Immigrants as Settlement Workers: An Inquiry into their Experiences of Work and Workplace Learning at Immigrant Service Agencies in Canada

Liu, Jingzhou

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Immigrants as Settlement Workers: An Inquiry into their Experiences of Work and Workplace Learning at Immigrant Service Agencies in Canada

by

Jingzhou Liu

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Abstract

My research investigates the transition to work and workplace learning experiences of immigrant settlement workers (ISWs) at immigrant service agencies (ISAs) in Canada. Informed by intersectionality and institutional ethnography (IE), I investigate how ISWs’ labour market integration and learning at work are constructed in institutional relations, organizing and shaping the coordination of individuals’ standpoint at local sites. In examining ISWs’ transition to work, I first trace the trajectory of immigrants becoming ISWs and then analyze how race, gender, and class intersect and shape their experiences of seeking employment in institutional complexes between governmental organizations, employment institutions, and ISAs. In exploring ISWs’ workplace learning in ISAs, I analyze ISWs’ emerging learning opportunities in formal and non-formal settings and how their learning can be situated in cultural and relational contexts. More importantly, my research scrutinizes how textual ruling power is translocally developed and distributed to mould ISWs’ daily practices in the workplace.

Eighteen ISWs were interviewed from three different ISAs in Western Canada. Based on findings from life history interviews and analysis of various governmental and organizational documents, my investigation reveals three major components of ISWs’ transition to work and workplace learning experiences. First, in deconstructing the institutional complexes, I found that credential assessment organizations deny and devalue immigrants’ qualifications and work skills as irrelevant, filterable, and neglectable. Moreover, labour market hiring acts as a second filtering mechanism that strains immigrant’s previous credentials and professional skills as different, deficient, or dubious. These institutional complexes are perpetuated by the intersectional identities of race, gender, and class and hooked into translocal social relations that coordinate and shape immigrant’s daily practices of labour market integration in the local setting.
Second, in adopting the concept of workplace subjectivity, I identified three kinds of ISW subjectivity in the workplace. First, *constructive subjectivity* emphasizes how immigrants’ life histories and their prior learning and working are deemed to be social assets that enrich and enhance ISAs’ services to newcomers. *Professional subjectivity* integrates ISWs’ subjective knowledge from formal, non-formal, and informal learning into their personal histories with objective knowledge, constructing individualized knowledge acquisition and creation. And *Cultural subjectivity* is the negotiated sense of self that emerges through ISWs’ workplace interactions with colleagues and clients from different cultural backgrounds. My analysis of cultural subjectivity reveals the importance of power relations in the ISA workplace and the effect of those relations on ISWs in terms of their yielding aspects of their own self-culture in order to assume Canadian normative workplace values, on the one hand, and imposing cultural discrimination against certain social groups, on the other.

Third, by unpacking the idea of outcomes measurement in the ISA workplace—with a focus on the key concepts of IE and Foucault’s governmentality—I find that outcomes measurement has become a *technology of power*, an essential workplace knowledge that produces ideal ISWs, who are self-caring, self-regulated, self-accountable, adaptable, and productive. This production process manifests textual ruling relations in workers’ pedagogical learning, textual-mediated learning, and relational learning, thus establishing in them certain ways of thinking, doing, and acting. Participating in, interacting with, and practicing the textual objectives of outcomes measurement legitimizes ISAs as an apparatus for the reinforcement of governmental ruling power, neglecting ISWs’ learning intentionality and autonomy in the workplace.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, without whose love and sacrifices I would never have been able to pursue my doctorate, and my grandparents, who were (are) vital to the childhood memories that continuously guide me through life’s adventures. May you be delighted to see me accomplish this milestone!
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Glossary of Acronyms

ELT: Enhanced Language Training
IE: Institutional ethnography
IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
ISA: Immigrant settlement agency
ISAP: Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program
ISW: Immigrant settlement worker
JSW: Job Search Workshops
LINC: Language Instruction for Newcomers
RAP: Resettlement Assistance Programs
SER: Standard Employment Relationship
SID: Skilled immigrant dependent
SPO: Service provider organizations
SWIS: Settlement Workers in Schools
Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically immigration has been linked to the notion of nation-building in Canada. Before Confederation in 1867, this aspiring nation had a free-entry period for immigrants (Wong & Guo, 2018). From 1867 to 1895, a period of open immigration prevailed for immigrants from England and the United States (Knowles, 1997). In 1896, the first Immigration Act was launched, which represented the end of a three-decade free-entry period. From 1896 to 1914, the wheat boom attracted a number of immigrants from Europe to Canada. After WWI, the Canadian government passed legislation under the Immigration Act to address “a prohibited class of undesirable people” and created a list of preferred countries, such as the United States and European countries, whose people were highly welcome to emigrate to Canada (Wong & Guo, 2018, p. 2). This explicitly racial preference in Canada’s immigration history triggered the underpinnings of prohibited classes of people who were deemed undesirable because of their perceived inability to integrate into Canada. As a result, for a lengthy period of time Canada had no immigrants from non-white nations such as those in Africa, Asia, and South America. After WWII, Canada’s immigration policy deliberately started to become non-racist. However, despite external and internal pressures for an open door policy, Canadian immigration policy continued to be highly restrictive and the political discourse was still exclusionary and racist (Knowles, 1997).

The post-war period marked the beginning of a new era in Canada’s immigration history. In the 1950s and 1960s, Canada continued its nation-building through immigration. In the mid-1960s, Canada was in a period of the greatest postwar boom with a high demand for skilled labour for post-war economic recovery and development (Whitaker, 1991). However, Europe, the traditional source of immigrants, was not able to meet the needs of Canada’s expansionary
economy. As a result, the Canadian government turned its recruitment efforts to the heretofore restricted nations: the developing countries.

In 1967, Canada established a point system to attract highly-skilled and well-educated immigrants, with education credentials contributing the largest number of points, followed by fluency in the official languages of English and French then work experience. With almost half of the points allocated for education and language proficiency, the proportion of immigrants entering with a university degree increased (King, 2009). The point system officially marked the end of Canada’s overt discriminatory immigration practices based on racial and ethnic preferences and created the roadmap for Canada’s development into one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world (Das Gupta, 1998). However, a comparison of immigrant origin between developing and developed countries still shows discrimination on racial preference. From the 1980s to 1990s, the top three racialized minority immigrant groups were from Eastern Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean and Bermuda (Statistics Canada, 2011). Today, racialized minorities, referred to by the Employment Equity Act as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Bélanger & Malenfant, 2005, p. 18), can be broken down into ten groups: the Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese and Korean. This more detailed approach to categorize the racialized minorities coincided with their growing proportion of the Canadian population. According to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2017), there were 7,540,830 foreign-born individuals who came to Canada through the immigration process, representing over one-fifth (21.9%) of Canada’s total population. This proportion is close to the 22.3% recorded during the 1921 Census, the highest level since Confederation. Thus, about one out of every five people in Canada is a member of a racialized minority.
The shifting composition and increased diversity of the immigrant population drew attention to the matter of integration (Tolley, Biles, Vineberg, Burstein, & Frideres, 2011). Integration is a fluid and elusive term that “means various things to various people in varying situations” (Jedwab, 2006, p. 97) and is used interchangeably with adjustment, adaptation, and acculturation (Korac, 2003). In fact, integration does not happen spontaneously but requires government actions and community cooperation (Tolley et al., 2011). As integration is conceptualized as both an individual and a group phenomenon (Berry, 2001), involving changes in attitudes and behaviours (Phinney, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), it should seek to engage Canadians, communities, and institutions for a longer-term process of welcoming and embracing newcomers into Canadian society (Guo & Guo, 2016).

Guo and Guo (2016) found multifaceted dimensions of integration, including economic, political, sociocultural, and interactive dimensions. Economic integration is often referred to as immigrants’ ability to find work, earn income, and contribute to the national economy through paying taxes, although a large focus has been on the economic interests of the state. Political integration means the integration of immigrants to Canada’s political systems, which is often narrowly confined to voting rights during election time. Social and cultural integration is used to assess immigrants’ participation in the social and civic life of the host society, which is often neglected by policies when they try to transition to their lives in Canada. Interactive integration denotes more comprehensive supports to an immigrant population, including ethnic sports, religions respect, communication and conversation building, and emotional support to cater to the changing needs of diverse communities. Despite Canadians and their governments working assiduously for generations to construct a more inclusive Canada (Korac, 2003), critics argue that integration still endorses a consolidation pattern in evaluating immigrants and perpetuates a
monolithic cultural framework that sermonizes tolerance on the surface but remains intolerant towards cultural specificities deemed outside the mainstream (Li, 2003a).

Immigrant settlement and adaptation takes place within various domains of integration. The complexity of integration highlights the importance of ISAs in facilitating and bridging immigrants’ transition to their new home. Specifically, they provide cultural resources, formal programs for language training and employment preparation, and social and cultural orientation to access to mainstream services (Gibb, Hamdon, & Jamal, 2008). The role of ISWs is even more crucial since they work directly and closely with immigrants every day. More importantly, many ISWs are immigrants themselves. However, very little is known about their experience as ISWs, especially with regard to their work and workplace learning. Therefore, I examine, within a context of immigration and integration in Canada, experiences of work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs.

1.1 Identifying the Problem

This research aims to investigate the work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs in Canada. As discussed earlier, many ISWs are immigrants themselves who provide invaluable settlement programs and services to newcomers in Canada. When these ISWs move to a new country, they typically reflect the difficulties that many immigrants are likely to encounter in the process of adapting their lives to a new society. One of the major barriers is the process of transition to work. For example, devaluation and denigration of immigrants’ prior learning and working experiences and underutilization of skills in their new country create multi-dimensional difficulties for them to access the Canadian labour market (Guo, 2009, 2013, 2015; Reitz, Curtis, & Elrick, 2014). Skill underutilization of immigrants with education and work experience lessens the value of immigrant human capital and constitutes an important component of overall
employment disadvantages for immigrants (Clarke & Skuterud, 2014; Li, 2003a). Furthermore, treatment of racialized immigrants undermines immigrant education and work experience by relegating them to positions occupied by flexible, cheap and vulnerable workers. Immigrants are increasingly turned into a circulating and precarious workforce subjected to multiple insecurities, severe regulations and flexible work patterns of the Canadian labour force (Maitra, 2015a). Thus, despite the fact that Canada has successfully attracted highly skilled immigrants to elevate its human capital resources in its labour market, many highly educated and skilled immigrants have fallen victim to not being classed alongside more desirable immigrants and having their experiences of transition to work shaped and racialized by Canadian society.

Workplace learning and knowledge creation are rooted in material and social activity, are highly contextual and fluid, and have the potential to open alternatives to explore experiential learning processes and their connection to social relations, power, and identity (Fenwick, 2005). Learning is further understood to emerge from participation and interactions of people within social relations (Fenwick, 2006a). These can be shaped by particular written texts, such as documents, forms for record-keeping, and reports. Such discourse reveals how texts have the power to standardize what counts as knowledge, thus controlling the work practices and social relations between individuals. In addition, workplace learning experiences are structured by power and interests in “a socially constituted and contested learning space” (Billett, 2006, p. 319). In this space, individuals’ workplace development is typified by unique dispositions, ways of knowing, and knowledge producing. As a result, how they engage in work activities and interaction is not determined by the nature of the workplace itself but by power relations (Billett, 2001a). Furthermore, learning in and through work not only stems from completed work tasks but also originates with social connections affecting people’s identity. This identity, the
culmination of personal and social aspects of lived experiences and work, is therefore determined by and shapes interactions among different forms of a person’s identity. Additionally, identity provides a foundation to explore relations among people, their work, and their workplace skills and to investigate how these relations reflect social and power relations and reciprocally perpetuate and shape people’s workplace learning (Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2016).

Work and workplace learning are intertwined. At the macro level, work and workplace learning have become pivotal symbols of economic development in nations and critical sites wherein the interests of states, organizations and individuals are translated into realizable goals of economic competitiveness and social inclusion (Edwards & Nicoll, 2004). At the micro level, individual factors vary in terms of degree and, ultimately, influence both change and the impact of change in work and workplace learning. Billett (2006) demonstrated that work and workplace learning can be analyzed through “who is participating in work, how people participate in work, and what kind of capacities are required for effective workplace practice” (p. 257). Individuals are active agents in what and how they learn from activities at work (Engestrom & Middleton, 1996). Similarly, social relations also connect work with workplace learning. Despite individual efforts to solely construct the direction, focus and intensity of their workplace learning, this learning is “socially structured and yet unique in localised manifestations” (p. 268). Individuals are highly engaged in the process of negotiation and social construction at work that further produces knowledge and learning at workplace. While it is crucial to understand individual and social dynamics that impact work and workplace learning, it is equally vital to examine institutional factors and how institutions reflect individual social relations and further shape workplace learning. Therefore, individual, social, institutional, and global factors are organically connected in work and workplace learning and impact immigrants’ learning experiences.
Turning to the focus of my research, ISWs’ work and workplace learning are interconnected. ISAs operate in a devolved funding environment (Sidhu & Taylor, 2009), with the structure of such neoliberal federalized policies affecting the lived experiences of workers within the immigrant settlement sector (Lee, 1999; Siemiatycki & Triadafilopoulos, 2010). Similarly, Mukhtar, Dean, Wilson, Wilson, and Dana (2016) investigated working conditions of ISWs and their challenges in navigating government funding and policy systems in order to effectively provide services to a growing and diverse immigrant population. These barriers create precarious employment for settlement workers (Burstein, 2010), an atmosphere of competition between ISAs, and a threat to organizational continuity (Mukhtar et al., 2016). The work and workplace learning experiences of ISWs leads them, in an attempt to ensure funding sustainability and improve their own working conditions, to reframe the image of immigrants as enterprising subjects in order to produce supposedly ideal immigrants for Canadian society (Ko, 2017; Thomas, 2015).

In my research, ISWs are broadly referred to people who work in ISAs providing settlement and integration programs and services to immigrants. Particularly, my research focuses on those who come with immigrant backgrounds and who are racialized minorities now working as ISWs. Furthermore, I pay close attention to the work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs by asking the following questions: What are the work experiences of immigrants as settlement workers at the ISAs? How do they perceive the workplace as a site to learn? What are the institutional relations constructed in their experience of work and workplace learning?

1.2 Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs in Canada. Conceptually, this study takes work and workplace learning as two
interrelated dimensions of analysis to investigate how social relations and identities manifest themselves and shape experiences of work and workplace learning of ISWs. By analyzing the notion of work, I focus on ISWs’ experiences of transition to work, including their transitional moments and personal and professional events in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Work, as the context to cultivate workplace learning, also determines what to learn, how to learn, and who to learn with. Through analyzing the transition to work of ISWs, I closely examine how they view their workplace, immigrant settlement service agencies, as a site to learn. Theoretically, this study is informed by the sociological approach of intersectionality. It intends to look at the intersectional experiences of immigrants as settlement workers at work and how race, gender, and class are intersected and shape their experiences of learning. This research adopts institutional ethnography (IE) as its methodology. Aligning with the sociocultural perspective, I see the life experiences of ISWs as an unfinished arena of discovery in which the lines of social relations are present (Smith, 2005). Inspired by intersectionality and IE, I argue that work and workplace learning experiences of ISWs are institutionally constructed and that these institutional relations organize and shape the coordination of their lived experiences.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question of this study is: How does the intersection of identities of immigrants as settlement workers shape their experiences of work and workplace learning at ISAs? In order to address this central question, a number of sub-questions need to be analyzed.

- How do ISWs characterize their work experience when they transition into an immigrant service workforce in Canada?
- How do race, gender, and class intersect and shape transition to work experiences of ISWs?
• How do ISWs perceive the workplace as a site to learn? What are the learning opportunities, strategies, struggles, and successes at ISAs?

• How are the work and workplace learning experiences of ISWs constructed in institutional relations?

1.4 Theoretical Approach to the Study

Intersectionality emphasizes gender, race, and class as distinct social categories of multiple identities that are mutually constituted to shape people’s experiences and produce social inequality (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, & McCall, 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016). The term intersectionality was coined by African American law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to underscore how intersections of race and gender shaped Black women’s employment experiences and marginalized vulnerable individuals and communities in both analysis and politics (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In her initial formulation of intersectionality, Crenshaw proposed it as a strategy for capturing how social identities of race and gender are interrelated in practice, experience, and politics and how these identities are grounded and constructed in the social world. In subsequent works, she argued that racialized experiences of women of colour cannot be interpreted analytically without also including the embodiment of class (Crenshaw, 1993).

Since Crenshaw’s ground-breaking lead, the concept of intersectionality has been heavily influenced by critical race theory (CRT). CRT seeks to explain the realities of race and “raced” gendered representations in the discourse of racial justice (Tate, 1997) and theorizes how subordinating racial relations in a regime of white supremacy are created, perpetuated, and maintained in an ever-changing society (Guo, 2015). Intersectionality, as elaborated by CRT, has developed in three ways. First, while early intersectionality theory contextualized the
experiences of unprivileged groups in terms of race, gender, and class, CRT contemplates the experiential knowledge of these three subjectivities and their theoretical positions in social justice. Second, in its analysis, CRT underlines structural power, which is exercised through systematic subordination that operates and is legitimized within institutions. Third, CRT problematizes the idea of colour-blindness, which presumes that race is neutral and is itself a construction of institutionalized racial and political power (Crenshaw, 2011).

Intersectionality can be defined as a form of critical inquiry and praxis, as well as an analytic tool to analyze global complexity relative to gender, class, race, sexuality, and citizenship, while also allowing us to interpret individual, social, and institutional relationships, and how praxis is fostered in response to social injustice (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality enables us to pay special attention to the influence of individual, social, and structural practices and the importance of power relations, particularly how power relations can influence practices that trigger integration, assimilation, and marginalization (Carbado et al., 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins & Bilge, 2016).

The importance and complexity of various layers of social relationships, in the context of immigration, that intersect with individual, institutional, structural, and cultural factors, necessitates a rethink as to what distinguishes the categories of gender, race, and class. It is necessary to examine the interconnections among individual identities, particularly, how identities collectively shape global social inequality. Specifically, rather than focusing on one main effect, a focus on effects on individuals comprising sustained and well-developed interactions, is an ideal way to investigate how multiple power relations impact social inequality, both internally and externally. Therefore, it is important to examine the work and workplace learning experiences of immigrants as settlement workers through an analytic lens that extends
from seeking the multiple, possible strands that produce social inequality, to exploring how to facilitate immigrant transformation.

Articulating immigrant workers’ experience in the context of immigration reveals intersecting identities that, in turn, enable researchers to understand individual experiences, diverse people, and complexity in the world (Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality analysis emphasizes gender, race, and class as distinct social categories of multiple identities. It also postulates that systems of social oppression are mutually constituted and work together to produce social inequality (Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Choo and Ferree (2010) analyzed three styles of understanding intersectionality in practice: group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered. Group centered refers to placing multiply-marginalized groups and their perspectives at the center of the research. Process-centered emphasizes power as relational, viewing the interactions among variables as multiplying oppressions at various points of intersection through focusing on unmarked groups. Lastly, system centered highlights the intersections of people’s identities as shaping the entire social system that pushes analysis away from associating specific inequalities with unique institutions. To this end, intersectionality illustrates locating distinctive standpoints that can “reveal complicated and contested configurations of power” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 132).

Race, gender, and class mutually affect each other in people’s lives and work against “the construction of hierarchies of social oppression” (Dei, 2005, p. 7). Aside from a biological distribution of genes, ‘race’ refers to a subpopulation in which certain hereditary features appear more frequently in some population groups than others because of relative reproductive isolation (Jaret, 1995). “Race” is a social construct (Guo, 2013; Li, 2003). The politics of race have evidenced an explosive and divisive force shaping the dynamics of contemporary society. Race
continues to resurface as a potent element in daily practices and encounters with seemingly untapped potential to perpetuate conflict and misunderstanding as “an ineradicable marker of differences and discrimination” (Fleras & Elliott, 2003, p. 32). What is more, a critical analysis of race is often conflated with racialization, a social practice that typified by labelling and stigmatizing a group of population or minorities by connecting with race or racial particularity (Fleras & Elliott, 2003; Ongley, 1996; Symons, 1999). Social significance is attached to certain biological features, which are then associated with certain forms of behaviour or activities that create a linkage to race. Racialization, therefore, fuels classification that divides people into desirable or undesirable groups. On the one hand, racialization explains why some relationships or activities have been linked to race and devalued, namely, racialized (Ongley, 1996). On the other, this racialized relationship captures a complex interaction in unequal contexts wherein power is often imposed (Fleras & Elliott, 2003).

As “a central tenet of feminist thinking that has transformed how gender is conceptualized in research” (Shields, 2008, p. 301), intersectionality addresses the importance of feminist knowledge as “a contribution of feminism to sociology” (Denis, 2008, p. 677). Gender is a form of identity, a basis of knowledge production, and “a fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation in societies” (Dei, 2005, p. 5). It is not a natural result of sex differences as it constitutes a culturally defined prescription about what is acceptable, desirable, or superior (Nelson & Robinson, 2000). According to Fleras and Elliott (2003), the concept of gender is considered as “a key organizing principle” that shapes how people think about themselves and relationships to the world (p. 142). Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that triggers social segregation. This gendered social construction confers more power and privilege to value outcomes over identity and inequality. These outcomes are then embedded within the
institutional structure of society and further marginalize or exploit devalued groups, such as women. Moreover, racialized gender norms are effective in producing and reproducing “racial self-doubt and stirring resistance in people of colour” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 145). For example, women of colour and immigrant women have been put down and put in their place by way of “gender stereotypes, double standards, glass ceilings, and restricted opportunity structures” (p. 139). Thus, gender relations are unequal relations, which reinforces the importance of examining how gender inequalities are constructed, expressed, and maintained as well as how these relations are challenged, resisted, and transformed.

Finally, class can be an intersectional identity, which is constituted on the basis of racialized and gendered social constructions, producing structural and systemic inequality. Class demonstrates a process of classification by which units are grouped together based on certain similarities for description and analysis. Porter, Clement, Jedwab, Satzewich, and Helmes-Hayes (2015) noted that, when researching class, it “is difficult to choose the criteria of the strata” (p. 7). Sociologists examine the classification of class in two ways: 1) by the objective method and measurable items by income, property, level of education, degree of occupational skills, or positions of responsibility; and 2) by power, the subjective method that utilizes criteria such as popular evolution of occupations obtained through public opinion polling techniques, or the opinions and judgments of some members of a community about the class position or class reputation of other members of the community. According to Porter et al. (2015), both methods lead to the construction of scales or indices that purport to measure social ranks relative to one and another. Despite being defined through a combination of objective and subjective methods, class is not inherently a social group since, in social groups, individuals have a sense of identity with one another, sharing common values and traditions, and having an awareness of unity and
common purpose. Thus, Porter (2015) argued that class is an artificial, statistical group that does not have any life of its own or any coherence because the structure of inequality that exists within it. In contrast, Pakulski and Waters (1996) referred to the disappearance of class discourse as an indication of the death of class. Bourdieu (1984) indicated that individual or collective classification struggles intend to transform the categories of perception and appreciation within the social world that is, itself, “indeed a forgotten dimension of the class struggle” (p. 483). Based on these statements, Reay (1998) contested that the discourse of class no longer exists. However, when approaching intersectionality, unlike newer forms of class analysis, Anthias (2012) attempted to radically move away from monolithic understandings of social division that interrelate social relations and people’s lives because they are considered as “mutually constitutive” in experience and practice (p. 126). Therefore, class illustrates individuals’ perceptions of life experiences and established social relations rather than delineates people’s objective and subjective demographics or social divisions in the society.

Intersectionality pays special attention to the influence of individual, social, and structural practices and the importance of power relations. In particular, it highlights how power relations can influence these practices and trigger integration, assimilation, and marginalization (Carbado et al., 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010). Intersectionality exposes not only power relationships but how power manifests itself through privilege and subordination that stratify society. This further echoes the hierarchy of effects and the desire to identify the interactions and analytic transitions from multiple economic, structural, and social inequalities toward individuals’ intersectional identities (Collins & Bilge, 2016). For example, racism is not a static phenomenon, but mutates when prejudice and discrimination shift to meet the changing needs of power relations (Lee & Lutz, 2005). These power relations can be tilted away from non-European immigrants,
particularly people of colour seen as the “others” through a socially constructed “racialization” process (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, an intersectionality framework can be used to dynamically analyze how national and transnational structures of inequality are produced and reproduced in multisided processes such as gendering, racialization, labour exploitation, and generational succession (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Based on discussions on race, gender, and class within an intersectionality framework, I respectively analyze how these factors intervene and intersect to shape immigrant workers’ experiences in Canada in my next chapter.

1.5 Significance of the Study

I justify the significance of my research in four perspectives. First, previous research has done little to establish the importance of immigrants as settlement workers’ work and their workplace learning. Research is lacking regarding the most vital role of ISWs, who are also immigrants themselves, to work with immigrants’ settlement, employment, and integration. I argue that if these workers’ work and workplace learning experiences are not well explored and understood, it could impact the services they provide to immigrant clients. Second, it is hoped that this study will make a contribution to the theoretical literature on the experiences of settlement workers related to work and workplace learning in Canada and create better learning experiences for the workers and a better relationship among workers, organizations, and the state. Third, I hope that the results from this research can impact not only ISWs but also immigrants in general while assisting Canadian policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in developing relevant and evolved related policies and initiatives.
Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

This research intends to examine the work and workplace learning experiences of immigrants as settlement workers at ISAs in Canada. Particularly, it proposes to tease out the factors at the intersection of identities of immigrants, as settlement workers, that shape their experiences of work and workplace learning at immigrant service organizations. This chapter reviews the literature related to the topic of this research. This chapter, consisting of four sections, analyzes the literature in the area of: 1) The changing nature of work in the context of immigration; 2) The evolving concept of workplace learning; 3) The intersectional experiences of immigrant workers in Canada; and 4) The landscape of ISAs and ISWs in Canada. These four sections provide the foundation, and the navigational tools of my research.

2.1 The Changing Nature of Work in the Context of Immigration

2.1.1 The Changing Characteristics

Studies of the changing nature of work shed light on the importance of economic, social, and individual well-being advanced by different schools of discussion. From the economic perspective, work can be viewed as “a disutility or deprivation of leisure time” that is endured to gain income in order to attain a higher quality of life, while the sociological angle tends more critically to illustrate that people’s autonomy is geared to “develop their individual potential and enter into social relationships” through their work (Jackson, 2009, p. 6). In both the economic and sociological perspectives, there are increasing concerns about the growing inequalities in the nature of work. The intersections of class-based, gender and race inequalities, have also drawn our attention towards the power relations in the nature of work. When bridging the economic and sociological aspects together, Billett (2006) argued that there is a need to consider “the more subjective experience” that arises from the economic aspects that have forged work conditions,
and that we need to negotiate between the two in order to analyze the role of individuals’ experiences in the context of work (p. 14).

The changes in the world of work that have occurred on a global scale cannot be understood just as societal responses and adaptations to massive technological innovations and developments, particularly in the transport and communication systems, as these changes have impacted production, exchange and distribution in the world market (Atzeni, 2014). Based on the Fordist model of production that promotes mass labour, mass production and consumption, in many parts of the industrialised world, work has represented relatively higher standards of living and provided the basis for the development of the welfare state (Atzeni, 2014). Starting in the 1970s, globalization has been the result of the Fordist model, which, in the shadows of a discourse that viewed market reforms as common sense, aimed to re-establish conditions for capital accumulation and restoration of class power (Harvey, 2005).

Since the 1990s, the world is being transformed by the influence of global economic activities, technology, transportation, and social practices that have led to considerable changes (McBrier & Wilson, 2004). Leicht (1998) pointed out that contemporary work in the 1990s has featured changes in the following ways: 1) There are flatter organizational hierarchies, as new information technologies eliminate the need for most layers of middle management; 2) There is the growing use of temporary workers employed on an “as-needed” basis to perform specific jobs for the duration of single projects; 3) The extensive use of subcontracting and outsourcing to small firms; 4) Massive down-sizing of the permanent workforce resulting from flatter hierarchies and the replacement of skilled workers by machine tenders; 5) A post-unionized bargaining environment where unions have no place and no structural ability to gain a foothold
to bargain with employers; and 6) Virtual organizations that exist, not as distinctive structural locations, but as webs of technologically driven interactions.

In the twenty-first century, the changing nature of work lies at the heart of the globalization in terms of competitiveness, productivity, and economic and industrial restructuring (Jackson, 2009). Billett (2006) examined the changing nature of work from three major perspectives: changes in work itself, in work participation, and work performance requirements. Changes in work itself demonstrates that the development of technologies causes some industries and occupations to be in the ascendancy as employment flourishes, while others are in decline or are changing in form. Technical work needs to be more redefined to fit into the diverse forms of work in order to embrace information technologies, while the shifting demands of work reflect changes in socio-cultural needs that create new forms of organizations for society. In addition, the forms of work participation have changed in contemporary society. Full time workers work longer and with great intensity in some countries. Women workers are now almost a majority in many western nations’ workforces, yet still experience lower wages and are poorer than their male counterparts. The engagement between workers and workplaces is being transformed because of relative social and geographical isolation, such as that of having to work from home. From the foregoing two factors we can deduce that work tasks are likely to be less routine but more intense, complex and requiring greater levels of interactions with people and artifacts. While these changing features have brought additional demands on the different means of conducting work, as well as on obtaining or possessing occupational skills in order to achieve work goals, thus complicating the work discourse, the requirements for performing effectively at work also have been changing. As the main driver of globalization, neoliberal discourse is dominant in Canada. In the past three decades, neoliberalism has emerged as the dominant global
economic, social, and political ethos, and has been rooted and practiced at various levels in Canadian public policies (Mukhtar et al., 2016). The onset of neoliberalism swept away Keynesian understandings of fundamentally reconfiguring the roles and responsibilities of states, market, individuals, families, and groups. It brought a “transferred decision-making power” and became the hegemonic policy paradigm and policy trend in the 1980s, when the government yielded to a pure market economy and limitations on social and economic rights began to be embraced (Burke et al., 2000, p.11). Neoliberal discourse is based now on the value of the free movement and accumulation of capital, minimal state intervention in the private sphere of markets and individual rights, and a restructuring of the public domain (Nihei, 2010).

Neoliberal discourse has made an impact on the labour market, thus playing an important role in the changing nature of work. Ong (2007) highlighted that in the advanced liberal nations, neoliberalism has been defined as a mode of governing through the notion of freedom, requiring people to be free and self-managing in different spheres of work. Instead of acknowledging that there are systemic problems that involve the state in the context of various types of work, neoliberal discourse manifests itself in the power relations that require individuals to obtain employment and thus “download” accountability to the individuals themselves (Thomas, 2017, p. 11). This new neoliberal relationship with work also supersedes and embraces inclusive policies that elevate people’s employability but regulate people’s attitudes, thoughts, and relationships with others (Ko, 2017), which further disrupts the segregation of work as well as shapes individuals’ work experience.

2.1.2 Precarious Nature of Work in Canada

Precarious employment is a concept that delineates the nature of work, as well as provides us with a portrait of labour market insecurity in Canada. Economic growth and
unemployment mean that more and more workers are receiving less pay, working either too much or too little, and have less control over their work. Work that differs from precarious employment is commonly described as non-standard (Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003). The relationship between precarious and non-standard employment is intertwined in the context of labour issues. The term “precarious”, “contingent”, and “atypical” are often used to describe “non-standard” work since these features are interchangeable and inevitably reflect on the precarious work itself (Vosko, 2010, p. 2). The category of non-standard work bridges the concept of precarious employment, while precarious employment simultaneously reflects non-standard work, since it adds important nuances to the standard/non-standard employment distinction (Vosko, 2003). The most common measure of non-standard work in Canada comprises four situations that differ from the norm of a full-time, full-year, permanent paid job (Krahn, 1995): part-time employment; temporary employment, including term or contract, seasonal, casual, temporary agency and all other jobs with a specific pre-determined end date; own-account self-employment (a self-employed person with no paid employees); and multiple job holding (undertaking more than one job concurrently).

The dominant Canadian approach to conceptualizing labour market insecurity through the non-standard category is insufficient in terms of providing an in-depth understanding of how workers experience labour market insecurity. Thus, an analysis of non-standard forms of employment is vital since the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) is the basis for extending labour and social protections to work (Fudge & Vosko, 2001b, 2001a), and such an analysis adds to our understanding of precarious employment (Cranford et al., 2003). Vosko (2010) further illustrated the importance of the precarious nature of work by analyzing the concept of SER and how it leaves intact the precarious margins of the labour market. She
undertook an integrated analysis comprising of a normative model of employment, the gender contract, and citizenship boundaries. This model refers to working time, continuous employment, and employee status. The restructuring of working time becomes a means, both of achieving subordination, and allowing employers to “value what labour is worth” (Supiot, 2001, p. 60). Although SER is a normative model of employment and reflects the interplay between social customs and traditions, and management mechanisms that connect with organization and labour supply (Deakin, 2002), it does not reflect everyone’s reality. SER “never took hold for the predominantly women and immigrant workers in small and decentralized workplaces in the service and competitive manufacturing sectors” (Cranford et al., 2003, p. 7). As a result, the current labour market has been restructuring, and more and more workers have been falling outside of the normative standard employment relationship (Fudge & Vosko, 2001a).

In addition, Vosko’s (2010) research on SER pays particular attention to the gender aspects of a contract. There is a normative and material basis that exists around sex/gender divisions of paid and unpaid labour. These operate in a given society with the aim of capturing the social, legal, and political “norms surrounding the exchange between breadwinning and caregiving” (p. 26). The research highlights the supposed, natural role of women in producing and sustaining workers in a household, while the role of males tends to be in primary sites of distribution in order to provide the necessities of life. These variations indicate the differences in public responsibility for men and women (Vosko, 2010). Historical differences, such as in the nature of the gender aspects of work contracts, and the time allocated to unpaid work by women and men in different places, demonstrate variations in the patterns of caregiving (Anxo, 2002). We find that women have been viewed to be the ideal part time workers, for instance, in Australia, and
temporary workers in the clerical sector, going back to the 1920s and 1930s, in Canada (Pocok, Buchanan, & Campbell, 2004; Vosko, 2010).

2.1.3 The Impacts of Immigration on Work

Immigration has been a core element of Canadian national identity. Canada has a long history of managing immigration for nation-building purposes (Boyd & Alboim, 2012). Canada is described as an immigrant society that aims to create a fair and democratic immigration policy, and provide a framework that is transparent and colour-blind (Cavanagh & Mulley, 2013). Under this framework, immigration is seen as an empirical fact within a set of ideological norms, comprising official policies, programs, and practices pertaining to settlement and integration. Immigration is framed as a social contract in which newcomers promise to play by Canada’s regulations, while Canada promises to protect their interests (Fleras, 2015). While immigration in Canada has become a salient issue that relates to integrated global economies (Hasmath, 2012), immigrants are to be selected on the basis of their potential contributions as skilled workers for the country’s knowledge-based economic development, in the hope of aligning long-term demographics projections with short-term labour market needs (Bauder, 2009).

The impact of immigration on the nature of work critically reflects on a labour market that is dependent on the skills of migrants, the skills of existing workers, and on the characteristics of the host economy (Ruhs & Vargas-Silva, 2015). The changing nature of work in Canada is connected to the processes of immigrant selection. While selecting immigrants, Canada attracts the right kind of immigrants for its economic needs. These immigrants are relatively young, possess a strong language proficiency, recognizable education credentials, and job offers, or they have in-demand skills (Levinson, 2013). At the same time, Canada discourages the entry of unwanted migrants through a combination of regulations, restrictions, and interdiction (Jurado,
Brochmann, & Dolvik, 2013). According to Fleras (2015), the politics of admission are played out in conflicts in the labour market. On the one hand, there are moves to fast-track designer immigrants who are low-cost and offer a high yield as permanent resident. On the other hand, immigration policies focus on the demand-side, inviting temporary foreign workers, whose precarious employment status resonates with guest workers. In between these two groups, there are designated migrants whose provisional status secures a possible entry point for admission. This creation of a three-tiered track displays a conflict that reinforces a reliance on “(im)migrants as commodified labour” rather than as nation-building Canadian citizens (Fleras, 2015, p. 74).

The nature of the labour market and work in Canada demonstrates neoliberal dominance. In relation to the notion of work, neoliberal discourse is seen as a means of getting efficient and quality-based production and distribution. Neoliberal policies dominate state power by reducing workers’ agency in society, cutting rights and curbing trade unions’ powers, as well as by reducing the role of citizenship in determining the political and economic model of the state (Atzeni, 2014). The demand-driven work positions may plug immediate economic needs, while causing precarious employment, thus exposing the nature of marginalization at work through skill selection immigration programs. This practice also commodifies the nature of work and workers through the economics of a customized immigration program that reinforces new patterns of racialized stratification (Zaman, 2006).

In general, the decentralized, demand-driven, and employer-instigated work types that are advertised by Canada, for its skilled workers selection, turn out to be a tool to marginalize, commodify, and racialize workers through precarious employment positions. This neoliberal changing face of work triggers the social dimensions of immigration and also yields insights into the reciprocal relationship between work, immigration, and society (Fleras, 2015). To reiterate,
while the context of working conditions is changing in relation to economic and social
development, Billett (2011) illustrated that workers who are different in terms of their identities
and experiences are the representations of the core values arising in the changing nature of the
labour market. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate their learning practices in the workplace
in order to enrich and strengthen my research.

2.2 Workplace Learning

2.2.1 Contextualizing the Workplace in Learning

Workplace learning is nested in contemporary conditions associated with globalized
capitalism and the knowledge-based economy, which open a space for learning such as
innovation, accountability, and technology development (Fenwick, 2001). Foley (1999) explored
how, in creating an advanced market as well as by providing customized services and products, a
powerful corporate megalopolis has greater control on markets. This control results in the global
deregulation of corporate conduction, decreased social support for workers, and increased
workplace stress. Besides, the post-Fordist workplace is fostered on knowledge development that
addresses how workplaces have been transferred to empower and build creative spaces for
communities and for individuals’ learning. As another dominant element in the context of
workplace learning, flexibility is defined as the naturalization that impacts a hidden curriculum
of work and the individual subjectivities produced in workplaces (Edwards, 1998).

Fenwick (2005) scrutinized the workplace through two major perspectives: globalization
and organization. The accelerated competition of globalization among corporations requires the
need of meeting changing consumer tastes and innovating various customized goods and
services. Fenwick emphasizes that the gap between these two factors is increasing. The two
factors are the technical, professional, or managerial elite of industries in the developed
countries, and the subsistence workers in the fourth world, who are living in poverty, and experiencing racial and gendered marginalization (Fenwick, 2001). The themes of specialization, privatization, and globalization change the nature and the environment of work and the desires of workers (Fenwick, 2001). Workers are thereby “expected to accept continuous change as a given condition, to forego exception of stable employment and organizational loyalty, and to assume personal responsibility for adapting to organizations’ changing needs for skills and labour” (p. 674).

At the organizational level, the workplace learning of workers has been legitimated as a foundation for organizational health. Workplace learning is supposed to initiate a wide range of benefits for workers such as personal development and productivity, purpose and work fulfillment, essential relationships, creativity, and even spiritual growth and contentment. This conventional capitalist labour employee-employer relationship exchanged for wage has been transformed and blurred by what is often referred to as a learning focus (Fenwick, 2001, 2005). Furthermore, workplaces are still driven by hierarchical power structures, and labour divisions. (Spencer & Kelly, 2013; Fenwick, 2008a). The hierarchical power structure manifests itself in learning, which is shaped by particular written texts at the workplaces, such as documents, policies, reports, and labour record-keeping. This learning process standardizes what counts as knowledge and controls work practices and the working relations of individuals. As a result, innovation and knowledge management are embedded in political and hierarchical power, thus making an impact on both work demands and the learning process. Fenwick’s (2006) critique on workplace learning indicates that workplace learning focuses on doing and thinking to avoid “assymetrical power relations”, and contestations over what counts as knowledge and what shows of learning are considered valid (p. 269). Therefore, learning conceived of as interrupting
power relations becomes irrelevant, and social activities and learning become attached to the needs of capital.

2.2.2 Learning and Knowledge at the Workplace

The concept of learning can be defined as permanent or semi-permanent changes in how people think and act (Billett, 2004). Learning and everyday thinking and acting are irreducible, and what individuals learn is shaped by activities through engagement and interactions with social partners and sources that are afforded by the workplace (Billett, 2001). Moreover, learning is central to the on-going existence of these practices and is regulated by the workplace through engaging in different kinds of social practices and it is often central to the continuity of practice. The practices are intentionally organized to structure workers’ access to knowledge and learning that are needed to sustain particular practices (Billett, 2004).

Knowledge is also an active repository that can be produced through micro-interactions among individuals and objects in their daily work activities (Fenwick, 2008b). The importance of the acquisition of knowledge is that it can be formed and developed through behaviour, new concepts, and know-how or “tacit mastery” in the everyday practices (Fenwick, 2006b, p. 270). In addition, knowledge represents the relations of individuals to group learning as a shared process (Bogenrieder & Nooteboo, 2004; Lehesvirta, 2004). This process can be acquired through informal workplace learning; performance support to promote informal workplace learning, and knowledge management to transform valuable, informal workplace learning into knowledge that is promoted, captured, and shared throughout the organization (Caruso, 2017). Thus, these activities and interactions of learning, afforded by either educational institutions or workplaces, shape the potential richness of individuals’ learning outcomes (Billett, 2004).
Learning and knowledge associated with work are rooted in material and social activities which are “highly contextual, fluid, and not necessarily connected with educational initiatives” (Fenwick, 2005, p. 673). Learning is an ongoing and inevitable process that results from engagement in “work practices over working lives as individuals think and act in everyday activities at work” (Billett, 2001, p. 20). Knowledge is non-linear identity development that is placed within specific and localized work-based and educational practices (Avis, 2004). It resides in individuals, teams and organizations” (Hager, 2000, p. 61). The transformation between learning and knowledge is reciprocal and on-going, through the formal and informal learning process (Prince, Burns, Lu, & Winsor, 2015). Workplace activities and interactions can be structured and regulated, and have close connections to pedagogical properties (Billett, 2004). Workplace initiatives to promote learning include mentorship, team structures, guided learning opportunities, job-redesign or rotation to increase exposure to new projects, and paid educational leave (Fenwick, 2005). Additionally, labour educators have studied population education and emancipatory learning opportunities in work that aim to foster people’s critical consciousness. In terms of the notion of informal learning, positive educational initiatives at work focus on people-centered workplace development such as attaining gender equity, combating racism, and helping people recognize and value their own work-related knowledge (Fenwick, 2005a). Therefore, the workplace can be an important site of collective learning and personal development, and it can offer various progression routes leading to credentials, and can generate knowledge creation (Avis, 2004).

2.2.3 Interdependencies between Individual and Workplace Practices

The understanding of interdependence between the social and cultural, and individuals’ contribution to learning is contested within the notion of social practice (Billett, 2006b).
Individuals’ identities and subjectivities are essentially socially derived, and they can be influenced by who shapes their behaviours and performance in and outside of the site of the workplace (Woerkom & Poell, 2010). The idea of self-regulating and self-subjugating is held to characterize how people engage with the churning and transformational nature of the workplace (Billett, 2006). In order to identify what constitutes the requirement of the work situation, what individuals learn through participation, and what are the determining factors to access workplace learning and knowledge, it is necessary to analyze the categories of activities and interdependencies since these interdependencies are at the centre between individual and workplace practices (Billett, 1999; Elkjaer & Nickelsen, 2016).

Based on scholarly studies, practice-based learning is the key term that articulates the degrees by which individuals obtain learning at the workplace, and in a social setting (Billett, 2001b, 2002, 2006; Fenwick, 2005, 2006, 2008). Lauby (2013) referred to participation in social practice as being analogous to learning through encountering the social world. Engaging in workplace activities interdependently interrelates individuals’ thinking and acting and their learning, to social sources. Thus, practice-based workplace learning shows that learning is rooted in a particular activity, situation and community in which people participate (Fenwick, 2005).

Workplace learning experiences represent an interaction between the enactment, the regulation of social practice at the workplace, and individuals’ agency, as individuals engage in work activities. Billett (2001) deconstructed the concept of interdependencies between individuals and the social by analyzing the themes of working with others—the ways in which work activity is premised on communication and interactions with others in teams or with clients. These are engagement, the basis of the employment status, factors that influence participation, shared values, homogeneity of tasks, the degree to which tasks in work are
homogenous; and artifacts and tools, which are physical artifacts used in the workplace. Whether considering workplace learning through participation in everyday work, or through intentionally organized learning activities, these interdependent participatory practices are likely to shape both the learning process and outcomes (Billett, 2004). Individuals’ participation in the workplace can be defined as the correlation among engagement with socially determined activities, partners, tools and signs (Billett, 2001b). These approaches provide the foundation to illustrate “the relations among individuals acting in the social practices of work and how they come to think, act and learn” (p. 22). Thus, interdependence among activities, engagement with others, and the practices, are positioned as central to learning, and these contributions are not under the control of individuals, but are distributed by workplace factors.

2.2.4 Problematizing Issues in Workplace Learning

As discussed earlier, the workplace is highly political and hierarchically structured. Workplace cliques, affiliations, gender, race, language, and employment standing and status also influence the distribution of opportunities that shape people’s learning acquisition (Berhardt, 1999; Billett, 2001b; Macneil & Liu, 2017). Work and the workplace are problematic since conventional use neglects the important spheres of unpaid work in homes and communities, and assumes that work is based in unitary, identifiable, geographically organized places (Fenwick, 2005). To this end, individual interactions and meanings construct part of the workplace context itself. They are interconnected systems nested within larger systems where they work and act. These interrelations make an impact on both people and work itself, which is a “continuous invention and exploration in complex systems” (Fenwick, 2005, p. 676). In these systems, workers are influenced and shaped by symbols and actions in which they participate, adapt, and learn.
In the concept of individuals’ thinking, acting, and learning in the workplace, Billett (2001) pointed out that the workplace is a highly contested terrain where access to social activities and guidance are not evenly distributed. He also indicates that the “conflictual relations among individuals, teams, and key interest groups cannot be reduced to a mere footnote” (p. 24). These unequal distributions pervade work so that the conception of performance influences how individuals are able to act and learn through work. The issue of identity affects people’s everyday choice (Fenwick, 2001), as well as how they think and act (Billett, 2006b), for example, identity is controlled by approving some identities, marginalizing others, and totally erasing some possibilities. Certain behaviours are endorsed by prevailing discourses as normal, while others can act as problems that are “deviant, repulsive or irrational” (p. 8). This leaves a concern about limitations and possibilities afforded to human identity by workplace conditions, activities and relationships.

Race can be a key factor that influences learning in the workplace. For example, Shan’s (2013b) research on emotional work in the engineering workplace found that this workplace constructs a competitive, masculine, and individualistic engineering “culture” in Canada. Shan argues that such a phenomenon neglects the emotional and the relational, both of which are supposedly central to Asian and Chinese cultures. In order to fit into the individualistic culture, some Chinese immigrant workers learn to change their patterns of socialization and some became hard-nosed competitors. Women continue to encounter gendered knowledge structures at work as they negotiate workplace cultures with male-oriented values, communication patterns and work styles (Bierema, 2001; Probert, 1999). The distribution of learning opportunities and control of learning purposes in the workplace often marginalize racialized minorities in
workplace pedagogies and trigger conflicts, while work experience, values, and commitments are ignored (Howell, Carter, & Schied, 2002).

Workplace learning encounters with hierarchical relations among organizations and individuals generates social inequality in workplace learning, which further shapes the work experiences of immigrant workers in Canada. As Fenwick summarizes, “Contemporary research as well as practice promoting workplace learning in Canada tends more to promote participative learning in community rather than individualistic skills training” (Fenwick, Sawchuk, Guo, Valentin, & Wheelahan, 2005, p. 2). She points out in particular that Canada’s historical tradition has been strongly rooted in radical communitarianism, dialogue and critical labour education. In addition, Guo (2014) highlighted that workplace studies tend to focus on the well-being and development of workers rather than on creating competitive and profitable organizations. This is particularly important for immigrant workers, because the ethnic communities are usually their first point of entry into a new society. A significant weakness in Canada generally is an overemphasis on learning in, and for the workplace. This overemphasis woefully ignores skills and learning gained in community activities and relationships.

2.3 Intersectional Experiences of Immigrant Workers in Canada

2.3.1 Racialized Employment Experience of Immigrant Workers in Canada

Scholarly studies indicate that the devaluation and denigration of immigrants’ prior learning and working experience, immigrants’ racialized identities, and the discursive and ideological constructions in the hiring criteria, all create multi-dimensional difficulties for immigrants in their pursuit of social equality in employment.

Exploring the process of foreign credential recognition reveals the existence of regulators who facilitate access to the immigration process. At the same time, the need for legislation
reflects a widespread perception that these regulators sometimes impede a fair recognition of immigrants’ professional credentials (Reitz et al., 2014). Although immigrants come with their own educational background, to some degree, immigrants’ education may not be equivalent to native education, or even less relevant to employers’ needs. Racialized employment resolves itself into institutionalized sanctioning, making unnecessary difficulties from Canadian employers and professional bodies towards immigrant workers in Canada (Guo, 2009). As Guo (2009) pointed out, the process of foreign credential recognition is hampered by three major barriers: poor information on the accreditation process; the lack of a responsible, coordinated approach for the evaluation of foreign credentials; and the lack of agreed-upon national standards. These barriers demonstrate that seeking accreditation in Canada requires “undertaking a personal journey involving complex interactions with multiple players” (p. 42). As credentials are the priority for immigrant professionals in their job search, it is extremely difficult for them to receive their credential recognition because of these barriers. Thus, immigrants are hampered by their prior education, which may not match occupations in Canada. This is a serious barrier for immigrants transitioning to the Canadian labour market. These phenomena lead to the downward social mobility of immigrants.

The roots of non-recognition of foreign credentials may be attributed to misperceptions of difference, and knowledge. The epistemological misperceptions of difference and knowledge generate a belief that the knowledge of immigrant professionals, particularly those from developing countries, “is deficit, incompatible and inferior, hence invalid” (Guo, 2009, p. 37). Knowledge has been racialized and materialized on the basis of ethnicities and national origins. Furthermore, the complexity of this process is intensified through an ontological commitment to a positivistic and universal measurement, thus denying immigrants possibilities to obtain success
in the host society. Moreover, the professional criteria and excellence have been utilized as “a cloak to restrict competition and legitimize existing power relations” (p. 49). Therefore, the juxtaposition of these misconceptions of difference and knowledge with positivism and liberal universalism, as Guo (2009) notes, “forms a new head tax to exclude the undesirable and perpetuate oppression in Canada” (p. 37).

The skills of immigrants in Canada have been racialized and materialized, since skin colour is the central basis of social marking (Guo, 2015). Immigrants are marked for their otherness because of the colour of their skin, their customs and languages, and their immigration status. They are viewed as the least desirable and are subjected to a systemic discrimination and exclusion from professional sectors. They are allocated jobs, which offer low pay and insecurity, and result in the gross exploitation of this group of people. They are also considered to be biologically and culturally capable to work under subhuman working conditions, at super-exploitative wages (Creese, 1992). The otherness, racialized status, and willingness to work at wages below those paid to white workers by the immigrants, in turn, threaten the wages and working conditions of the white male workers (Das Gupta, 1998). Asian workers have been considered to be “unorganizable” by the white unionists, resulting in the unions adopting a strategy of exclusionism towards the immigrants (Das Gupta, Man, Mirchandani, & Ng, 2014). This racialized ideology has contributed actively to precarious employment as well as to social precariousness among workers of colour (Das Gupta, 2006; Ng & Shan, 2010).

Racialization remains central to the operation of a hierarchical regime of skills discrimination based on skin colour rather than on qualifications. Through the process of deskilling and reskilling, racialized immigrants are channeled to training programs such as skill retraining, accent reduction, and cultural brainwashing in order to fit into the dominance of white
privilege. This process has become “a social engineering project for manufacturing normative, white, docile corporate subjects” who are accorded Canadian norms and value (Guo, 2015, p. 236). Therefore, racialized immigrants’ foreign credentials, job skills, and work experience are devalued and denigrated based on their skin colour.

The racialized identities of immigrants of colour undermine their privilege by relegating them to a position of flexible, cheap and vulnerable workers. Maitra (2015a) demonstrated how a transnational network with India-based body shopping agencies are assisting Indian immigrant IT workers in Canada to get employment in their own fields. In her study, she argues that these associations are “increasingly turning the immigrants into a globally circulating and precarious workforce subjected to multiple insecurities of severe regulations and flexible work patterns of the recruitment agencies” (p. 195). She further indicates that these immigrant workers are ready to accept such regulatory conditions to avoid unemployment and to survive in a labour market that is “racialized, gendered and lacks stability and predictability” (p. 195). Although facing diverse barriers to entering the labour market, workers learn to establish their own networks to seek their respective careers instead of working in low-end, and contingent fields of work. Fear and insecurity regarding their income and careers, and distance from families while they struggle to maintain their temporary employment contracts, have influenced their lives within a heavily competitive neoliberal workspace.

The discursive and ideological constructions in the hiring criteria and the conduct of hiring, work together to present the privileged male and white cultural habitus with power, while ensuring and maximizing the economic interests of employers. Shan (2013) examined Chinese engineers in Canada through an investigation of the hiring practices of the engineering profession in Canada. In her research, she discusses the soft skills and hard skills that are
embedded in a racialized discourse and argues that employers’ lack of knowledge of the ‘others’ has turned immigrants from developing countries into a deficient labour pool. Additionally, she demonstrates that in the project-based and network-dependent hiring schema, employers who rely on existing networks as a major approach to hiring, ensure that immigrants without access to the “right social network are easily relegated to a secondary labour pool” (p. 924). Lastly, Shan (2013) demonstrated the contradictory invocation of the skills discourse. On the one hand, workers consistently use hard and soft skills such as hiring criteria, thus ideologically placing immigrants at the bottom of the hiring ladder. On the other hand, the social networks do not bring positive results for immigrants’ employment opportunities since most of the engineer companies only offer contingent project availabilities. Thus, the so-called labour market need due to shortage does not mean better job opportunities for immigrants. Instead, “calculated hiring strategies” are used by employers to shape immigrants’ employment outcomes (p. 925).

2.3.2 Marginalized Experience of Female Immigrant Workers

Compared to any other group, immigrant women, particularly those from racialized backgrounds, continue to experience the worst labour market conditions and outcomes (Guo, 2013; Premji et al., 2014). The unequal social roles of immigrant women are the result of immigration policies in Canada. Historically, gender control has been significant in its efforts to limit the numbers of the racialized population (Shan, 2015). Since 1992, there have been more women than men immigrants to Canada. Although they came as the family class or as independents, in 2012, more than half of the immigrant women entered through economic categories, as skilled workers, business immigrants, live-in caregivers, or provincial territorial nominees (CIC, 2013).
The gender differentiation in immigration status (principal applicants or dependents) indicates a structural difference between male and female immigration with regard to their occupation and status in their home country, as well as in Canada (Man, 2004). This immigration process further leads to an ideological and sociological differentiation process reproducing and structuring inequality for women immigrants. The state immigration and governmental policies influence immigrant women’s participation in the labour market, and reproduce women’s marginalized economic situation, and their social position (Jayaraman, 2014). Despite the fact that immigrant women come as either principal applicants or dependents to Canada, their reception in the host country does not reflect their status. Their diverse pathways demonstrate various challenges and struggles and warrant social attention. Immigrant women face difficulties based on legal frameworks and government policies, bear the consequences of racism and patriarchy, and have no choice but to be trapped in precarious employment with low pay and minimal benefits (Jayaraman, 2014).

The employment experience of immigrant women in Canada is complicated by a gendered and racialized institutional process practiced by the state through its immigration policies, a professional accreditation system, and employers’ requirement of Canadian experience for job applicants, as well as labour market conditions (Man, 2004). At present, the main forms of marginal and insecure work for women workers of colour indicate different forms of insecure and marginal employment, such as the absence of labour rights, health and safety provisions and social entitlements, as well as job security. These employment conditions have serious implications for women. They include work intensification, difficulty in taking breaks and limited access to maternity leave, maternity and redundancy pay. Immigrant women have been viewed as being placed in a lower-class position. They are seen as the ideal cheap and docile
labour force, willing to work under exploitative conditions such as at low-paid, low skill jobs, characterized by high risk and precarity (Fuller & Vosko, 2008; Ng, 1999a; Premji & Lewchuk, 2014). Systemic racist and ethnic discrimination practices affect and shape racialized minority immigrant women’s experience in the labour market (Gannagé, 1999; Ng, 1999a). The identity of gender, along with race, prevents immigrant women of colour from pursuing employment that matches their skills and goals, and creates delays in the job search process (Premji & Lewchuk, 2014). Discriminatory employer practices place racialized and gendered restrictions that influence immigrant women’s employment rate (Shan, 2015; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007). In contrast, female immigrants who are from the First World immigration ranking countries, such as the UK or the USA, face fewer challenges by employers or in hiring practices, as compared to women who are born in other countries (Boyd, 1984). In particular, women from racial minority communities face a significantly higher possibility of working in precarious employment than white immigrant women (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

This binary dichotomy of dividing immigrant women into racialized minorities and white women immigrants is determined by the colour of skin and gender. Das Gupta, Man, Mirchandani and Ng (2014) drew on interviews with highly skilled professional immigrant women from China and India and investigate how they learned to reorient and reshape their skills, experiences, and aspirations in order to secure employment in Canada. The authors’ research indicates that though this group of women were assessed as the ideal permanent residents in Canada, based on their high levels of education and professional experiences, non-white female immigrants experienced higher levels of unemployment, lower incomes and poverty compared to the white population in Canada. The study also demonstrates that the marginalized positions of the immigrant women situated them and shaped their practices in the
labour market in such a way as to make it very difficult for the women to improve their employment situation. These social practices perpetuate systemic racist and racial discrimination practices and further exclude immigrant women of colour from the dominant society and simultaneously shape their practices when entering the labour market.

In Ng’s (2002) research on examining the aspects of globalization in relation to the changing working conditions of garment workers in Canada, she finds that the garment workers, especially women, struggled with a disconnection after working with a particular employer repetitively because of negative experiences, such as not being given a piece rate until the garments were completed; late payment or being paid less than the agreed upon amount; and no vacation pay although vacation pay would be included on the T4A issued at year end to give the appearance of conforming to company standards. The increasing competition among employers and workers, and decreasing security for workers, is not inevitable. Ng defined this phenomenon as the “globalization regime of ruling” that produces the local conditions in centres of garment production in Canada and around the world, “planned and effected by actual people in their actual everyday activities, working toward the integration of markets, including labour markets, on a global scale” (p. 77).

Feminist scholars highlight the significant roles that women play in maintaining their families (Grahame, 2003; Landolt & Da, 2005; Parrado & Flippen, 2005). The gendered division of household labour indicates that men resist more involvement with domestic work, even though women take on the responsibility of providing financially for the family (Grahame, 2003). Specifically, in order to understand the complexities of Asian immigrant women in the United States, she illustrates the complexities of immigrant women meeting family needs, while engaging in work related activities that have been produced by the organization of the labour
market, immigration legislation, and the ideological practices embedded in developing, managing, and administering public policies such as job training and family leave. These complexities have converged to form the extended social relations that shape and direct immigrant women’s experiences (Grahame, 2003). Premji and Lewchuk (2014) highlighted how immigrant women have faced various social barriers associated with household gender relations, including the high load of household and caregiving work, lack of supportive male partners, and lack of affordable childcare. Additionally, Shan (2009) and Shinozaki (2014) illustrated that intra-family gender and power relations are highly influential on how some immigrant women navigate the labour market and how they understand themselves in balancing family and work.

The ideological perspective of female immigrants in family social positions and stereotypes in power relations define their occupational decisions in the labour market (Ng & Shan, 2010). Female married workers would be less likely to be treated as non-standard workers if unpaid caring activities were not an essential feature of social life. As such, the concept perpetuates the male’s privileged position, both in the paid workforce, as well as in the family, since women are seen to be the supporters within family relations, while men are obliged to maintain regular employment and share it with their families. This unbalanced social distribution in a family setting creates the notion of ideological power relations that generates a negative impact on women and limits their career path when they are looking for jobs.

2.3.3 Class, Inequality, Power

Class stands for people’s everyday practices around social distinction and reproduces the social hierarchy (Anthias, 2012). As class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions (Reay, 1998), the individual’s life, as it is associated with economic achievement, can be considered to be
“classed” with particular focus on gender and ethnic forms (Reay, 2004). Statistics show that economic inequality, including differences in wages, situates immigrants in a lower class, as compared to native-born individuals. For example, a significant immigrant wage gap is indicated in almost all occupational fields in Canada in the monthly wage (Smith & Fernandez, 2017). Immigrants also receive less pay than Canadian-born counterparts with similar levels of education and it takes at least a decade for their earnings to converge (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008). Although education has a positive, and significant impact on immigrants’ cognitive skills that are related to higher wages (Smith & Fernandez, 2017), immigrants are paid considerably less than native-born Canadians, even when they have similar qualifications, ages, language knowledge, racial backgrounds, are living in the same cities, as well as working at the same occupational levels.

Class connects with race, gender and age, influencing immigrants’ social integration as well as their intergenerational social mobility. Guo and Guo (2016) pointed out that immigrant women and youths are the two major vulnerable groups that encounter discrimination and social exclusion since “their race, ethnicity, religion, and social class produce multiple layers of marginalization and oppression” (p. 51). In addition, according to Platt (2005), ethnic minorities start from a very different distribution of class origins, and their subsequent destinations combine the impact of these class origins, overall changing class distributions and particularly, the within-group format of mobility. When examining the class impact on intergenerational mobility, Pratt suggests that the occupational disadvantage faced because of migration by some past migrants results in “initial downward mobility, along with the ethnic penalty faced to a varying degree by minority ethnic groups in the labour market” (p. 458), He adds that social mobility indicates a less clear-cut relationship with outcomes than traditional patterns of class outcomes would show.
In Clerge’s (2014) review on sociological debates on the socioeconomic incorporation of immigrants and the racial and ethnic relations of new and old African-Americans, he finds that Black immigrants still have to navigate similar racial and class boundaries, potentially emulating the structural behaviours and belief systems of upwardly mobile African-Americans. He suggests that the racialized minority’s social mobility can be improved if “it accounted for the spatial differences, interclass relations with the upper class and racial boundary work between minorities in its frameworks” (p.1180). Thus, class as a factor with clear relevance for the development of a wider and more integrated analysis, reproduces social hierarchy and inequality in relations (Anthias, 2013), which further establishes hierarchical and unequal social integration in immigrants’ lived experiences.

National, social, and individual perspectives, along with the intersection of race and gender, contribute to the hierarchical and unequal social integration through the lens of class. Class needs to be understood in the “various ways in which socially organized human labour is applied to society to produce value” (Milner, 2001). According to Li (2003), the government, when analyzing the value of immigrants, utilizes an underlying assumption of how they can enrich Canadians. Such an understanding of immigrants has led to higher potential expectations from immigrants, as compared to native-born individuals, to make significant contributions to Canadian society. There are three approaches to understanding the economic value of immigrants: estimating an optimal level of immigration to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs to Canadian society; using the idea of a balance sheet to calculate the net cost or net benefit of immigration; comparing the earnings of immigrants and native-born Canadians to see how immigrants fare in the labour market. Viewing immigrants’ value through their economic value causes a two-dimensional dilemma. On the one hand, the discourse of class produces
hierarchical social relations with regard to immigrants’ value in the labour market. On the other hand, the recognition of immigrants as economic actors, rather than in terms of their sociocultural value, is a form of commodification and constitutes a boundary that situates immigrants in a particular class location, and also segregates them from attaining better social integration.

Li (2003) noted that “proper integration necessitates immigrants performing at least as well as the average Canadian in terms of per-capita productivity, but successful integration requires immigrants to do better than the native-born so that the resident population can benefit from immigration” (p. 325). Due to the complexity of their multiple identities, immigrants are subject to different kinds of assumptions, in particular in terms of the economic expectations on them, but they are not provided the space to be accepted at the social and governmental levels (Ferguson & McNally, 2015; Guo, 2009; Li, 2003b). The complexity produces not only unequal class relations between immigrants and native-born Canadians, but also leads to conflicts that shape immigrant social practices as well as their class position.

The economic conditions constitute just one aspect of class; they do not provide us with a comprehensive picture of the impact of class in contemporary society (Prandy & Blackbrun, 1997). Limiting class debates to the purely economic sphere results in the marginalization of the individual’s multiple identities and “a neglect of the myriad ways in which social class differences contribute to social inequalities” (Reay, 1998, p. 259). Ng (1999) addressed the issue of how class is rooted and perpetuated in the interactions with immigrant women in the workplace. In her research, she defines the relationship between immigrant service counsellors and immigrant women as “a gradual transformation and crystallization” (p. 85). She asserts that the relationship is created inevitably through the immigrant women’s roles as they are organized
into an ethnic and gender segregated labour force with capital value for the employers. The relationship also contributes to shaping women’s class positions.

State and class have dialectic relations. In large measure, the state enters as a primary focus point for the process of organizing social groups. The state and social groups can be defined by “a shared and objective economic interest, and they are organized as coherent collective actors capable of articulating and pursuing their interests both with and against other social groups” (Sassen, 2007, p.179). In other words, the state has the hierarchical power that plays a central role in shaping the working and learning experiences of immigrant workers (Ng, 1999). Moreover, the state plays a leading role in establishing and organizing the working class through diverse interventions and control mechanisms. It is the pivotal influence of the state that reorganizes class relations since it has progressively taken on the role of mediating the economy, and amplifying the infrastructure essentials for continuous capital accumulation. Class reflects the demands of the state because class difference has practiced, perpetuated, and facilitated the labour market and further located immigrant women in Canadian hierarchical structures, and shaped their social practices. Thus, class identity and class consciousness emerge from the broader class relations embodied in immigrants’ experiences in capitalist society, and ultimately propel them to become the agents of change (Anthias, 2013; Berberoglu, 2009).

2.4 Immigrant Service Agencies (ISAs) and Immigrant Settlement Workers (ISWs) in Canada

2.4.1 ISAs in Canada

As Canada has a long history of immigration, ISAs have played an important role in facilitating ethno-cultural diversity and economic prosperity in Canada. The immigrant service sectors are a complex of community agencies that largely rely on state funding to provide services to newcomers and immigrants to settle in Canada. In this context, it is meaningful to
understand the history and development of ISAs in Canada. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, small-scale and informal “settlement assistance” for non-British and French immigrants was mostly offered by ethnic communities such as churches, and voluntary organizations (Amin, 1987). After the Second World War, the idea of settlement was attached to the notion of Canadianizing immigrants through training them in Canadian values, and English or French language skills. For example, in 1960, the Department of the Ontario Provincial Secretary and Citizenship was created by merging a small office responsible for the provision of information, translation, group and community services for newcomers, with a section of the Department of Education involved in English language training and citizenship instruction (Hawkins, 1988). In addition, it is interesting to notice that most of the settlement workers were female volunteers with strong Christian affiliations, while funding for settlement support at the time was mostly from the church or private donors (Ko, 2017).

As the number of immigrants grew, various immigrant support agencies and ethnic organizations began to emerge. Starting from the 1970s, the expansion of immigrant services and the growth of immigrant serving organizations has been fueled by federal government policy on immigration (Holder, 1998). In Ontario, the federal government began offering short-term grants to community agencies for immigrant services and programs (Amin, 1987). In 1980, the resettlement of the “boat people” used private sector voluntary associations as central actors in the process: “…the entire government was privatized and decentralized, with government playing a supportive role” (Whitaker, 1991, p. 22). Since the 1990s, the devolution of service delivery to non-state entities, coupled with a destabilized and competitive funding structure, has resulted in the marketization of immigrant settlement support (Ko, 2017). Welfare agencies, such as departments of social welfare, housing and public health, behave as “buyers” who can choose to
purchase services from a selection of competing non-profit or private organizations (Rose, 1996). In the twenty-first century, emphasis was placed on a strategy for immigration and citizenship that selected immigrants according to their ability to contribute to economic and social development, while reducing the demand for integration services. The federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration, now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), was created linking immigration and the acquisition of citizenship, demonstrating an obvious concern about shared values and national identity (Hold, 1998).

ISAs aim to provide diverse range of assistance and support to immigrant populations for meeting their requirements and integrating their lives into a new country (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). To be more specific, their services tend to be concentrated in the areas of: (1) language acquisition and proficiency; (2) employment related services; (3) housing; and (4) information workshops and settlement counselling services (Even & Shield, 2014). The purpose of immigrant services is to support the short and longer-term needs of immigrants and to facilitate their holistic participation in the economy and society (Evan & Shield, 2014). The ultimate goal is “to facilitate greater participation in and integration into mainstream society” (Guo & Guo, 2016, p. 49). Working with the foregoing mission objectives in mind, immigrant settlement and integration services feature the following core aims (COSTI, 1999, p. 9): “1) Adjustment: acclimatizing and getting used to the new culture, language, people and environment or coping with the situation; 2) Adaptation: learning and managing the situation without a great deal of help; 3) Integration: actively participating, getting involved and contributing as citizen of the new country” (p. 9). In addition, immigrant settlement and integration services do not represent immigrants’ unjust privileges, nor do they promote ethnic separatism (Kymlicka, 1998). They function as providers of transition roles to immigrants and they endeavour to accommodate
diversity, and deal with distinctive problems facing particular ethno-cultural groups (Guo & Guo, 2016).

In most non-profit ISAs, employment related services and language training are the two core immigrant service types (Shields et al., 2016). Career programs are centred on increasing the opportunities of the immigrant workforce through training and actively developing and connecting immigrants with potential employers through giving counseling on career planning, job searching, resume writing, and interview skills preparation. Furthermore, language acquisition programs are funded by the government and they also play a vital role in facilitating immigrants’ integration. For example, the Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) was created as part of a federal integration strategy providing bridge-to-work language programs for immigrants, focusing on presentability and employability of immigrants for the Canadian labour market through a process of accent reduction, name anglicizing, and adaptation of Canadian linguistic and cultural norms (Y. Guo, 2009). In addition, the Enhanced Language Training (ELT) program was established in 2003 by the federal government to provide a higher level of language training for the workplace through helping immigrants understand Canadian workplace culture and fit into the workplace (Soveran, 2011).

It is important to note that immigrant settlement and integration services are provided by the IRCC but delivered by the non-profit services. In Canada, there has been a long relationship between government and non-profit service providers in the provision of support services for newcomers to this country, and the Canadian model of immigrant service has been considered as the best practice internationally (Evans & Shields, 2013). However, the uneven distribution of immigrants in Canada complicates settlement and integration processes at the national level, and this causes an inherent process that happens at the sub-national level. This further explains the
important role of ISAs in integrating immigrants and how they have been taking “the lead” in immigrant services in Canada (Evan & Shield, 2014, p. 3).

Immigrant-serving organizations are influenced by “governmental changes, shifts in jurisdictional responsibility, economic trends and disruptions, boom and bust cycles, and changes to immigration policies” (Thomas, 2017, p. 183). According to Burstein (2010), immigrant-service agencies support individual immigrants, immigrant families and communities by solving their problems related to settlement and integration, as well as by creatively assembling government programs and other stakeholder services. Agencies strive to become more competitive in related areas and with regard to their positions. They need to distinguish themselves from competitors by focusing on their major strengths and interpreting how these strengths can be employed to address the critical emerging social, economic, and cultural challenges. The transformation of settlement agencies requires them to create capacities that differentiate them from other agencies, while focusing on their core strengths and concentrating on their interventions that are connected with immigrant issues. Therefore, settlement agencies should buttress certain capacities that are underdeveloped, particularly, “the introspective capacity of agencies to acquire knowledge and the sector’s capacity to mobilize that knowledge in pursuit of innovation” (Burstein, 2010, p. 44).

2.4.2 The Role of Funding in ISAs

Applying for funding has always been the priority role for ISAs. Over the past few decades, specifically from the 1990s, sources of funding for immigrant services have shifted away from private, religious, and community donors and immigrant Service Provider Organizations (SPOs), and has become heavily dependent on government grants (Sadiq, 2004). The financial dependence on state funders has intensified as the funding discipline has been
restructured (Sadiq, 2004). Additionally, it is important to acknowledge changes in the federal government, from the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, to the Liberal Party of Canada in late 2015. IRCC is now the main federal department that is responsible to provide financial support in language and skills, labour market access, welcoming communities, policies and program development. Most services are designed and delivered by service provider organizations, but certain services such as some information provisions are delivered directly by IRCC, and some services are delivered overseas (Government of Canada, 2017).

Program-based funding is the standardized approach that determines federal government funding based on the local needs. IRCC funds many programs for immigration settlement, including the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), LINC, Job Search Workshops (JSWs), Host Program (a volunteer-newcomer matching program), Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), and Resettlement Assistance Programs (RAPs) for refugees (Maharaj & Shuguang, 2015). The Settlement Program from IRCC assists immigrants and refugees to overcome barriers specific to the newcomer experience such as a lack of official language skills and limited knowledge of Canada, and to facilitate them to participate in social, cultural, civic and economic life in Canada (Government of Canada, 2017). The focus of funding from the federal government involves three areas: language instruction, settlement and adaptation programs and the host program, with a recommendation of gearing language training towards finding employment, and a streamlined process of foreign credential or experience recognition (Reitz & Banerjee, 2006). According to Neudorf (2016), in 2008, the IRCC implemented the Modernized Approach, recognizing that performance measurement focuses on the actual outcomes rather than the number of clients they served. Secondly, the Modernized Approach agreed on the dispersion nature of immigrant services. Programs were administered
and categorized under specific aspects, and organizations were responsible to make contributions to each of these programs. Thirdly, while understanding different settlement needs in diverse regions and of different duration, the Modernized Approach endeavours to achieve collaborative planning and prioritization, with all the stakeholders being involved in coordinating and carrying out programming collaboratively.

The financial support of ISAs from the government relies on their scale and development. Guo (2006) investigated prominent immigrant service organizations in Vancouver and has shown that larger and more well-established organizations are more likely to maintain a modest autonomy from the government. Similarly, Mukhtar et al. (2016) demonstrated that larger agencies are better able to secure yearly funding, forcing smaller agencies that cannot compete for state resources to be eliminated from the market, and thus, reducing competition. However, Guo (2006) also pointed out that government downloading has forced ISAs to commercialize their services by implementing some fee-based services that disproportionately impact low-income clients. This serves to strengthen neoliberal realities that distance the immigration settlement organizations from serving newcomers in order to maintain funding levels for organizational sustainability (Mukhtar et al., 2016).

ISAs receive support from the provincial and municipal levels. For example, Quebec has long played a key role in immigrant settlement since the establishment of its own Department of Immigration in 1968, and continues to do so with its Canada-Quebec Accord (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). The other provinces have the flexibility to add distinct programs if the province formally requests it, such as New Brunswick’s francophone settlement program. Besides, all provincial and territorial governments provide provincial immigration and settlement websites as additional support. Municipal governments also support immigrant service organizations for
accommodation, to enroll children in school, and engage in other local activities. For instance, Chiasson and Koji (2011) investigated that Sherbrook City Council has created an “Intercultural Relations and Diversity Committee”, and the town of Rimouski has developed a “Welcoming Guide for Newcomers” and has adopted the “Rimouski Declaration of the Citizens Rights” (p. 177). These developments are symbolic of the municipalities’ commitment to facilitate ISAs for settlement and integration of newcomers into their communities (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). However, as “creatures of the provinces” with no direct funding for immigrant services, municipalities play a subordinate role in immigrant settlement, even though the cities and towns are “the primary recipients of immigrants to Canada” (Tolley, 2011, p. 4).

2.4.3 Receiving Funding

The fundamental constraint on the strategies described above is their top down orientation, which is better suited to coordinating policies and plans, than to delivering services (Burstein, 2010). In 2003, the Canadian Council on Social Development published a report that demonstrates concerns from various non-governmental agencies in funding restructuring and its effects on the non-profit and voluntary sector since the 1990s (Scott, 2003). The report indicates that while there are a range of funding sources for non-profit agencies, the majority come from federal and provincial governments. Taking Ontario as an example, there are several kinds of shifts in the funding realities of the non-profit groups: 1) Shifts from funding based on organization mission, to project-based contracts that give increased control to the funders; 2) Funding becoming short-term and increasingly unpredictable; 3) Less administrative costs that cannot be directly tied to a project or program; 4) Funders adopting a more targeted approach to funding; increased and advanced reporting and evaluation requirements, which complicate the funding process for non-profit organization staff working with limited resources; and 5) Joint
submissions with other project partners being required, and the demonstration of securing funding from other sources, before being extending support (Scott, 2003). Thus, these limitations are a function of how governments acquire program knowledge; they also result from accountability regimes that hold officials responsible only for the programs they control but not for their coordination with the services offered by other departments and other levels of government (Burstein, 2010).

Scott (2003) delineated the relationship of non-governmental agencies to the state as “a deeply frayed rope” that is about to break through problematizing potential issues of the founding reality through the following perspectives (p. 135): 1) Volatility, which refers to huge swings in revenue that determines organization’s stability and capacity to provide quality services and programs for clients; mission drift, which means a pulled-away reality from the primary mission due to the instability that influences an organization’s reputation in the community; 2) Loss of infrastructure, which indicates losing the basic infrastructure because of the project-based funding and restrictions on administrative cost; 3) Reporting overload, which shows difficulties for smaller organizations in facing short-term contracts and hiring, as well as reporting to multiple funders and requirements; this house of cards manifests itself in the inconsistent partnerships among organizations, since funders are looking for financial or in-kind contributions from other sources, which leads to the loss of one contract or the end of one partnership agreement and that can make an impact on the whole interlocking structure; 4) Advocacy chill, which refers to the fear of lobbying client groups’ rights; and human resource fatigue, which outlines the unsustainability for staff-stretching to the limit to meet challenges and remain faithful and responsible (p. xiv-xv).
While the policy capacity of government has been under challenge due to the shrinkage in the size and resources of the civil service (Baskoy, Bryan, & John, 2011), the advocacy and policy capacities of ISAs have been even more constrained due to strict funding rules and a decline in funding by governments, which are the key financial source for agencies (Evans, Ted, & John, 2005). It is undoubtful that the program-based evaluation gives substance to the principles of program consolidation, outcomes-based measurement, and collaborative governance in the pursuit of efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. However, the move to short-term funding models has occurred alongside more rigidly defined mandates that limit the independence of the settlement sector to shuffle around funds for different types of programs. These principles indicated that too much attention is paid to outputs at the expense of measuring outcomes. Sadiq (2004) argued that “Canada’s settlement sector has evolved into a para-state system that is financed by contractual arrangements between the state and non-governmental settlement agencies” to deliver employment, language, housing, education, and other services to newcomers (p. 1). This type of restructuring of the settlement sector has created instability, service gaps, as well as “a general diversion of precious human resources from service planning and delivery to irrational administrative burdens” (Richmond & Shields, 2005, p. 518). This unfocused service structure also further intensifies the unmet situations between where the migrants are located and where the services are provided (Joassart-Marcelli, 2013; Sadiq, 2004).

2.4.4 The Advocacy Role of ISAs in Canada

The settlement and integration policies in Canada tend to show a warm welcome to newcomers in this country (Reitz, 1998), and the policies provide guidelines to create pathways for the immigrants to undertake their new journey. These policies at the national level are not simply administrative decisions. They reflect the needs of what programs and practices are
required to be established, and what the place of immigrants should hold in their community from a societal perspective (Siemiatycki & Triadafilopoulos, 2010). Given that immigrants constitute a vulnerable population, with 70% of them being racialized minorities, immigrant organizations that service this population are unquestionably playing an essential role in advocacy, through providing immigrants’ concerns and interests to government policymakers (Evans & Shields, 2013; Shragge, 2013).

In addition, advocacy is an essential role that ISAs play for immigrants’ rights (Evans & Shields, 2013). Carter, Plewes, and Echenberg (2005) classified the policy voice role of non-profit organizations in the following categories: “(1) identifying issues on the policy agenda; (2) developing policy solutions through research and analysis, i.e. policy-ready research; and (3) promoting particular policy solutions” (p. 6). In addition, Evans and Shields (2014) highlighted the key role of advocacy in the non-profit NGOs that provides a voice to the community they serve, particularly, for those marginalized groups, with a purpose of effective integration. They further define advocacy in two dimensions, “big advocacy” and “small advocacy”, to articulate relations with governmental institutions. Big advocacy refers to adopting a more public form to illustrate policy changes, which includes “challenging government programs and policies that affect immigrants, refugees and settlement workers” (p. 28), and “small advocacy” involves activities that concern more ‘behind the scenes’, day-to-day interface and ‘consultation’ that occur between state officials and NGO personnel (p. 27). Thus, it is important for ISAs to be culturally inclusive and sensitive with collaborative approaches for program development and the autonomy to take on a meaningful advocacy role (Creese, 2011; George, 2002).

Non-profit advocacy refers to the relationships that involve engagement with the state, resulting in “both collaboration and conflict” (Wayland, 2006, p. 1). Thomas (2015) analyzed
advocacy by emphasizing the idea of empowerment themes that immigrant service organizations are playing for immigrants. Under the neoliberal influence, empowerment can be positive since agencies are actively engaged in advocacy and capacity, as they are assisting newcomers to obtain Canadian citizenship, and to become actively involved in civic and political life. However, these positive actions focus on improving individual deficits with educational upgrading, resume preparations, and workshops that are related to teaching white Canadian cultural norms, rather than towards providing an equal focus on adaptation by local employers and communities. Therefore, settlement agencies, similar to other non-profit and government-funded services, are confined by increased bureaucratization which can create gaps between community needs and the expectations of government funding mandates (Creese, 2011; Yan, Chau, & Sangha, 2010). This limits a critical advocacy role for immigrant service providers who must choose between maintaining funding and critiquing governmental policy.

Although finding an advocacy voice seems challenging to ISAs, Shield (2013) further highlighted that the non-profit service practitioners find a shield to better protect themselves from government, while simultaneously strengthening their voice through coalitions with wider organizations. The provincial umbrella associations play the role of speaking with a collective voice for the sector’s service providing organizations at the provincial level, such as in Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan. These organizations present the voice of ISAs; thus negotiations carry more weight. Additionally, a better way to communicate with the government is to join together with these umbrella organizations, since it is feasible for the government to deal with sectoral voice organizations when consulting on an issue, rather than trying to coordinate multiple ISAs.
2.4.5 The Role of ISWs in Canada

The role that ISWs play in relation to newcomer organizations and mainstream institutions adds a strong spatial dimension to integration. Guo and Guo (2016) identified the landscape of integration as “a holistic, multifaceted and collaborative approach for creating warmer and more welcoming communities, inclusive spaces” (p. 45). While advocacy focuses on the relations between governmental institutions and the agencies, integration manifests relations among individuals. These relations can be analyzed from three perspectives: internal, external, and holistic. Internal relations refer to the relations among ISWs themselves. External relations refer to the relations between workers and immigrants. As settlement workers are mostly immigrants as well, holistic relations can be identified as the comprehensive relations that appear for both the settlement workers and the immigrants as a hybrid identity. In addition, by mediating relations between ethnic specific and religious organizations and mainstream organizations, settlement agencies acquire a “first hand appreciation” for the challenges and needs that face communities at a systemic, as opposed to an individual, level (Burstein, 2010, p. 37).

It is undeniable that the power of the state supports the development of ISAs, while simultaneously, neglecting the needs of the organizations. Under the pressure of funding, and the existence of both programs and organizations, ISWs endeavour to survive in the “cracks” that are formed through the requirements of the funders, organizations, employers, and immigrants. A distorted environment inevitably shapes their practices when working with clients, as well as in their learning experiences in the workplace. In Shields’s (2013) research on the role of settlement organizations in the public policy process in Canada, he illustrated that advocacy is such a charged subject in the government non-profit circles that members of the non-profit sector have approached the issue in diverse ways: “Some non-profit representatives are on boards or other
advisory/coordinating bodies with government officials and find that these forums can be useful for exchanging positions and getting their voices heard. Others have adopted a stance where they will select priority issues that they will engage policymakers on and let other issues slide, realizing that their voice will likely only be heard if they are able to prioritize and not engage on every issue that arises” (p. 19).

Ng (1996) shared a pessimistic viewpoint on the roles that ISAs and ISWs are playing in the state. In particular, she examines the experiences of immigrant women in a non-profit organization that provided job counselling and immigrant services for non-English women towards helping them to overcome difficulties in the labour market. Ng investigates different kinds of contradictions within the state, agencies, board members, the staff, and immigrant women. The state fundamentally constructs diverse types of social relations that perpetuate and legitimize courses of actions, and these can involve other forms of illegitimate actions. The state represents and determines the social relations and positions of domination and subordination, and the relations of power. The agency, on the other hand, becomes “an extension of the ruling apparatus” (p.11). In order to survive and receive funding from the state, agencies produce a “product”, which is defined by a legal contract to cater to the board of directors, the internal representatives of the state within the agencies, in order to approve the legal financial welfare of the agencies. These requirements and landscape development trigger an internal fragmentation and segmentation within the agencies, which ultimately leads to certain contradictions inside the agencies, such as tension between the board and the staff, program guidelines and services to immigrants.

In addition to the role of helping immigrants’ integration in Canadian society, ISWs’ roles have been confined by the requirement of funding, particularly, through the word “outcome” that
we discussed in the last section. In order to receive financial support and maintain program existence, ISWs act as the ideal government control practitioners fostering good immigrants in society, based on requests from the government. The “good” immigrants deserve support from immigrant services, while the “bad” immigrants are a drain on the Canadian economy. For example, instead of supporting those immigrants who profoundly need employment opportunities, the employment-related programs in immigrant services agencies define their employability only by examining their work for skills, thus causing a stratification between the “ideal” and “successful”, to those who need support to access the job market. These policy orientations also illustrate the flexibility and pervasive nature of neoliberal ideology as it operates in various ways, moving beyond individuals to limit settlement organizations as well.

The Canadian government has restructured the welfare state, creating rigid mandates that guide the immigrant settlement sector towards focusing on improving individual deficits (to create “responsible” citizens). ISWs are limited in what they can do for immigrants within this framework of strict mandates and limited funding pools. Human capital deficits alone cannot explain a segmented labour market, which is divided along the various boundaries of intersecting oppressions, and restricts access to better jobs and working conditions. When newcomers fail in the labour market it is either because the immigration system selects the “wrong” immigrants, or they have not been diligent enough to integrate into the Canadian labour force (Thomas, 2015, p. 162).

Under the power of the state, the role of ISWs becomes a tool for the government to meet its requirements by producing and helping the “right” immigrants who can integrate easily into the Canadian economy and who are self-sufficient and independent. More importantly, helping and producing the “right” immigrants helps to set some agencies up as “successful samples” and
enhance their competitiveness among different agencies for further financial support. This process of commodification of immigrants as products, manifests itself as an outcome of neoliberal ideology driven by market logic and its contributions, as well as by a continuous power hierarchy (Chuong, 2015). Therefore, ISWs utilize immigrants as tools to apply for funding, and they act like supporters, not for immigrants but government power relations, while simultaneously marginalizing immigrants who are struggling with, or missing the appropriate and necessary skills. For ISWs, it is critically important to move beyond providing services that address the “deficits” of the “wrong” immigrants.

Despite the fact that ISWs play an important role in ensuring immigrants’ integration into Canadian society, the ISWs simultaneously encounter difficulties and challenges. As well as forcing immigrant service providers to compete more vigorously for government funds, ISWs are also increasingly challenged by the entry of new agencies as competition, a circumstance that Burstein (2010) calls “an unequal battle” (p. 20). Burstein further analyzes how poor wages and working conditions faced by settlement agencies, and the short-term nature of government funding, create constant uncertainty. The involvement of multilayers of competitors, from unionized sectors such as educational institutions or related-industries, produces an uncertainty for ISWs in jobs that offered better security, training, benefits and salaries. In addition, Vosko (2010) highlighted that temporary agency workers have limited access to social benefits and statutory entitlements, both of which are linked to the duration of an employment relationship, since their paid working lives are often punctuated by multiple periods of unemployment. Similarly, Mukhtar et. al (2016) pointed out that it is not only the limited and precarious nature of funding, but also the conditions imposed upon funding, such as the types of programming and eligibility requirements, that limit the autonomy of organizations.
The Neoliberal Approach

The neoliberal ideological concept has influenced ISAs’ practices. Neoliberalism’s influence, although varied and fluid depending on context, similarly impacts non-governmental organizations which must adhere to the norms set by the federal government (Creese, 2011; Mukhtar et al., 2016). The period of welfare-state development and consolidation has ended, and its space has been replaced by a new retrenchment and restructuring (Burke et al., 2000). Jessop (2002) emphasized that one of the salient aspects in state restructuring is the reshaping process of the welfare state, and many support and services functions of the central government are delegated to local and non-profit sectors (Shields, 2014). Furthermore, paradoxically, the subject of neoliberalism has been freed from direct oppression or domination of the state, but has been bound by the secret forces of self-governance through privatization, accountability and practice (Brown, 2005). In other words, the governance of populations has been transferred into a more informal and private area that involves a multitude of non-state entities ranging from private corporations to the self (Goldberg, 2009). At the same time, political power has not faded or diminished into the background, but has been relocated through the new relations formed between the state and nongovernmental or private actors (Lemke, 2001).

The manifestations of neoliberalism lead to a loss of “autonomy, distortion of agency mandates, dangers of increased bureaucratization and commercialization, difficulty in responding to community needs, inability to act as an advocate, resulting in a potential loss of legitimacy” (Creese, 2011, p. 193). While ISAs are well positioned to advocate for a more inclusive labour market and help newcomers cope with racism, ableism, sexism, and gender inequality, paradoxically, they are constrained by funding requirements and often are only able to focus on assisting individuals, rather than attacking systemic problems (Creese, 2011; Ku, 2011; Thomas,
The utilization of alternative service delivery through non-profit organizations has been a central part of the neoliberal agenda in Canada to “shrink the state” (Evans & Shields, 2013, p. 18).

From this perspective, government level institutions tend to avoid funding organizations that present an advocacy voice, because neoliberals consider this voice to represent the actions of “special interests” (Laforest, 2011, p. 46). “Special interests” are seen in a “negative light” by neoliberal governments (Evans & Shields, 2013, p. 18). Despite research showing us that the federal government has not decreased funding because of advocacy voices (Jedwab, 2002; Mukhtar et al., 2016), the settlement sector still presents the basic fear of having a potential negative impact on government by using the settlement sector’s voices (Laforest, 2011; Phillips, 2009; Mukhtar et al., 2016, Zhu, 2016). Ultimately, such fear has passive consequences for state funding (Evans et al., 2005). Thus, the organizations bypass public positions carefully and use less visible inside channels within government to express their positions (Shields, 2013).

As discussed earlier, the determination of receiving funding from the federal government depends largely on service outcomes (Joassart-Marcelli, 2013; Richmond & Shields, 2005; Sadiq, 2004). Agencies are seen by the government as contractors and their value is judged by the service they deliver. While it makes sense for funders to ask for evidence of outcomes, it is critical to define outcome, and to measure the efficacy of the wide range of support provided by immigrant-serving organizations. In the concept of neoliberalism, successful settlement outcomes are routinely attributed to the quality of government services and the volume of government spending. These ideas, however, are further critiqued by Burstein, as being dangerous if they are not carefully circumscribed (Burstein, 2010, p. 38). He utilizes the metaphor of building up the “public interest” to delineate the government trying to find lower
cost alternatives to contract with settlement agencies, by challenging delivery through commercial enterprises or public institutions. Neoliberalism affects the employment outcomes of immigrants and plays a role in the provision of settlement and employment services. Neoliberal pressures “reduce the availability, autonomy and efficacy of immigrant services” and its ideology “constrains service providers to intervene at the individual level, thereby reducing broader anti-racist and anti-oppression advocacy work” (Thomas, 2015, p. 162). Therefore, ISAs must be understood with great care. Rather than viewing them as vessels for carrying government services, to avoid damaging them while pursuing otherwise laudable public policy objectives, they need to be viewed as the rising tide that lifts all ships (Burstein, 2010).

Privatization is one of the important manifestations of neoliberalism. Privatization is seen to be “doubly beneficial” through a neoliberal perspective as it “reduces government spending, and it opens potentially lucrative new terrain for private, profit-seeking investment” (Stanford, 2008, p. 250). As Frideres (2006) noted, since the 1980s, there has been a re-coordinating of “the welfare state in favour of the neo-liberal approach that rejects state intervention with regard to immigrant integration” (p. 7). Canada has followed the trend of neoliberal privatization. Under this principle, immigrant services are exercising neoliberal principles to the extent that “an increasingly privatized immigrant settlement system has been increasingly pursued, relieving the federal government of much of its responsibility and accountability in helping to ensure the success of immigrants entering Canada” (Flynn & Bauder, 2015, p. 3).

The idea of partnerships within the non-profit sector is founded on the basis of mutual trust and power sharing (Evans & Shields, 2013). The partnership between government and non-profits for immigrant service delivery does not, in fact, provide the non-profits with equal status to negotiate immigration policies and to challenge the status quo. These relationships are simply
contractual whereby the government holds “all the real power and non-profits become financially dependent and subject to the accountabilities of the state” (Shields et al., 2016, p. 18). Thus, as a government “partner”, non-profits are expected to follow, or at least not deviate from the current immigration policies and government regulations, which can undermine the advocacy role of non-profits in relation to immigration reforms, and work against the expansion of migrant rights. Thus, immigrant-serving agencies are expected to reach outcomes to connect with government mandates and they are considered by the government to be contractors, and their value is equated with the services they deliver (Burstein, 2010; Neudorf, 2016).

2.5 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the changing nature of work, the social inequality of work for immigrant workers in Canada, workplace learning, and ISAs in Canada. In the first portion of the literature review, the chapter described the changing nature of work under globalization, and how it led to the development of work, the different ways in which people’s participation takes place, and work performance requirements. These factors have changed the nature of work in the neoliberal labour market, the latter itself being manifested in social inequalities. Aligning with immigration in Canada, this section focused on the precarious nature of work between state, institutions, employers and workers, and explored how power complicates improvements in the changing nature of work and perpetuates unequal power relations among the former factors.

The second part of this chapter aimed towards understanding the concept of workplace learning in the Canadian context. Through analysis of knowledge, learning, and interdependencies between individual and workplace practices, this part of the discussion problematized how the workplace is highly political and hierarchically structured, and how that
influences the process of acquiring learning. In addition, the third part of this chapter analyzed immigrant workers’ work experience in Canada via an intersectionality perspective. Contextualizing in the context of immigration in Canada, this section found that the intersections of race, gender, and class were not only simply considered as distinct social categories of multiple identities, but also the major components that produced social oppression and ultimately shaped immigrant workers’ daily practices.

The last section of this chapter examined ISAs in Canada with a focus on the functions of these agencies, as well as on the roles of ISWs. Under the concept of neoliberalism, in order to receive government funding, immigrant service providers have to work on the ideal outcomes requested by the government and try to avoid speaking from immigrants’ perspectives. This indirect control ignores an understanding of the reality of immigrants’ life experiences and creates difficulties for ISWs in their workplace. In these ways, ISWs do not only play the role of supporting immigrants’ integration, but instead help the government to establish a stronger neoliberal society in Canada.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explores reasons for selecting institutional ethnography (IE) as my research methodology and how to conduct my research. Particularly, it focuses on development of my selected methodology, the rationale, research design, selecting participants, research methods, data collection and analysis, the researcher’s role, as well as trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In addition, the definitions of methodology and methods are discussed in the selected methodology section, and the notion of ontology and epistemology are examined in the rationale section aligned with the discussion of the selected methodology. The analysis of ontology, epistemology, and methodology provides me better understanding of the connections between my selected methodology and methods, as well as how I position myself as a researcher thoroughly and comprehensively in my research.

3.1 Development of Institutional Ethnography (IE)

As a way to systematically solve the research problem, methodology of research can be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically (Kothari, 2004). Institutional Ethnography (IE) was developed as a methodology of research in feminist sociology and named as such by Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith in the early 1980s. IE has developed incrementally over the past several decades and spread not only internationally in sociology, but also through a number of other fields such as nursing, education, and social work (Devault, 2006). Smith states that IE is an alternative approach in sociology: “a sociology that does not transform people into objects, but preserves their presence as subjects” (Smith, 1987, p. 151). Smith (2005) further noted that IE is “not just a way of implementing sociological strategies of inquiry that begin in theory, rather than in people’s experience, and examine the world of people under theory’s auspices” (Smith, 2005, p. 2). IE explores an approach to
understand the social organization of knowledge and its consequences in contemporary society through the investigation of the social that focuses on the interrelations between people’s daily experiences and their relations with the social organizations (Devault, 2006; Smith, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of IE is to “transcend the objectification of so-called traditional social science” (Walby, 2007, p. 1009) and to open up a site “where our own activities as participants in discourse enter into and contribute to forces that stand over and against us and overpower our lives” (p. 228).

The earliest articulation of IE came in the late 1960s, in feminist thinking, from feminist standpoint theory which focused on analyzing how experience from people’s everyday lives could be created and translated in research (Walby, 2013). Feminist standpoint theory was, however, subjected to critique. Harding (1988) pointed out that feminist empiricists who claim both a special privilege for women’s knowledge, and an objectivity in their perspective, are stuck in an irresolvable paradox. In Harding’s understanding, “women’s standpoint of reality” appears not only to be governed by rules, and to be constituted by one privileged set of social relations, but also, by the commitments to “participatory and emancipatory values and projects that increase the objectivity” for better understanding female roles in social relations (p. 27). Based on Harding’s analysis, Smith (2005) later emphasized that feminist standpoint moves the critique beyond feminist empiricism by asserting that “knowledge of society must always be from a position in it and that women are privileged epistemologically by being members of an oppressed group” (p. 8).

IE was first proposed in the area of social work in the 1980s. Witkin and Gottschalk (1988) highlighted that IE shares an appropriateness with social work research in terms of its “explicit criticalness, recognition that humans are active agents, grounding in the life experiences of the
client, and the promotion of social justice” (p. 222). Swigonski (1994) also recognized the notion of social justice analysis in IE and suggests that IE demonstrates a need for understanding marginalized populations. O’Neill (1998) investigated how IE can be an effective approach to investigating various social institutions from the standpoints of diverse populations. He explains that IE provides insights into “how oppressive ideologies shape social relations within social services and social work education, disadvantaging certain groups” (p. 140). O’Neill suggested that this understanding can be used to promote social justice and to develop more inclusive and emancipatory organizational policies and practices.

Some years later, Smith (2005) developed her notion of IE by comparing her everyday life as a trained sociologist and connecting it with her experience as a mother. She explores this particular standpoint to show how it allows us to include any disappeared subject in the discourse or, as she explains, to make connections between people’s own embodied knowledge, and the ways of conceptual practices of power. She points out that the social relations of capital in Marx’s perspective are grounded in differences between the bourgeoisie and proletariat; these differences have been developed and promoted actively and repressively by the bourgeoisie. Smith (1990) explored this notion of the social relations of capital and points out that social consciousness exists as “a complex of externalized social relations” that are organized and coordinated in people’s social life (p. 6). IE aims to analyze the notion of ruling relations that indicate the extraordinary yet ordinary complex relations, between the interconnections of people, corporations, and government bureaucracies, that are textually mediated and connect with individuals across space and time to organize and shape their daily lives (Smith, 2005). According to Smith, IE goes beyond social discourses and social relations and focuses on the
immediate local and the ruling relations that are rooted in the managerial and “political-administrative regime” (Smith, 1990, p. 635).

IE can be utilized as a theoretical framework or as a methodology. As Walby (2013) noted, “IE is neither a theory nor methodological technique per se; it is more like an agenda for inquiry that is guided by particular theoretical and methodological commitments” (p. 141). Theory refers to a series of principles that can inform research and assist practice (Paul, 2012). The notion of methodology provides researchers rationale to identify a research problem and guide them to use specific methods and design in order to establish and develop particular kinds of knowledge about social and educational phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Method can be defined as a series of data collection techniques used to select, process, and analyze information applied to examining a research problem (Scott, 2014). Because IE uses individual standpoint as a foray into investigating organizational processes, it is increasingly used in a variety of scholarly fields including sociology, health research and management studies. Mykhalovskiy and McCoy (2002) suggested that IE’s focus on “how people’s daily lives and troubles are organized socially and institutionally” (p. 20) is conducive to the creation of knowledge supporting equity, representation, and inclusion. Smith (2005) situated her discussion of texts in the context of European history and North American politics and concludes her study of how texts facilitate ruling relations with the statement: “Advanced contemporary industrialized societies are pervasively organized by textually mediated forms of ruling” (p. 212). Influenced by the framework of texts, Rudrum (2016) positioned her study on the social organization of maternity care in rural Global South settings and emphasizes that the concept of texts in IE are important as a bridge between historical and local contexts and broader, or extra-local, contexts since what
they produce in one place are influential in coordinating activities and knowledge in a different place.

A review of IE as a methodology indicates that scholarly studies start with analyzing the interrelations between gender and class, as well as how these two dimensions create spaces for an in-depth understanding of social settings. In the 1990s, Ng (1996) used IE as a methodology to investigate the ways that an employment agency was organized by state and labour market processes so that its services came to have a contradictory feature pertaining to the interests of racialized, minority immigrant women. In her study, she problematizes the major social dilemma as having two aspects: The linkage between macro analysis—the analysis of demographic and labour market changes—and the micro analysis of local settings—the example of face-to-face interactions and meaning making. The relations between macro and micro processes remain indeterminate so that there emerges a need to locate IE within the complexity of macro and micro settings, in order to analyze the understandings of relational dynamics that penetrate these settings. Based on her methodology, Ng’s research findings suggest that “class cannot be understood as a separate phenomenon from gender and race,” which are “essential constituents in the organization of people’s class location” (p. 10). She points out that the employment agency can be “an extension of the ruling apparatus” that perpetuates “the extension of the coordinated activities of the state” (p, 23). Ng and Shan (2010) applied IE as their research methodology on women’s labour market experiences. Beginning with the standpoint of women’s labour market experiences, their analysis is not limited to narratives from participants, but extends further, to situate and investigate the participants’ experiences in the larger context of society. Thus, IE facilitates researchers to see how ideologies and other existing conditions become operative in immigrants’ experiences. Particularly, through exploring the dialectics of structure and agency, it
provides a framework for focusing on how immigrant women navigate their career and face labour market barriers.

The development of IE in the past two decades has shifted from a gender or class perspective to focus on the intersections of gender and class. Some scholarly studies have extended further to incorporate the concept of race along with gender and class in their studies. IE is an inquiry that addresses marginalized voices and neglected topics because the challenge in taking up these matters is directly linked to the ruling forms of social organization (Grahame & Grahame, 2001). More importantly, IE moves beyond analyzing daily experience alone, to include the historical located experiences that are “organized by social relations not fully apparent in it nor contained in it” (Smith, 1987, p. 92). Grahame (2003) generated her study by examining how Asian immigrant women manage the triple responsibilities of family, job training, and paid work in Canada, with a focus on women’s experiences and the extended social relations in both the present, and in the historical experiences that have shaped their social practices in their lives.

IE can also be used as a theoretical framework in the area of social work-related research. McCoy and Masuch (2007) adopted IE as a theoretical framework that informs their research project, by associating people’s everyday experiences with institutions to explicate the social and institutional determinants of everyday experience. In their research, they locate the experiences of immigrant women in a larger set of institutional relations and find that the social and institutional relations shape the conditions and possibilities of immigrant women in the workplace. Shan (2009) investigated Chinese engineering immigrants’ learning experiences as socially organized practices. In her research, she takes the Chinese immigrants’ daily experiences as the standpoint and pays particular attention to their transitional moments, and personal and
professional events, in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Her research focuses intensively on the threads of social relations articulated through their learning experiences, including those that extend to the larger managerial and administrative ruling relations.

Although IE provides a repository of various perspectives for researchers to explore experiences and relations within social organizations, there are critiques of IE. Smith (2005) indicated that IE projects of inquiry and discovery “reject the dominance of theory” (p. 49), and she adopts the rather vague term, mainstream sociology, to locate the general practices of sociology’s order of discourse that are used to define sociological practices. However, Walby (2007) argued that “theory is thought of as a conceptual practice of power associated with not only positivism, but also with ethnomethodology and phenomenology” (p. 1013). He asserts that IE is theoretically driven, as is all social science practice, and that IE has the goal of exploring the ontology of the social as the result of its analysis. Additionally, Walby asserts that IE is not much concerned with its necessary complicity in objectification, as a result of retaining a high degree of authority over representations of the subject. He suggests that institutional ethnographers “need to stand outside of the social relations in motion that [IE] attempts to map and take them as an object” (p. 1025), and also that they need to “conceive of power more broadly and see that objectification is achieved in much smaller moments in the social relations” (p. 1026).

3.2 Rationale and Female Standpoints in IE

Ontology focuses on understanding the existence of the world and the sociocultural relationship of desire and recognition (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Ontologically, IE resists the assumption that the social as “out there” to be researched, but that the social is understood to be
organized in the coordinated activities of actual people, at particular, historically-situated moments. Smith (1999) highlighted the importance of a social ontology here as one that is “not of meaning but of a concerting of activities that actually happens” (p. 97). An ontology of the social as the coordinating of people’s activities creates spaces of ontological coherence among sociologies exploring diverse levels or aspects of the social. An ontology of the social, as the coordinating of people’s activities, also creates ontological coherence to explore different levels and aspects of social. This offers an imperative ontological lens, since people’s lives can be discovered and understood through writing descriptions, explications, and analysis. Thus, ontology in IE provides a conceptual framework for selective attention to actualities, such that the project of inquiry can proceed as a discovery of learning from actualities.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge that addresses the issues having to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular fields of inquiry (Smeyers, 2013). Connecting to IE, the notion of epistemology originates in a feminist perspective. Smith (2005) developed a critique of knowledge as ideology and illustrates the comprehensive ways that “women’s daily material situations provide a distinctive epistemological perspective on the everyday relations of ruling” (p. xi). IE is distinguished from other sociological approaches by its commitment to beginning inquiry with what people know and have experienced. To this end, people’s actions are never taken up without recognizing where and how they coordinate with others (Smith, 2005). Furthermore, epistemology “is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). IE maps out people’s social relations to examine how they impact on individuals’ daily experiences in their social and institutional environments and to illustrate subtle ways of knowing experientially versus knowing objectively or ideologically (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Thus, epistemology in IE builds into the evidence of
people’s experiences that shapes the relations to their epistemological claims, namely, the notion of standpoint. Standpoint is a term lifted out of the vernacular, largely through Harding’s innovative thinking and her critique that develops an epistemology that relies on a diversity of subject positions in the socio-political-economic regimes of colonialism and imperialism. Standpoint in IE creates capacity to discover the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society. Moreover, a standpoint in every person’s experience is to discover its existence and organization in their lives and to explicate or map that organization beyond the local of the everyday. It is a method of inquiry that “works from the actualities of people’s everyday lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience” (Smith, 2005, p. 10). Therefore, the notion of standpoint designates a subject position for IE researchers, providing practical access into the social space, where it extends beyond individuals’ experiences (Shan, 2009). IE has “a double character” (Smith, 2005, p. 51). One is to produce a “map” of ruling relations with a specific focus on institutional complexity as to how individuals practice, and where they may want to go. Another character is that IE targets to build knowledge and methods of discovering the institutions and the ruling relations of contemporary western society. It provides a piece-by-piece learning of institutional processes and how the resources in institutions intersect between people in different institutional settings. In the sociological context, IE views the social as the focus of the study, as well as how people’s activities or practices are coordinated and situated. The sociological inquiry specifically emphasizes people’s activities, as they are coordinated with those of others. In addition, IE in the social context is designed to explore trans-local relations, where people undertake local participation, and how these are organized. The ethnography inquiry is pushed beyond the local
settings of people’s daily experience, and aims to investigate the extended relations that coordinate multiple settings trans-locally (Smith, 2005).

Gender is an emergent feature of social situations, both as an outcome and a rationale for various social arrangements, and as a means of legitimizing one of the most fundamental social divisions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Smith (1990, 2005) laid out the meaning of women’s standpoint and locates it in the historical trajectory of the relations of ruling. She asserts that a sociology for women must be able to disclose for women how their situations are organized and determined by social processes that extend outside the scope of the daily life and are not discoverable within it (Smith, 1987). The developing of an alternative sociology taking up women’s standpoint is modeled by taking into account the early adventures of the women’s movement. The importance of women’s role was neglected, and they were excluded from the ruling apparatus. In the processes of textual discourse and organizations, they are described and analyzed as though they have played a subordinate role, being accorded manual and nonspecific tasks that are essential to the functioning of these entities.

The women’s standpoint here needs to illustrate the women’s perspective, and it needs to focus on the relations of the ruling apparatus in the institutions where women’s work has been unrecognized. Smith (1987) explained that there is a problem to be confronted here and that is how to create a knowledge that is “for us”, which she further explains as an idea of explicating “the social determinations of our own lives and experience as women” (p. 153). In other words, understanding gender in the social structure is pervaded by an influence that is often “unconscious and reflects taken for granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them” (McMullin, 2009, p. 56). As a method beginning from where women are as subjects, IE facilitates women as subjects and
knowers, and locates them in their actual daily world, rather than in an imaginary space that is constituted by the objectified forms of sociological knowledge between the relations of the ruling apparatus. Therefore, IE takes up women’s standpoint not as a given and finalized form of knowledge, but in order to undertake investigation on experience and what discoveries need to be made.

3.3 Experience as a Dialogic Discovery on Work Knowledge

The everyday world manifests itself in the complexities of relations. As Smith (2005) noted, “IE focuses on people’s experience in and of institutional forms of coordinating people’s doing” (p. 44). IE takes people’s everyday life experience as an unfinished arena of discovery in which the lines of social relations are present. IE aims to examine how social relations are created, the connections between these social relations, and how connections reflect on the process of translating people’s practices within social relations of organization. Thus, the discourse of IE constitutes an examination of the individual’s experience as it is socially constructed through the daily world, and its relations with the implicit social relations and organization.

Experience can be a form of dialogue to analyze problems. According to Smith (2005), dialogue is involved in the production of experience. Dialogue may be a researcher’s experience. It is a type of language system that produces “the actual and the experiential knowledge” to be further processed into ethnography (p. 125). The notion of experience in IE is driven by the Bakhtinian perspective on experience as a recognition of the dialogic (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Bakhtin, Holquist, & Emerson, 1986). Bakhtin views every utterance as a dialogue between the givens of language or discourse and the speaker’s attentions, the hearer, and the situation. The continual space created between speakers and writers, for new ways of combing words together
to make utterances that have not been spoken before, are responsive to distinctive situations and particular storytelling motives. Applying Baktin’s discourse perspective, Smith (2005) noted that the recognized dialogic does not imply that “discourse determines the interchange between what is recollected and what was happening that is being expressed as the speaker’s experience” (p. 127). She emphasizes that the speaker and the writer’s role in dialogue is to select and further analyze the resources in the discourse of what they need as part of discourse, and to establish the intention, and constrain the utterance. As analyzing utterances through the notion of experience might lead to a struggle to force the lexical givens of discourse to speak what they did not prepare for, some might feel uncomfortable about talking of certain experiences such as discrimination, masculinity, or racism. On this concern, Smith (2005) demonstrated that adopting Bakhtin’s idea of discourses can establish new words or ways of understanding how experiences speak to individuals. This is, from Smith’s perspective, how experience can be an “essence” in IE: because it is essential to realize the actualities of people’s lives and how they know about themselves.

Work activities are taken as the fundamental grounding of social life. IE takes some particular experiences associated with work processes from individuals as a “point of entry” in order to explore the relations between people and institutions (Smith, 2009, p. 32). More importantly, the interrelation between experience and work aims to articulate how people in one place are aligning with their activities that shape experience at the point of entry (Smith, 2009). In the notion of IE, the major purpose of analyzing experience as a dialogic form is to discover and coordinate people’s experience of what they do with the forms of what is problematic in the complex of work organization. The concept of work knowledge originates in the idea of work. The term work knowledge refers to two layers or aspects that provide an important guide in the
entry into the data dialogue. Work refers to people’s experience of their own work such as what they do, how they do it, what they think and feel. In a general sense it is that which is treated as paid employment. In IE, work pertains to anything done by people that takes time and effort to complete, rather than something that is commonly considered a job. Work knowledge indicates the implicit and explicit coordination of people’s work with the work of others. Work knowledge is a major resource for IE research since “it is dialogically evoked in the interviewer-informant interchange” in an individual’s life, an observer’s experience, or the observation from a researcher in a given setting (Smith, 2005, p. 227). The concept of work and work knowledge in IE enables researchers to learn from individuals’ experiences of what they do, how their work is organized, and how they feel about it. Moreover, understanding the discourse of work and work knowledge facilitates researchers to focus not only on people’s experience of everyday doing and interacting, but also the relations and organization that coordinate people to avoid being misled by institutional conceptions of work.

McCoy (2006) noted that the trick of analyzing in IE is to find a way to “locate individuals and their experience within a complex institutional field” (p. 113). The notion of everyday life as problematic, and the starting of inquiry in people’s experiences does not mean starting with people’s problems. Although concerns motivate inquiry, they do not define the direction of research (Smith, 2005). Some researchers illustrate how experiences are active in the institutional process, while others locate their research in the regulatory dimensions of the institutions through exploring people’s work in particular settings, and in the distinctive institutional forms of coordination. As the art of IE is not to address the idea of experience per se, but to use experience as a point of entry to investigate what is behind those experiences, this possibility provides institutional ethnographers the tool to go beyond what individuals have
experienced to discover how social relations, institutions, and multi-dimensions are intertwined in the social world.

Connecting these factors to my research, the notion of experience in IE comprehensively matches the focus of my research. My research addresses the experiences of work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs. My research pays particular attention to how these experiences can be socially constructed and shaped through the social and institutional dimensions, as well as the intersections of their identities. My focus however, lies not in comparing the similarities and differences in experience between immigrant workers, rather, it is be to use the concept of experience as the entry point of my research to tease out the social relations articulated through the workers’ experiences of work and workplace learning, to the social, institutional, and political regimes where ruling relations are implicated. In addition, my research extends the examination to how the state perpetuates these ruling relations and shapes the work and workplace learning experiences of ISWs.

3.4 Text, Ruling Relations, and Power in Social Relations

As discussed previously, the standpoint of women in IE locates people in local, actual, and particular sites. It further problematizes the coordination of people’s activities as social relations organized outside local historical settings and connects people in modes that do not depend on particularized relationships between people. IE explores the ruling and power relations that are constructed from local and particular settings and relations. The social relations organized in IE coordinate multiple local sites of activity and analyze the investigation of the text-mediation of social relations (Smith, 1990; 2005). Since the core value of IE, or its goal is “to go beyond what people know to find out what they are doing is connected with others’ doings in ways they
cannot see” (p. 233), the concept of text, ruling relations, and power are essential in mapping the institutional impacts on people’s own knowledge of their daily practices.

The idea of text refers to the identification of texts as material in a form that enables replication of what is written, drawn, or otherwise reproduced such as paper, print, etc. More importantly, text can be defined as the “active ways” in which to view speakers in a conversation (Smith, 1990. p. 92). The notion of materiality is addressed in IE because text can be present in the everyday world and, at the same time, it can connect people into trans-local social relations (Smith, 2005). In my research, the performance of text, particularly the active ways of presenting it, also constitutes “the stability and replicability of organization”, which further influences institutions and shapes people’s daily experiences and practices (p. 236). This impact creates spaces between readers, hearers, and watchers to situate themselves in an identical form that reflects on their bodily being. In other words, through the possibility of hearing and responding, researchers present in the active conversations activate the textual interchange (Smith, 1999).

The recognition of text in IE does not manifest itself as a discrete topic, rather, it indicates coordination and connection between people’s doings, and it is an essential reflexive piece on how and why they are following certain social practices.

Ruling relations refer to an embodiment of a localized and particularized standpoint that confronts the modes of consciousness, actions of complex objectification, and extra-local relations coordinating people’s activities across different sites (Smith, 2005). In particular, ruling relations refer to the representation and interrelations between organization themselves and the state (Smith, 2001). Institutions can be identified as “complexes” within ruling relations that are observable through the complex discourses that are focused on functions such as that of education, government, or health care (Smith, 2005, p. 233). The ruling apparatuses are those
institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies (Smith, 1990). Rather than viewing them as objects of investigation for IE research, they become the subjects of IE since they can be explored from the standpoint of people who are comprehensively involved in them. As Smith (2005) noted, inquiry in IE echoes “intersections or interconnections of more than one functional complex or of the more inclusive ruling relations” (p. 68). Thus, exploration of the ruling relations within “complexes” from the standpoint of experience creates spaces to analyze how an institution is organized in texts, with various approaches to exercise and affect the relations within the social context.

According to Smith (2005), the concept of the ruling relations directs attention to the distinctive trans-local forms of social organizations and social relations mediated by texts. They are objectified forms of consciousness and organization, constituted externally to particular people and places, creating and relying on textually based realities. Smith’s formulation of the “ruling relations” is not a heuristic device and does not simply point to “structure” or “power,” but instead refers to an expansive, historically specific apparatus of management and control that arose with the development of corporate capitalism, and supports its operation (Devault, 2006).

Ruling relations refers to “the forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places” (Smith, 2005, p. 13). In addition, based on Smith (1990), texts manifest themselves in the relations within the textual discourse through “how local happenings are entered into its interpretive practices and to how its social relations are organized” (p. 92). Thus, the investigation of texts constituting social relations offers access to the ontological ground of institutional processes, which organize,
govern, and regulate the society that people live in, as well as the ways in which textual discourse is constructed.

As Smith (1999) noted, “sociological texts are active in sociological discourse” (p. 136). The dimension of power is the missing piece in expanding people’s everyday knowledge (Smith, 1999). Particularly, there is a need to understand the relations between text, ruling relations, and power in social relations, in order to expand the scope of the local actualities of people’s work and work settings. The investigation develops from people’s everyday experience to explore the social relations and organizations that coordinate people’s activities across local sites, and to explicate the notion of power that is deeply implicated in the daily practices (Smith, 2001). Texts are produced by organizational members and relate to issues of power relationships, effectiveness, or control (Cooren, 2004). From the concept of ruling relations (Smith, 2001, 2005), it is a complex connection of people’s work and a reflection of power that is embedded in intentions, desires, opportunities, impediments, blockages, and powerlessness while simultaneously, the texts constitute and regulate, establish agency, and create textually specified capacities to control and mobilize the work of others. Textually sanctioned agency produces the dimension of power that is generated by the concerting and mobilization of people’s work. Thus, IE does not generalize from a particular group of people; instead, it explores ways to understand power and ruling relations that are embedded between the connections where institutional arrangements are the objects of analysis (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2013), and it particularly reflects “how society’s institutions govern people’s lives, and where explications of how things are socially coordinated” manifest themselves (p. 4). Therefore, power and ruling relations in IE manifest themselves through an analysis of “how texts are understood to coordinate people’s
activities” (Norstedt & Breimo, 2016, p. 3) as well as by describing social processes that have “generalizing effects” that shape people’s daily work practices (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 6).

3.5 Research Design

To reiterate, in my study, I focus on two areas of research: ISWs’ experiences of work and workplace learning. Based on these two fields of inquiry, I ask four research questions. The first two questions ask how ISWs characterize their work experience when they transition into an immigrant service workforce and how race, gender, and class intersect to shape their transition to work in the trajectory of becoming ISWs. These two research questions not only highlight the transitioning moments of ISWs trying to integrate into the Canadian labour force but also indicate how immigrants articulate themselves to the immigration sector workforce. Meanwhile, these also speak to how institutional relations shape ISWs’ experiences in labour market integration.

The second part of my study dwells on the workplace learning of ISWs. Particularly, my research examines how ISWs perceive the workplace as a site of learning? What are their learning opportunities, strategies, struggles, and successes at ISAs? How are workplace learning experiences of ISWs constructed in institutional relations? These three research questions are interconnected. The first question aims to unpack the conception of learning in the ISA workplace from the ISWs’ perspectives, while the second question helps demonstrate how different learning opportunities emerged in the workplace. The third question focuses on examining how the translocal institutional relations organize the coordination of ISWs at local sites.

In order to receive comprehensive responses to my research questions, I chose participants from three ISAs in western Canada. My reasons for selecting these three organizations are
twofold. All three organizations have long histories of supporting immigrants’ integration in Canada for the past three decades. Organization A has over 300 ISWs and has received the largest amount of federal funding in the past five years. Organization B has over 200 staff members and it ranks second in terms of receiving both federal and provincial funding. Organization C, on the other hand, is the largest immigrant service organization facilitating female immigrants’ integration and settlement in western Canada. Although organization C does not receive as much funding compared to organizations A and B, its mandate to support female immigrants makes it meaningful in providing insight into multi-identities and intersectionality for my research. Secondly, while reviewing ISAs in western Canada, I was truly impressed by the extensiveness of the programs and services that these three organizations have built for immigrants. This discovery facilitated my understanding of the more comprehensive and holistic landscape of these ISWs’ transition to work, what they do for work, how they work, and how they learn in the ISAs.

Having said that, it is worth noting that, as Marshall and Rossman (2016) cautioned, the ideal site for research is more complicated than the justification I have provided above. An ideal site is one where entry is possible, and a high probability of various processes, through people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest, are present. More importantly, here the researcher is able to establish relations of trust with participants, while data quality and the credibility of the research are assured and well presented. Also relevant to my research, IE aims to understand individuals’ everyday experience that “brings into view the interface between their individual live and some set of institutional relations” (McCoy, 2006, p. 109) and how these institutional relations indicate power on through textual system (Smith, 2005). Following Marshall and Rossman (2016) as well as IE more broadly, I was careful when approaching these
three organizations, mindful of presenting my research to them, keeping in mind their sensitivities. I also described the purpose of my research clearly, in order to remove any misperceptions on both sides. While conducting my research, I initially planned to ask for textual materials in the three ISAs. I found, however, that these three ISAs had concerns about confidentiality in my research and requested that I not include any organizational materials in my dissertation. Given this situation, and based on the narratives of my research participants, I started to investigate IRCC textual materials in order to tease out how textual accountabilities are embedded in institutional relations that coordinate to ISWs’ learning in the workplace. Through this lens of institutional relations, I was able to analyze the social relations between the state, ISAs, and the ISWs and how these relations shape individuals’ learning in the workplace.

**3.6 Research Methods**

In this study, I used two research methods: life history interviews and document analysis. I did so because these methods are helpful in establishing the problematic for my study (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). The goal of combining these two methods is “to elicit talk that will not only illuminate a particular circumstance but also point toward next steps in an ongoing, cumulative inquiry into trans-local processes” (p. 371), and to locate and trace the threads of connection among individuals working in different parts of institutional complexes of activity. The combination of these two methods can be a good fit for my research and facilitated comprehensive research findings.

A life history interview method focuses on individual lived experience as a context for learning in order to analyze “how specific individuals experience their present in the light of their past and their subjectively projected future” (Olesen, 2007, p. 44). Each informants’ story helped me to see more of the emerging big picture (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). This reflects IE’s
core value of understanding people’s everyday experience and exploring work practices in everyday life. Additionally, it draws on interrogating the meaning and significance of the past and how it influences the present and the future (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The life history interviews in my research opened various windows on capturing participant’s historical moments, including transitional moments, struggles, and successes when they integrate their lives in Canada and in the Canadian workforce, and it enabled me to make crucial linkages between their life stories and workplace learning experiences. Furthermore, a life history interview addresses “individual’s experiences to make broader contextual meaning” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 20). This feature helped me attend to people’s conscious self-presentation and the relations among institutional, political, and systemic influences at institutions.

As Campbell and Gregor (2008) pointed out, in an IE interview, each person would know their workplace setting from participating differently in its social relations and would therefore have their own organized standpoint. They point out that entry-level workers do not interpret research in the same way as high-level members in the organization. The notion of standpoint here “moves away from acceptance of a managerial perspective as correct or more adequate, even though it has that status within the organization” (p. 72). As Holstein and Gubrium (2003) suggested, an interview can be part of an approach designed for investigating organizational and institutional processes, there is a need to achieve balance between directing the interview toward the researcher’s goals and encouraging informants to talk in ways that reflect the contours of their activities. Thus, the combination of hearing participants’ life histories and situating them within translocal institutional relations is essential because the connections can be constituted through unfolding their life, and to enable linkages to work. In terms of the practical aspects of my field work, I audio-taped all my interview and take hand-written notes during each interview.
In order to explore participants’ lived experiences as moments in their life histories, I opted to employ an open-ended interview method. As such, my interviews were guided by my designed interview questions and modified based on participants’ individual narratives. In this way, I was able to holistically understand the individuality of my participants’ transition to work and workplace learning experiences.

Another method that I used was document analysis. The new textual technology radically expands the discourse of the public sphere and it transforms the public arena in impressive ways by enabling multi-approaches to information receiving. These transformations consequently provide multi-formats of textual materials that can enrich data in my research (Smith, 2005). In my research, I collected the organizations’ documents, such as public financial reports and annual reports, as well as news articles, and analyzed the official websites of the three organizations. Since, as I mentioned previously, documents from each organization does not appear directly in my research analysis due to concerns about confidentiality, collecting and analyzing these public organizational documents allowed me to understand the institutional backgrounds and their organizational operation so that the ISWs’ learning in the workplace could be examined. I also analyzed governmental documents of the IRCC Settlement Program, including Evaluation of Settlement Program, their conference materials and PowerPoints, National Call for Proposal for Funding Guidelines, and Logic Model. I carefully analyzed the organizational and governmental documents collected to examine the ruling fabric that is threaded through institutional relations. Document analysis involves the researcher investigating institutional work processes by following a chain of action, typically organized around and through a set of documents (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 374). Thus, in my study, document analysis was significant to find out how people’s daily doings were coordinated by social and
institutional relations, how these relations are not visible within workplace settings, and how people are articulated with, and participating in those relations (Smith, 2005).

In my study, I used textual analysis and listening guide analysis to analyze my data. Specifically, textual analysis was adopted to analyze my document materials and listening guide analysis was utilized to analyze interview data. I took all my data as text and use these two methods in conjunction when necessary. Text-based forms of knowledge and discursive organization play a central role in shaping people’s everyday experience (Smith, 1990). Text refers to documents or a type of representation that has a “relatively fixed and replicable character” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p.765). Smith (1999) used the metaphor of DNA to address how knowledge that is socially organized and invented in one local setting can make an impact in multiple locations as a means of regulating local activities and organizing social relations among people. Smith (2005) explored different forms of institutional knowledge and text-mediated organizations, and explains how textual knowledge enters as a form of institutional action that is embedded in power relations. Textual analysis also explores the ubiquitous and generalizing organization of the ruling relations (Smith, 1990, p. 165). In other words, this method of analysis is a significant tool to uncover “the ideological practices that produce a certain kind of knowledge practical to the task of ruling” (Smith, 2005, p. 421).

In the analytical process, reading texts can be an “actual interchanging” between readers’ activating of the text and their responses to it (Smith, 2005, p. 236). Similarly, the textual conversations “standardize the almost limitlessly various understandings of readers; that is, they bring a similar understanding of what is read about to all those professionals who read the same text” (Bell & Campbell, 2003, p. 117). However, conducting a textual analysis is not an exercise to find some supposedly “correct interpretation of reality” (Sharma, 2001, p. 421). Rather, “texts
are seen as constituents of social relations, and hence, by exploring our own knowledge of how
to operate the interrelations among them, we explicate both our own practices and a segment of
the social relations in which those practices are embedded and which they organize” (Smith,
1990, p. 149). Thus, the importance of text becomes a medium to help researchers escape their
experience “as inert” and to enable them to see individuals as embedded in social relations and as
being in action (Smith, 2005, p. 236).

The important considerations in textual analysis include selecting the types of texts to be
studied, acquiring appropriate texts, and determining which particular approach to employ in
analyzing them (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999). In my research, I took not only those texts that
have a variety of configurations as my data analysis materials, but also interview transcripts.
Interviews are conducted with people who work with the texts involved and people who are
regulated through the organizational processes in question. The importance of interviewing in IE
is to learn about people’s location in the ruling relations and to learn what the individual does
with texts (Walby, 2013). In other words, to analyze text as a constituent of relations reflects
research in showing how relations are organized and how they operate in people’s work and
workplace learning. As organizers of social relations, textual analysis requires researchers to
analytically analyze textual materials for their properties and to explicate the active power of the
text as it is realized and activated by the readers. While investigating my data through text, I paid
attention to how the nature of social relations of ISWs can be textually mediated and how power
can be transformed and plays a role in the construction of social relations.

From the IE data collection and analysis stance, Campbell and Gregor (2008) demonstrated
the distinction between “entry level” data and “level-two” in the process of data collection in IE.
As a starting point, “entry level” targets the everyday life and work-related knowledge of a
specific group of people, while “level two-extra-local level” typically consists of frontline 
professionals such as social workers, community agency personnel, and other bureaucrats. 
Frontline professionals are especially essential since they are the “informants” who make the 
connections between clients and ruling discourses, “working up” the messiness of daily 
circumstances, thus fitting the categories and protocols of a professional regime (DeVault & 
McCoy, 2006, p. 27). The challenge of interviewing frontline professionals is that they are 
“trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers wish to unpack” 
(p.28). In order not to succumb to what Smith (2005) calls institutional capture, one of the 
challenges is to move beyond this institutional language and not “subsume the actual under the 
institutional” (p.156).

However, there are difficulties when researchers try to go beyond the institutional terms 
and discourses. For example, in Bisaillon and Rankin‘s (2013) study, they faced contradictory 
information from informants on the entry level and the high-level. They problematize the 
relationship between the stories told by the two groups, and identify flaws at the “entry level” 
with those they have from the high-level informants. Norstedt and Breimo (2016) illustrated the 
relevance of who is doing IE, and the issues of different interpretations given at different levels. 
They explore how to handle data collected at the two levels, as it critically reflects the power and 
ruling relations in participants’ daily experience and practices. While information can be shown 
as being in conflict or even on opposite sides, I was aware of these contradictions and modify my 
research questions during the interviews in order to analyze the map of interconnections between 
participants’ everyday experience and institutional processes as a way to “show those people 
working in the institutions where in the text-mediated process the standpoint of the subject 
disappears into the discursive” (Walby, 2007, p. 1013).
Listening guide analysis (also called the voice-centered relational method) was first
developed in social psychology and it has recently been given a more explicitly sociological
form (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In particular, Walby (2013) argued that “listening guide may be
able to act as a tool for institutional ethnographers interested in refining the practice of data
analysis in IE” (p. 150). This method facilitates the researchers as text readers to be able to listen
attentively to the voice relating the story (Byrne, Canavan, & Millar, 2009), and it highlights the
understanding of the relational social world and how individual selves are always enmeshed in
relations with others (Walby, 2013). More importantly, it addresses the narration of individual
selves interrelating with broader discourses of race, gender, and class, and it explicitly illustrates
“How the theoretical interests of the researchers shape the analysis and exposition insofar as the
selection of discourses of class, ethnicity and gender as the key foci is a choice the researcher
makes based on their theoretical commitments” (p. 147).

There are four steps that need to be undertaken in order to conduct a listening guide
analysis (Walby, 2013). The first step involves an attempt to understand how one’s views
influence the production of the text. In this step, the presence and consideration of power in the
social relations is essential. The second step is to analyze the narration of the self. The voice of
the self is phrased in any personal pronoun. ‘I’ refers to self lived experience that is constructed
through narrative. In this step, I pulled out every first person ‘I’ in a transcript, along with the
verb and words that follow and maintain the sequence in which the narrative fragments occurred
in the story. This helped me select narratives to work with and grasp how participants narrate the
sense of self in the interview. The third step requires the researcher to listen for ‘contrapuntal
voices’ or multiple voices within one story that are reflective of the broader social relations the
self is enmeshed in. This step offers spaces for the researcher to analyze social relations in
everyday lives from the interviewees through the constitutive of the voice of self. The last step draws on how structural forces shape and limit the participant’s capacity for action. This step is where the dimension of the narration of the self correlates with my participants’ experiences of transitioning to work and workplace learning, and listening guide analysis expedited my understanding of how the notion of the self is shaped in institutional relations. Although my research is focuses on ISWs’ experiences of transitioning to work and workplace learning at ISAs, this consolidation of textual analysis and listening guide analysis served to strengthen my understanding of ISWs’ experiences at their workplace and of how the intersections of race, gender, and class both informed their experiences and manifested in the extended social relations.

3.7 Participants Selection

I selected participants based on my research design and according to the guidelines of my ethics application. Although my research is framed broadly as an examination of ISWs’ experiences of work and workplace learning at ISAs in Canada, I am really focused on ISWs who provide settlement and integration programs and services to immigrants. As such, I approached three ISAs in western Canada to find ISWs providing these services and addressed any apprehensions about participation by confirming to them the confidentiality of both the ISAs and the ISWs. I selected ISW participants who were first generation immigrants from racialized minority backgrounds and who had landed in Canada as either a) part of the economic class of “skilled workers”; b) part of the family class, that is, those who were sponsored by family members; or c) refugees, including refugee claimants or refugee students. With the requirements of my ethics application in mind, I contacted and visited research sites, carefully seeking approval to do my research at those selected organizations. Through a friend of mine who
worked in one of these ISAs, I was able to approach a settlement program manager. With the manager’s approval, I accessed frontline workers in the settlement program as potential research participants. While collecting data, however, I did not interview ISWs from the three organizations simultaneously. Instead, I intentionally organized my interviews with these three ISAs in a sequence so that I was able to focus on each organization’s background and its operation in order to explore my participants’ standpoint more holistically. In accessing the second organization, I adopted a “snowball” recruitment method (a sampling method where research participants recruit other participants for a study [Noy, 2008]), starting with one interviewee from the first organization. From that ISW, I was connected with the second organization and snowballed and recruited my participants through word of mouth from the first interviewee in the second organization. I need to admit that accessing the third organization was challenging since this organization has hierarchical boundaries. With the support of my friend, I connected with a manager in that organization. However, recruitment of participants progressed slowly due to the organization’s internal approval system for researchers. My friend then directly contacted the CEO of the organization, to whom I then carefully introduced my research. After receiving organizational approval, the CEO appointed an ISW to recruit interview participants for me. In each interview, I started by introducing my research, explaining my consent form, and asking permission to audiotape the interview. Each of the interviewees signed the consent from (Appendix B) before the interview started. In total, I interviewed 18 ISWs: six from each of the three ISAs.

3.8 Research Process

My research process encompasses four stages. My field research started in August 2018, and I completed all my interviews in March 2019. In the first stage, I approached the three
selected research sites and my participants in accordance with my research design and ethics application. While collecting my data, I engaged in a process of reflection, the second stage in my research process. Before each interview, I reviewed organizational documents—annual reports, official websites, and organizational news—in order to better understand each ISA’s background. I also search for my interviewees’ background online to tailor my interview questions based on their life history. Based on this research, I created individual files for each ISA and for each interviewee. In the ISA files, I collected organizational documents and my interpretative notes regarding how each ISA organized their operation and the organizational features that could directly and indirectly influence ISWs’ workplace learning. For the ISAs, I created a reflexive journal organized according to reflections prior to the interview and following the interview. Prior to the interview, I reflected on my expectations, fears, what I needed to be aware of, and what I could emphasize during the interview. Following the interview, I analyzed preliminary themes from the interview based on transition to work and workplace learning. I also reflected on my data analysis and IE as well as how to improve my research practice in the upcoming interview.

The third stage of my research process was transcribing participants’ interviews. In my research I used a parallel method to transcribe my interviews. While transcribing, I listened carefully to the conversation and transcribed accordingly. Meanwhile, I had a side note file for each interviewee, taking notes regarding key words or quotes and their appearance time, categories that the key words or quotes belonged to, possible themes, and momentary thoughts. This parallel method not only strengthened my understanding of the data and helped me to stay focused on my research topics and to avoid missing or misinterpreting any information from my data, but it also allowed me to tease out threads from the data to pursue in the next interview.
Interviews with Chinese participants were conducted in Mandarin and Cantonese. For these transcripts, I first transcribed them into Mandarin/Cantonese and planned to translate all of them into English before my data analysis. While taking side notes in the transcribing process, however, I realized that in translating these interviews into English I could possibly lose the original context of the language itself. Instead, in order to maintain the originality of these participants’ narratives, I kept the Chinese text for the purpose of data analysis and then translated quotations that I used into English.

The fourth stage of my research process was data analysis, which consisted of six phases. I first imported all 18 transcripts to NVivo and created a file for each participant. I then adopted the aforementioned data analysis method—listening guide analysis, coding my data with a line-by-line scrutiny approach to focus on every single line of the transcript to avoid missing any potential information. I paid close attention to the expression and the narration of the self to scrutinize how the voice of self is shaped by different institutional contexts. In the third phase, I focused on the repetition, typologies, metaphors, and institutional languages, which can specifically capture participants’ feelings in their lived experiences. As people’s stories implied the presence and participating in social relations that coordinate their actions (Smith, 2005), this methodological guidance aligned well with listening guide analysis, guiding my thinking and creating the categories of my data. In this way, I could pinpoint how certain articulations of the self can be situated in multilayered institutional relations that coordinate their actions in life. Next, I created themes based on my data coding, and I sorted these according to a similarities and differences approach (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Utilizing this approach facilitated my identification of individual expressions of the self in each story, which allowed me to further
scrutinize the context of those stories and synthesize the construction of stories and contexts in institutional relations.

The fifth phase of my data analysis was the textual analysis of IRCC Settlement Program documents, including Evaluation of Settlement Program, their conference materials and PowerPoints, National Call for Proposal for Funding Guidelines, and the Logic Model. I imported these documents into NVivo 12 for an in-depth textual analysis, focusing on its institutional language in relation to ruling power. The last phase in my data analysis was to making connections to my literature review. This process allowed me to make connections between my categories and themes and my literature, reinforcing the discussion of my data and the examination of my research purpose. It is important to note that my data analysis was a nonlinear process. As one of the crucial steps in every research, these six phases in my data analysis divergently and collectively encouraged me to enhance the examination of my data and to move forward to this examination, making further inquiry to respond to my research questions.

3.9 Researcher’s Role

Understanding the researcher’s position is important. Since “reflexivity is a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research, understanding how it may be impacted by the characteristics and experiences of the researcher is of paramount importance” (Berger, 2015, p. 219). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) claimed that qualitative research as an interactive process is shaped by the researcher’s social position including life experience, gender, social class, race, and immigration status. Thus, this reflexive piece is vital to understand my identity and position in this study and to reflect on my position as a researcher in this research. In this section, I
undertake a biographical account of myself, connecting it with the notion of insider and outsider to justify my positionality in my study.

Before coming to Canada, I worked as a journalist, an editor, and a producer in a national television station in Beijing, China. In the five years that I worked at the television station, I gained various types of experience working with people from different ethnic backgrounds with different aims of staying in China such as to study, work, or to accompany their spouses. This was a starting point for me to get interested in understanding individuals with different identities and listen to their stories. Canada is globally known for its multiculturalism. As this is my seventh year studying and living in Canada, I have had diverse opportunities to connect with people from various ethnic backgrounds through volunteering in immigrant service organizations. Most of them are first-generation immigrants. From the stories I have heard, I have found commonalities and differences between us that allow me to connect my previous work experience as a journalist in pursuit of the truth, with the role of a researcher trying to understand why my participants are telling me these stories. Several questions come to mind, such as: where do they come from? What lies behind their stories? Linking these experiences with my three years of academic studies as a doctoral student studying immigrants and their experiences in Canada, I found that ISWs are the important individuals who can be influential in assisting immigrants’ life experiences in settlement and integration. As a researcher, I am responsible to examine their experiences as both immigrants and settlement workers at their workplace and scrutinize the institutional relations that organize and shape lived experiences of this group of people.

The notion of the insider highlights the situation of researchers who conduct research within populations of which they, the researchers, are also members (Kanuha, 2000). Thus,
researchers share similarities in identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (Asselin, 2003). In terms of my positionality in these three organizations, I would say I am an outsider among the insiders. Although I have acquired academic knowledge and volunteer experience in ISAs that can provide a bridge for me to become an insider in this research, I am still an outsider because I am not one of them. In many instances, I share their ethnic backgrounds, but I may not understand their institutional language. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argued, “being an insider might raise issues of undue influence of the researcher’s perspective, but being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective” (p. 59). Although these factors suggest that I situate myself as an outsider in my research, my gender, my yellow skin and black hair, my ability to speak certain languages, namely Mandarin and Cantonese, my experience volunteering in ISAs, and my academic training, offer me the linkages to be one of them. I am confident that these supporting facts have helped me to make connections between my identities and my research.

3.10 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivists since their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004). However, many naturalistic investigators prefer to use a different terminology to distance themselves from the positivist paradigm. Drawing parallels with quantitative research, there are four criteria to employ from a positivist perspective that are relevant to qualitative research (Padgett, 2017; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007; Shenton, 2004): credibility (in preference to internal validity), transferability (in preference to external validity/generalizability), dependability (in preference to reliability), confirmability (in preference to objectivity). Although these criteria do not receive universal acclaim, Padgett
(2017) described that “they serve an important purpose in providing alternatives to replace ill-fitting quantitative standards” (p. 210).

Trustworthiness in my study is essential. To ensure trustworthiness, I documented the entire process of my research by my reflexive journals. In this way, I was able to examine multivoices of my participants’ life stories to enrich my understanding in my research. In terms of my data collection and analysis methods, I used various approaches: interview, document review, textual analysis, and listening guide method. The multiple data sources and methods insured a triangulation in my study. For my research procedure, I had four phases: seeking participants, data collection, reflection, and data analysis. This ongoing process ensured there was sufficient interplay and interaction between my data, theory, methodology, and my findings. Furthermore, Walby (2007) argued that conducting IE research draws on “those face-to-face and textual practices beginning in the construction of ontology and continuing in data collection, coding, analysis, and the writing of social scientific texts, whereby relations between ourselves as researchers, others as participants, and our audiences continue in our text work involving case selection, representation, and manuscript preparation” (p. 1009). For data collection by using life history interview, Cole and Knowles (2001) argued that life history interview is “the intersection of a researcher’s life with that or those of the researched” (p. 216).

To solve these concerns, Walby (2007) demonstrated that social relations of research always entail a degree of objectification so that institutional ethnography research should “stand outside those relations in motion” to preserve the presence of the subject (p. 1025). However, Law and Urry (2004) suggested that the engagement with ontological politics from the IE researcher can be the outcome to make a positive impact on people’ life experience. Thus, in the process of conducting my research, I was cautious of the subjectivity in my research and link the
subjective critically to my reflexivity. I valued my ontological understandings to create a “objectified space” for me to reflect on the subjectivity in my research. I also payed attention in each of these phases to make sure this research is credible and trustworthy.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Every social researcher must consider the ethical implications of conducting a research. The interaction between researcher and participants can be ethically challenging as they are personally involved in different stages of the study (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shogh, and Cheraghi, 2014). Ethnographical research should avoid harm to and respect the rights of all participants and consider the consequences of all aspects of the research process (O’Reilly, 2005). There are two major difficulties on ethics issues in IE research (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Since IE studies are developed in institutions, to negotiate with organizations and getting their approval to make information available was a priority. While accessing an institution depended on upper-level support and relationships among the ISWs themselves, the success of a study also relied on good relations between informants and researcher. Another ethical concern is that informants may worry about the researcher’s relation with the organizational leadership. Workers may feel they are answering questions under a form of managerial surveillance and they may consider their answers will affect their daily work.

In order to address these potential concerns, before I start my research, I carefully followed the ethical requirements from the ethics board of the University of Calgary. When approaching the research sites, I learned how to explain the research in ways that allowed the organizational personnel to see it as interesting to them and as a research they were willing to support to avoid unpredictable misperceptions and difficulties. Working with individual informants provides opportunities for me, as a researcher, to explain how I explore the experiences of transition to
work and workplace learning of ISWs. This process effectively reduced anxiety from the informants. I also gave careful consideration to the relations of research they are entering and try to maintain good relations between myself and participants by protecting their privacy and rights. For example, in order to secure confidentiality, participants whom I quoted in my findings were identified by pseudonyms and the names of their organizations were removed throughout my data analysis.

Kaiser (2009) warned that participants should be made aware of their right to refuse to participate, the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained, the potential use of the data and their rights to re-negotiate consent forms. Before I started to collect any data from my participants, I carefully went through the consent form with each interviewee. I explained to them their right to refuse to answer any interview questions they were uncomfortable with. These ethical considerations helped me to manage potential risk in my research. In each interview, I was able to build trust between the interviewee and myself, ensuring that all participants were open to answering my research questions.

3.12 Limitations and Delimitation of the Study

The potential limitations and delimitation of my study are twofold. First, the examination of 18 ISWs’ transitions to work and workplace learning can not be generalized to all ISWs in Canada. Although my focus is on ISWs who come from racialized first-generation immigrant backgrounds, and the demographic of my participants contains those who are from African, Asian, and South American, these three general geographic backgrounds may limit my research data as it cannot be extended to wider immigrant populations in their experiences of work and workplace learning. Second, as I have volunteered in an ISA, this experience can potentially trigger challenges for me in understanding organizational operations as well as participants’
stories in workplace learning. Particularly, in the early stage of my data collection, confusion did occur because of the terminology participants used in their workplace, which differed from that I was familiar with. In the following, I demonstrate how my selected methodology, IE, effectively delimited my research limitation.

The delimitation of my research highlights the importance of IE, which overarchingly and comprehensively guides the conduct and the focus of my research. IE adopts an individual’s standpoint as problematic and interconnected to the social relations between institutions at different sites. This perspective unpacks the “actualities” of people’s lived experiences with a focus on exploring how their life participation is hooked into institutional relations (Smith, 2005). By applying this focus to my research, it transforms my research limitation into an essential dimension of inquiry, addressing how individuals’ life histories and their stories can be crucial elements that translocally produce certain social relations, coordinating their thinking and doing at the local site.

In delimiting my second limitation, the methods of IE were essential to ensuring the focus on examining my research questions. Though I have not worked in ISAs, the document review and textual analysis methods of IE can holistically assist me in both understanding the background of those organization and learning ISA institutional languages. Additionally, I kept writing reflexive journals throughout my research process, which encompassed a reflection of my research practices and skills. For example, I requested clarifications from interviewees whenever it was needed. I also contacted my participants by email if there was any word, phrase, or sentence that needed to be further explained. These preceding practices have progressively and efficiently intensified my research competence in analyzing participants’ stories and capturing the institutional relations that organize and shape their local coordination.
3.13 Summary

This chapter described the methodology used to conduct my research, including the rationale, research design, methodology of selecting participants, research methods, data analysis methods, the researcher’s role, as well as trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. As this study aims to understand the experiences of work and workplace learning of ISWs at ISAs, IE is selected as its methodology since it focuses on understanding people’s life experience and their social relations in organizations. I have justified the reasons for the selection of my research methods and data analysis methods, my research process, my position as an insider and outsider in this research, my research limitation and delimitation, as well as how multiple data sources and methods enhanced the credibility of my study.
Chapter Four: Immigrant Settlement Workers’ Experience of Work

This chapter starts with an overview of my research participants. To reiterate, my research focuses on ISWs’ experiences of work and workplace in Canada. I aimed to investigate ISWs who are first generation immigrants from racialized minority backgrounds and who work with immigrants on their settlement and integration in Canada. I interviewed 18 ISWs from three different ISAs in western Canada to participate in my research. My participants originated from 10 different countries and landed in Canada between early 2000 to late 2010. Before landing, most of my participants had earned credentials and many of them had worked professionally as lawyers, engineers, teachers, or professors in their countries of origin.

Within their ISAs, two were managers, four were program coordinators, two worked as employment counsellors, one worked as a team lead for client services, and nine worked as settlement counsellors. These ISWs were originally from 10 different countries, including China, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Kurdistan, Nigeria, Mexico, the Philippines, a South American country, and a West African country (I am being vague about the last two to protect those participants’ confidentiality). In terms of years of landing, four of them came to Canada after 2010, 11 of them landed between 2000 and 2010, two of them came to Canada between 1990 and 1999, and one emigrated in the 1970s. Regarding their gender, I interviewed two male ISWs and 16 females. In terms of their immigration class, 12 of them landed as skilled immigrant dependents (SID), three landed as family class immigrants, one came as a refugee student, one was a dependent child, and one was a refugee claimant. Regarding their educational background, 16 of my participants received their prior education in their home countries, while Imani and Samuel earned their degrees in Canada. Two participants earned master’s degree, 14 participants earned bachelor’s degrees, and two earned diplomas. Professionally, seven participants have
backgrounds in the field of education, while three participants worked in law and related professions. The rest have worked in various areas, including government, the airline industry, tourism, banking, and mental health.

The following table (Table 1) offers a brief summary of the immigration and professional background of the 18 ISWs who participated in this study. For all my participants, I use pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Year Landed</th>
<th>Immigration Class</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Professional Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amaca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Law</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bijara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Kurdistan</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Refugee Claimant</td>
<td>BA in Education</td>
<td>Teacher, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Education</td>
<td>Teacher, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enona</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Family Class</td>
<td>BA in Business</td>
<td>Supervisor, Airline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helat</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Kurdistan</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Psychology</td>
<td>Psychotherapist, Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imani</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Refugee Student</td>
<td>BA in Community and Development</td>
<td>Refugee Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junting</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Coordinator</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Education</td>
<td>Teacher, Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Library Science</td>
<td>Admin, Banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lihua</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Geography</td>
<td>Teacher, Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahalia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Family Class</td>
<td>BA in Accounting and Law</td>
<td>Government Officer, Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahsa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Law</td>
<td>Admin, Legal office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Family Class</td>
<td>Diploma in tourism</td>
<td>Admin in Tourism Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miaoli</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Employment Counsellor</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Business and Trade</td>
<td>Business Manager, Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pefals</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Client Service Team Lead</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA of Science in Secretarial Administration</td>
<td>Admin, Banking and Telecommunication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Department Manager</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>MA in Business</td>
<td>College Professor, Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When immigrants move to Canada, the most significant step in their integration is to secure employment to sustain their livelihood. In this chapter, I focus on my participants’ trajectories of becoming ISWs and their experiences of transitioning to work. According to the stories of these respondents, they explored their employment paths through ISAs’ programs and services and were equipped with employment knowledge and skills, strategies, and opportunities for labour market integration. Through different ways of interacting with ISAs, these immigrants progressively found their niches within ISAs to become ISWs. Another part of this chapter investigates how immigrants’ experiences transitioning to work intersected with identities of race, gender, and class and how their intersectional identities produced experiences of oppression in their employment placements. I view their integration into the Canadian labour market as a process of negotiating institutional complexes (McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) defined relations between institutions as complex and hierarchical and argued that institutional complexes appear in many local settings to generate specialized forms of action even as those relations work to standardize their actions across local instances. With this in mind, I take the standpoint of immigrants’ experiences to open the discussion regarding how their experiences are constructed and organized in institutional relations.

This chapter emphasizes the work experience of ISWs before they became ISWs, with a focus on the trajectory of these immigrants becoming ISWs in the immigrant service sector and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Dependent Children</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Department Manager</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Dependent Children</td>
<td>MA in Intercultural Relations</td>
<td>School Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingdi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Employment Counsellor</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>BA in Engineering</td>
<td>Engineering Project Manager, Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yifeng</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Settlement Counsellor</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Diploma/Engineering</td>
<td>Engineer, Government/Teacher, English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants
their transition to work. The process of becoming an ISW has four major aspects: first contact with ISAs, volunteering and understanding Canadian work and culture, capitalizing on their bilingualism as an asset to the ISA workplace, and re-credentialing in service-related fields. In tracing my participants’ paths of becoming ISWs, I argue that the role of ISAs is crucial in considering these immigrants as constructive agents, who are active, valuable, and substantial in making contributions to the immigrant service sector. In examining ISWs’ intersectional experiences in transitioning to work, I illustrate how ISWs’ intersectional identities of race, gender, and class interlock and shape their local labour market integration. Together, this chapter underlines how both the trajectory of immigrants’ becoming of ISWs and ISWs transition to work are constructed in institutional complexes between governmental credential recognition assessment systems and labour market operation.

4.1 Trajectory of Becoming ISWs

In this section, I start by delineating the process by which my participants were first in contact with various ISAs as immigrant clients themselves. Then I look at how, through their involvement with ISA programs, many of my participants started to volunteer with ISAs to get better familiar with the working environment and culture in Canada. These volunteer experiences led to my respondents becoming “visible” and “selectable” in the settlement service employment market, which ultimately created a path for them to become ISWs. I consider, in particular, how, on this path, their bilingual capital was a critical factor for them to be employed as ISWs. And lastly, I analyze why participants pursued a Canadian educational degree to enhance their employability and refine their career path within the immigrant service sector. By presenting individuals’ strategies, by no means I am making generalizations about immigrants’ trajectories of becoming ISWs. Instead, the goal of this section is to demonstrate how their experiences in
the Canadian labour market fashioned their trajectories toward working as ISWs and how their stories are shaped and produced within institutional and relational complexes.

4.1.1 First Contact with ISAs

My participants indicated that, well before becoming ISWs, their initial contact with ISAs was in seeking support to access or enter the Canadian labour market. Participants identified three major ways that they were made aware of ISAs: social networks, including their friends and family members; community connections with individuals who spoke their native languages; and self-conducted online research into ISAs and their available services. As implied by my interviewees, most of them participated in career-related workshops and programs or had face-to-face career consultations, since increasing their employability was a priority in their endeavors to settle in Canada. For example, before landing in Canada, Pefals and her family were living in London, UK. She did not know of any ISAs until she enrolled her kids in school. She then started as a client and later was offered a part-time job. She said,

I was a client here first. I didn’t know about this ISA until I enrolled my kids [in] school. Then, the secretary in the organization told me, if I’m looking for a job, then I can go to this ISA and they help newcomers. And I asked, is it free, because there’s nothing like this in London [where I lived before]. And then yeah, it’s free. So, I called and then they intook me as a client. Later on, I find it [the program I enrolled] was interesting. And then after that, they offered me a part time job. But that is after my two jobs [at a call centre]. (Pefals)

Unlike Pefals, Kemi got to know the ISA she now works for through her own research. After facing different barriers to finding a job, she decided to take an ISA employment program for young immigrant mothers, which provided her with practicum experience in the Canadian labour market. As a client, she was impressed by the experience of being involved with the ISA. She recalled,
I came across one ISA’s website by doing research online. I was thinking in my mind, “Okay, maybe I should try doing their employment skills program for immigrant mothers.” I really liked it. I went into that program for six months. Fourteen weeks plus, in the last ten weeks, practicum. The program has job placement. And then I did my job placement in [a] community centre. And then after that, I graduated from the program. (Kemi)

While having diverse engagement with ISAs, some participants made a mental shift from being the client of an ISA to potentially becoming an employee. In the interview, Kemi specifically pointed out that the goal of taking an ISA program was to seek potential employment opportunities in those organizations. She explained,

I know a friend who took a program here at the ISA. Although she wasn’t retained where she went for her job placement, I can try and see what happens…. After the program, it’s [a] 50/50 [chance that] you might get a job [in this ISA]. They might tell you where you go for practicum. They might not. So, it’s just 50/50. So, I was like, “Let me try and see.” So, after I graduated from the program, I think it was three months later, the coordinator of the program called me that there’s an opening in this ISA. But it’s just that three months contract. So, there’s no harm to get some experiences because I like [it] here a lot. I could just apply. I use it to adapt to my experience. So, I said, “Okay, I will send out my resume.” Then, I was called. Three months got to six months, six months got to a year. I am still here. (Kemi)

In my study, most of my respondents benefited from the experience of joining ISAs, while two participants expressed that their participation was less positive. These negative experiences, however, motivated them to become ISWs themselves. Miaoli landed in Canada when she was in her 40s. After consulting with a settlement practitioner, who misleadingly advised her to seek only hotel or factory work, she was offered work in a hotel as a waitress. After a few months, she decided to seek employment by herself. She recalled the experience as providing both the initiative and motivation for her to become an ISW:
After landing here, I went to an ISA. A counsellor did an assessment for me and misled toward jobs doing manual labour. She didn’t give me positive feedback, like suggesting I take any courses or offering advice on career development. The only thing she said was, “Your English is good, so you can start working immediately. Do you want to work in a hotel or in a factory?” She only gave me two choices. I was so disappointed. After seven or eight months working as a waitress in a hotel, my colleagues told me I should go and find better jobs…. After that experience, I said to myself I should become an ISW so I can give newcomers clearer direction for their career development. I will try my best not to mislead my clients. (Miaoli)

Miaoli’s story pinpoints her shift from being an ISA client to developing her career path toward becoming an ISW. Upon landing, Miaoli’s access to information about the labour market was so limited so that the settlement practitioner was able to dissuade her from pursuing a wide range of employment options. Through this negative experience and her reflection on it, Miaoli motivated herself to seek positive change, to work in an ISA and support immigrants with similar needs.

Similar to Miaoli, Yifeng was also pessimistic about her experience with ISAs, describing herself as a ball being kicked. She explained,

The whole [ISA] system was very slow. For example, I wanted to make an appointment, but I needed to wait two weeks or a month. If I wanted to make an appointment for counselling, I had to wait one month. Once you meet the counsellor, if he/she referred you to another organization, then I had to wait for another month. I felt like I was a ball being kicked around. I was always in the process of making phone calls and being referred from one place to another. (Yifeng)

In Yifeng’s story, she described feeling hopeless the last time she met with an employment counsellor, who was impatient with her. It was at such a desperate moment that she decided to become an ISW. She stated,
So, the last time I went to see a counsellor, I told myself this will be my very last time. I am going to ask good questions to solve my concerns in looking for jobs. But, when I got there, he [the counsellor] looked at me and said, “What do you want to do for work?” I said, “I don’t know what I could do.” He said, “If you don’t know what to do, why have you come here?” I said, “If I knew what to do, why would I have come here?” His attitude to me felt like he was pouring a bunch of ice water over me, from head to toe, and the pain was like he was beating me on my head. That was the most painful moment in my life. I had no direction after what he did to me. I told myself, this will be my very last time. If I didn’t get any support, then I would never see another counsellor. After that, I decided to become an ISW because I knew that if I was sitting in his chair, doing what he was doing, I would treat my clients a thousand times better than he did. (Yifeng)

Individuals’ stories about being clients with ISAs illuminate how they encountered the immigrant service sector and how these experiences were a turning point along their trajectory to becoming ISWs. In narrating their experiences as ISA clients, participants stressed two things in particular that relate to their work as ISWs: 1) the connections between their lived experiences and their motivations to become ISWs, and 2) their desire to be a positive force in helping immigrant newcomers in their settlement and integration. In the next section, I explore how participants’ volunteer experiences with ISAs shaped their trajectory toward becoming ISWs.

4.1.2 Volunteering in ISAs

Volunteering has been deemed as a powerful source of knowledge and skills in immigrants’ integration into Canadian society (Guo, 2014). My study found that volunteering was an essential act for participants to draw on in navigating a career path in the local labour market. Based on my data, 13 participants volunteered in ISAs or related community service agencies. Among these ISWs, 10 of my participants pointed out that volunteering was recommended by their settlement counsellors to gain Canadian work experience. Based on their
stories, volunteering was one of the most significant factors in these immigrants securing a job in
the immigrant service field. For instance, after consulting with an ISW, Enona decided to apply
for a volunteer position as a receptionist in one ISA. She stressed that volunteering was crucial
for her to get through the ISA hiring process and that it led her to employment as an ISW. She
said,

[A] settlement counsellor recommended [that I] volunteer [in this ISA]. So, I met
with a volunteer manager and they offered me a volunteer opportunity as a
receptionist. Then I knew I need to volunteer in order to get some Canadian work
experiences. If I hadn’t done volunteering here, probably I would have ended up
working in maybe a store or a cashier or some low-level labour. But because of
volunteering, I mean to me, it was the best way to start my professional work here….I was volunteering there for a year and I had already the Canadian work experience
doing this job. When they asked me for three references within Canada, it was easy
for me because I got two references from my volunteering experiences here. They
interviewed me, and I got the job. (Enona)

While for some participants, volunteering was vital for them to explore their employability
in the context of ISAs, for others, volunteering was considered as an important process for them
to find out their work interests. In Mahsa’s story, volunteering provided her with the opportunity
to both familiarize herself with an ISA workplace and to network, and these two reasons
encouraged her determination to work for the ISA where she volunteered. She said,

I never stop[ped] volunteering in this organization until I got a job in this ISA. So as
soon as I came to this ISA, I got the information about that program and
volunteering. I didn’t have any information about other agencies. I didn’t want to
go…. I spent my time and effort to volunteer in this organization…. I then knew I
liked [it] here a lot because it shows what I am capable of…. So, I tried my best to get
a job here. I know the place well and I have my network here. I can do my work
better [here] than [if I had to] re-integrate myself to other companies. (Mahsa)
My respondents resorted to volunteering to both enhance their employability and explore their work interests. Meanwhile, my data show that some participants learned to take initiative to integrate their prior professional experiences into the ISA workplace to secure their employment. Priya was a college professor in India. While volunteering, she utilized skills from her teaching practices to support senior immigrants’ learning, which led to her being selected to become an ISW.

What I learned from my volunteering experience was… I took the initiative when I was volunteering with the seniors’ program. And it was teaching seniors who were even illiterate in their own languages to learn English. It’s not easy…. I had the teaching experience; I came up with new ideas on how to do that. I had prepared lesson plans and normally volunteers wouldn’t do that. The facilitator gave them the lesson plans and the volunteers just follow. But I made some suggestions and she said you go ahead if you think that works. So, I made up my own lesson plans. I changed the format of the way the lessons were taught, and they appreciated me for that. So, when the position came [open], they just said apply. It was just like that. I knew that they were going to take me. (Priya)

In Priya’s narrative, her trajectory of becoming an ISW was empowered by the skills she had obtained as a college professor. This process underscores the value of her previous skills, which re-emerged and were integrated organically in the context of her volunteer work, to her employability at an ISA.

In their engagement with ISAs, ISWs started as clients with their organizations and were provided opportunities to volunteer in ISA programs to upgrade their Canadian work experiences. Through these practices, ISWs progressively charted routes that, customized by their individual cases, allowed them to explore the potential of entering the immigrant service
sector. In the next section, I focus on one particular asset of these ISWs that positioned them to work as settlement practitioners—their bilingualism.

4.1.3 The Bilingual Asset

Although they had different cultural backgrounds, all my participants indicated that their bilingual skills were an important asset for them in securing employment in ISAs. Enona, Helat, Lihua, and Maya were hired as ISWs at ISAs because of their bilingual skills. Maya, who received a diploma and a bachelor’s degree in social work in Canada, was working in a Francophone organization because of her bilingual skill. She indicated that she had applied for work as an ISA immigrant settlement counsellor and received no response. She eventually got hired by an ISA due to the capital she had of speaking both English and French. She reminisced,

I never considered working as an ISW in this organization…. When I went to a networking event for work in the community, I got to see the supervisor here in this program, and I got to kind of connect with her. And I told her, I’d really like to apply for a job at this organization. And then I was working with a Francophone organization. One day, she sent to me a job posting, asking me, “Are you [interested in applying] for this? We are hiring for a French speaking counselor here.” And I thought okay, I will apply, and that’s how I got in here. (Maya)

While Maya’s narrative was a typical example of how an immigrant’s bilingualism was deemed an important linguistic and cultural asset to an ISA’s operation, for Helat, her story was different from the other three. Helat was my only participant who was employed only because of her mother tongue, despite not being fluent in English at the time, she got hired. She said,

I never thought that my language would be the key to get this job. When taking the program here, the coordinator told me that they are looking for a settlement counselor who speak my language. You can’t find many people [who] speak my language in this city, they needed it at that time. There was a group of people coming
to Canada, so they needed someone to serve these group of newcomers. But I said, “No, my English wasn’t good enough to do this kind of job.” … It was like a huge world for me to go and communicate with people [in English], so I said I can’t. She [her colleague] said go and try. So, I went back to the library. It was [at the] deadline [at] that time to [apply to] that position. So, I just tried, and I applied for this position, and after a few days, they called me, and they said they gave me the interview date. So, I started my career in Canada with this agency. (Helat)

Changen further indicated the advantages of being bilingual and being able to provide first-language services to better communicate with immigrant clients. She stated,

We had more than ten languages spoken here in our department. In most cases, when a client comes, he/she could find a counsellor who speaks his/her first language very quickly. This language service is essential, and it shows a quality of communication during the service for both sides. (Changen)

From my data, I found some participants emphasized that language was not only a means to communicate but also to hire them based on the needs of the government’s immigration services. This need for those who are bilingual is embedded in the institutional relations between the government’s immigration polices and how ISAs adjust their hiring preferences to cater to the needs of immigrants. According to the Statistics Canada (2016), those coming from the Philippines were the largest source of immigrants to Canada in both 2014 and 2015, while India and China were the second and third largest source countries in those two years. It needs to be noted that the number of immigrants from Syria increased 254% in 2016, making it the third largest source of immigrants that year (IRCC, 2017a). The phenomenon of selecting immigrants with a racial preference was highlighted by Lihua, who indicated that first-language communication was crucial to understanding immigrant clients’ needs, and it affected the selection of ISWs. She stated,
We use our first language to serve our clients. For immigrants, if they come from countries such as the Philippines or India, from African countries, or from Eastern Europe, English is not an issue for them. They could quickly find resources for themselves. But for most immigrants who came to Canada under the family class or as refugees, their education background is relatively lower. Some of them may not speak a single word of English in their whole lives. So, for them, they need to have people who speak their first language to help me. In this way, they can be more comfortable communicating and they can also tell practitioners their real needs because we follow trends in immigration and we hire people based on those trends, and that’s why you see ISAs hire mostly minorities. (Lihua)

Although my data demonstrate that first-language communication is a key to understanding immigrant clients and their needs and the selection of ISWs, one participant, Samuel, pointed out that language alone cannot determine an ISW’s skills. Instead, he argued, it is important that immigrants are encouraged to explore cultural-related knowledge and skills that are immersed in languages themselves. He said,

There are certain client-based services. We may have certain languages that we need help with. If someone could speak… a certain language but they don’t have the cultural competency, the openness, the willingness, [or] the kind of insides to work with people from different places, language alone doesn’t just deal with them. So, I’m looking for a composite picture of someone who possess knowledge, competencies, in different areas. (Samuel)

The above stories indicate that possessing bilingual skills can be vital to finding a position in ISAs as these skills improve communication with immigrant clients and understanding of their needs in settling in Canada. In this way, being bilingual is a significant cultural and linguistic asset that not only enriches their understanding of clients’ requests but also to provides a holistic lens through which to establish a comprehension of cultural-related knowledge and skills.
4.1.4 The Experiences of Recredentialing

Many scholarly studies illustrate that gaining Canadian education experience is one significant factor in improving employment and occupational outcomes (Adamuti-trache, 2016; Flynn & Bauder, 2015; Smith & Fernandez, 2017). In my research, 11 respondents undertook educational programs as an employment strategy to better prepare themselves to enter the Canadian labour force. Participants who re-credited did so for three reasons: at the suggestion of settlement counsellors, to upgrade knowledge for career development, and to overcome barriers to accessing the Canadian labour force. Upon landing in Canada, many of my participants consulted with ISWs to determine their next steps. For example, Maya stated that her decision to recredential was based on the advice of a settlement counsellor. She said,

She [the settlement counsellor] identified what I like, my personality, and what I would like to do…. Based on what we did together, social work was one of my options. And I never thought about being a social worker back then. But then I thought it really fits my personality when I looked at what a social worker does. And I really like to do that. And she said, “You can go to this university, where you can do a two-year diploma program. Or you go to this university and do a bachelor, a four-year program.” I then thought, maybe I go and start with a two-year diploma and decide if I want to do more after that. If it sounds less intimidating, I will see if I really like it. And that sounds doable. So, I thought I will do that. And then that’s how I started my social work journey. (Maya)

Unlike Maya, Yifeng’s decision to recredential was influenced by her self-motivation to “move upward.” Although she had been advised to seek work as a manager in a fast food restaurant, Yifeng did not yield her passion to work in the immigrant service field. Although she faced challenges due to her age, certain financial difficulties, and her responsibilities managing her family, she decided to challenge herself to study social work in university. This recredentialing experience was what provided Yifeng with her practicum opportunities to work
in the immigrant sector, and that experience led her to volunteer in an ISA, where she found a job as a settlement counsellor.

The process was very difficult because you are much older than the young people in a bachelor’s program. At the same time, you have to consider if you have financial support to pay back the student loans. I had to take care of my daughter and at that time I was also working full time in a fast food restaurant. But all these struggles couldn’t defeat my dream to move upward. I mean, at that time, to transition myself from a fast food worker to working as an immigrant counsellor was my life’s passion. I didn’t want to work in a fast food chain forever. I wanted my work to be more meaningful and useful, [I wanted] to help other immigrants. (Yifeng)

While some participants pursued a Canadian education based on suggestions by settlement counsellors and others did so in seeking an upwardly mobile career path, others sought Canadian recredentialing opportunities because they lacked access to the work force. Upon landing, very few immigrants in my research were familiar with accessing labour market information in the host society. It took them a while to self-navigate to the gateway of the Canadian labour market. For example, Xingdi worked at different entry level positions due to lack of information about the labour force. She mentioned that her only resource for job research was job bank website at Service Canada. In most cases, she could not find any employment opportunities. Instead, she started to explore part-time and contract work. The frustration of navigating employment on her own led her to study for a diploma in career development, which led to her securing employment in an ISA.

In those years, I often felt like I had been chasing my tail all day, but without getting any useful information to support my life. I had no one to advise me on what the process of finding a job is like and on how to plan my career…. But you have to do something. So, I moved from job to job. Mostly, these were part-time jobs or contract work for two or three months. It was very frustrating. Then I thought maybe I should
go back to school and learn English so that I could find a better job, and that’s what I did. (Xingdi)

Apart from the aforementioned reasons for recredentialing, four of my participants noted that gaining a degree in Canada provided them with essential skills to apply to jobs in the immigrant service sector. Changen, in particular, found that a Canadian education was the key to increasing her employment possibilities in the service sector. She also emphasized that understanding the Canadian context was crucial and that her Canadian education afforded her skills and wealth of knowledge and illustrated her devotion to becoming an ISW.

Of course, the Canadian degree is extremely important to working in service fields. I think the reason I am working here as an ISW is partially because of my Canadian degree. No matter how experienced you are, you need to show employers in the ISAs that you know the field and you know the skills because you are helping immigrants coming to Canada. Though my diploma was only one year, because it was a fast track, I took so many courses and gained a lot of professional knowledge. I learned how to understand people as human beings and how to provide services to different people. It was all about people and how to understand people. I made huge progress during that experience…. If I hadn’t taken the service course in Canada, I would be confused about how to provide services. After the diploma, however, I knew that I would be an ISW because this experience helped me to understand myself. (Changen)

To conclude, the first section in this chapter describes the trajectory of my participants to becoming ISWs. Four sub-themes that emerged from their stories include: first contact with ISAs, volunteering, the bilingual asset, and experiences of recredentialing. Their trajectories emphasize the importance of institutional relations that situate these individuals from the translocal context to the local sites. Namely, ISAs are playing a role in assisting, developing, and framing these immigrants’ transition to work in becoming ISWs. Along this career pathway, each
of my participants had faced multifaceted barriers. In the next section, I will tease out the threads of the complex fabric that makes up the host workforce, with a focus of the intersection of race, gender, and class.

4.2 Intersectional Experiences of the Transition to Work

My respondents’ narratives illustrate how their experiences of seeking employment were shaped by the interrelations between race, gender, and class. In order to sustain their lives in Canada, these immigrants had to renegotiate practices and values related to work and life. This section underscores the sophistication of the structural barriers and social oppression that my participants encountered in the local labour force before they became ISWs. It needs to be pointed out that race, gender, and class realities are often intertwined and interwoven in immigrants’ work experience. Many recent studies have adopted an intersectional approach and indicated that racialized immigrants face multilayered obstacles in their employment market transitions in Canada (Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Frank, 2011; Guo, 2015b; Maitra, 2015). Notably, these studies acknowledge that intersectional identities of race, gender, and class play a central role in processes of deskilling, denigration, and devaluation of immigrants’ labour, which further produces discrimination, segregation, and marginalization. Through an analysis of my findings on the intersections of race, gender, and class, I intend to scrutinize the institutional relations that are intrinsic to these interactions, perpetuating labour market social inequality. In other words, my findings emphasize the translocal institutional relations that pass through local settings and shape the immigrants’ experiences of oppression while finding jobs.

This section contains three sub-themes. First, in terms of race, respondents reported experiencing the complexity of racialized hiring practices. Second, in terms of gender, female participants discussed confronting more multilayered challenges compared to male racialized
immigrants and how the complicated balancing between work and life conditioned them to precarious work. Third, my discussion of class shows how these participants experienced different degrees of poverty and financial difficulty due to their low-wage labour employment while settling. In analyzing these three sub-themes, my intention is not to generalize about ISWs as a group of immigrant newcomers. Rather, I aim to untangle how their experiences of oppression in Canadian institutional complexes are related to race, gender, and class.

4.2.1 The Racialized Hiring Complexes

In using race to deconstruct the complexity of racialized hiring process, I noted that one of the predominant experiences raised by my interviewees was the long process for credential recognition and the denigration of their prior education and work. Guo (2009) described the process of credential assessment as “a personal journey involving complex interactions with multiple players” (p. 42). These complex interactions and multiple players make up the institutional and relational complexes that govern the local settings in which immigrants have to either conform to the credential assessment requirements, which usually takes a long time, or explore employment potentials for themselves without having their skills recognized. For example, Bijara was an English teacher in her home country. After landing in Canada, she decided to seek teaching-related positions. However, she noted the challenges of both the application process and the lengthy and complicated procedure for having her teaching certificate and previous teaching experience recognized. She pointed out that enduring this procedure was not financially feasible for her and her family. She described the process as follows:

Firstly, I was searching about how to become a teacher here or even how to become an assistant teacher. It’s very difficult to become a teacher here. It’s such a long process. I contacted one university and they told me it’s not easy. You have to send your documents and do the IQUAS assessment [International Qualifications
Assessment. You have to find out where [the] assessment [is]. After that, according to your documents and the degree, they will decide [whether] your previous work can be recognized and how would this work here in Canada? Then you have to study for two years. So, for that time, I needed to be financially independent and it was really difficult for me. (Bijara)

Similar to Bijara, Helat received her education and training as a psychotherapist at a Swedish university in her country. While she was looking for a commensurate job in Canada, she found that her prior educational degree and professional skills were not recognized. Instead, she was told she needed six more years of full-time training to upgrade her knowledge and practice in Canada.

It’s my wish [that my work and education can be recognized], but I found it was not that easy. I went to one university to find out what to do and to find out my path to work in the same field. They told me if you want to be a psychotherapist, you have to study full time for six years. I was thinking in my mind, “Oh my god! Six years! With nothing with no job!” What they said was, basically, you have to start from the beginning. I got training in the western system in my country, it doesn’t make sense to me. Professors and doctors were from Sweden and they gave me the training and taught me to get my career. But now, when I am living in the West, my work is not recognized, and I need to spend all these years to just get the certificate. I later found this was just a beginning. There is no guarantee I can get a job after all these trainings. (Helat)

Another example that underlines the denigration of immigrant qualifications is the story of Amanca, a former lawyer in Nigeria for eight years. Amanca stated that the devaluation of her educational degree was traumatizing. Amanca described her journey of understanding this reality as an identity crisis. She said,

It took quite a long while to settle. I think the basic problem I had, and I know that a lot of immigrants have, is getting a job here in Canada. Basically, when we come in,
more or less, your certificate is worthless. The certificate you came in with is not really recognized or you have to now start struggling to see what you can do to upgrade your education and be able to work and find yourself in the workplace. It was traumatizing for me. I mean, there is this form of identity crisis you go through as an immigrant. Coming as a professional, you come in here and then suddenly you’re not even sure where you fit in anymore. So, it was such a struggle for me. (Amanca)

Amanca’s experience transitioning to work pinpoints the structural barriers that deny immigrants’ access to the Canadian labour market through an institutionalized credentialing process that filters immigrants’ employment assets. As a result, the institutional complexes diminish immigrants’ prior social investments in education and work experience and forces them to engage in manual labour very much unrelated to their skill sets. This is the reason why my interviewees started to adopt an “aim-low” approach to gaining Canadian work experience. In order to do that, they learned to “rebrand” themselves. Enona noted that her friends had to delete their highest education degree from their resumes to enhance their chances to interview for entry level jobs.

I have so many friends, they came with a master’s degree. They have worked in the United States, [they] have perfect English, and they also experience the same [not finding jobs]. They even told me that they had to delete their master’s degree [from their resumes] in order to create an interview opportunity because what they would hear from these companies was that they [were] overqualified for these kinds of jobs, and they were just seeking [a] survival job. They learned that if you wanted to get a survival job, then the less qualifications and less professional background and education was going to help them. (Enona)

Although some were able to gain Canadian employment experience through this “aim-low” approach, even this approach did not work for some of my respondents. Yifeng had worked as a college English teacher in China and upon landing tried to find teaching-related positions. After
receiving no response from any of her job applications, she started to search for entry level work for survival. Still, Yifeng struggled to get interviews to enter the Canadian labour market because her skills were not recognized. She explained,

They never open the door for you. I sent out dozens of resumes. It was like throwing a stone into an ocean. There was not even a single response. It was very difficult for me to find teaching-related jobs. Then I started to look for labour work, but nothing happened, and the door is never open. Sometimes I would see and advertisement and go to the place and know on the door. If I was lucky, they would interview me and tell me that everything looked good. But then after that they would tell me that I am overqualified or not qualified. They were just trying to find excuses to not recognize my skills. (Yifeng)

Imani experienced a similar situation, and he indicated that his skills were devalued. Even after earning a bachelor’s degree in social work at a Canadian university, he emphasized his feeling of false hope when interviewing with local employers, who led him to expect to be hired and then never contacted him after the interviews. As such, he had to endorse the aim-low approach and applied for entry level jobs in mainstream companies and community-oriented organizations. He found the process of job seeking to be very challenging due to the non-recognition of his skills. Facing multifaceted barriers in his interview experiences, he gave up seeking positions in mainstream organizations. He stated,

I had interviews and I wasn’t able to secure them [the jobs]. They just gave me a good time there, and chatting about my experiences, … say my story is unique and they love that aspect of [my] unique story and they really enjoy my profile. But when it comes to securing the job, it was a problem. I couldn’t define it so far. But I usually, you know, we have good ways of blaming, we just put it on somebody else. So, it was very struggling. And eventually, I gave up, actually, to apply for mainstream companies, even if it’s community-oriented organizations. (Imani)
In Imani’s interview, he emphasized that, in his experience, access to the Canadian labour market is guarded by a series of colour-based hiring practices. His interpretation of his experience was that employers were uncertain to incorporate immigrants with racialized minority backgrounds into the local labour force because of their skin colour. Thus, immigrants’ knowledge and skills were racialized and materialized on the basis of ethnic and national origins (Guo, 2015b), which further marginalized their access to the work force. Imani stated,

The difficulty that I was going through was still a puzzle to me, like they couldn’t see my skills…. There is a lot of misunderstanding, and I think lack of awareness, about people’s abilities. Sometimes, there is a feeling for me, marginalization. It’s not about my merit. It’s mostly about … if we can just bring this guy into the workplace, does he understand us? Though it’s just my way of looking at it, nothing came from them. That’s just the way I interpret that. I feel like if we just hired this black guy, does it really go well with employees or would there be any kind of conflict or anything? … People are nervous about each other and there is a lot of labeling here in this country for different reasons. For example, skin colour, gender, culture…. There is lots of labelling. I cannot pinpoint what it is, but I think I was to some extent affected by that. I think I was a little bit affected by that element so that I was not able to find the job as quick as I wished. (Imani)

From the above discussion, it is evident that racialized immigrants have experienced significant demoralizing and disempowering downward social mobility, vulnerability, and marginalization in their transition to work. Based on their experiences of oppression, it is evident that race is a salient aspect of immigrants’ social existence, that racism and racialization create structural barriers in access to the Canadian labour force. In this context, the experiences of immigrants’ transitioning to work are indoctrinated with limited social resources to consent to the social agreement that segregates them to lower social structure. In the next section, I focus on the
intersection of race and gender that produces the social oppression experienced by female immigrants’ in their transition to work.

4.2.2 Intersecting Gendered Work Experiences

Racialized female immigrants’ experiences of their transition to work are marked by the intersection of race and gender. In my study, 12 participants followed their husbands to Canada and landed as skilled immigrant dependent. In the integration process, though racialized minority immigrants confront multifaceted barriers in finding employment, the situation for female racialized immigrants is even worse. In my study, three of my female participants struggled with uneven opportunities available to women in finding jobs. Priya, for instance, pointed out that her husband worked in different countries and received considerable income. They moved to Canada because her husband was offered to an IT company in Ontario. Meanwhile, she volunteered in a library for nearly two years while she was without employment. Similar to Priya, Kemi indicated that her husband had already received a few calls from several telecommunication companies before arriving in Canada, while she had to struggle with finding herself low-paid, entry-level, manual labour after landing.

Female participants reported feelings of anguish when dealing with their unemployed status and animosity toward a Canadian labour system that doubly rejected them on the basis of both race and gender, thus rendering them jobless, marginalized, and devalued as a social asset. Amaca, for instance, recalled her experience of oppression while searching for her niche in the labour force. Since she and her family couldn’t afford for her to endure the long procedure of her recredentialing in the field of law, Amaca’s initial plan for entering the Canadian labour market was to find a contract administrative job. After earning a Canadian administrative certificate, she was confident she would be able to find administrative work. However, she was told to expect
rejections from employers based on her lack of Canadian work experience. Amaca then turned to one ISA and took an employment bridging program there. She did a ten-week practicum as part of the requirement of the program, which she believed would ensure her employment in Canada. Now, though she was fully equipped with both a Canadian education and Canadian work experience, ironically, she was told she was overqualified due to her work experience in her home country. Thus, her transition to work cycled through the denigration of her previous credentials and experience, the rejection of her Canadian credentials and experience, and her questioning her own career choices.

Adding to the frustrations of tackling unemployment, female participants also experienced language as another barrier. Before landing in Canada, Enona worked in Mexico for seven years as a supervisor for a Canadian airline. Given her rich professional experience in a Canadian company, Enona may have been able to start working in Canada in positions that were comparable to her previous experiences. However, her first targeted position was a receptionist because of her insecurities about communicating in English.

I didn’t feel that I was comfortable to work as a supervisor, so I was looking for a receptionist [job] to start with. In my case, I felt that my English wasn’t good enough and then I was hesitant to apply for a lot of positions…. Even my husband was sending me a lot of emails with jobs as managers or supervisors, I didn’t apply for any of those. I felt [too] insecure to do that. I felt that they are going to judge me, and my self-esteem was there yet, quite yet. I just wanted to start from the bottom and then made my way up. I just wasn’t confident when I arrived here. I feel that people judge me. (Enona)

Due to her lack of confidence in her language skills, Enona took work as a cleaner for four months. Based on my data, Enona seemed well prepared for this underemployment experience, describing this as a bottom-up approach to entering the labour market.
Helat also reported her fear of language in her experience of transitioning to work. As she had previously worked as a psychotherapist, Helat was trying to locate herself in the field relating to her prior professional work. However, language was an overt barrier to her in entering the Canadian workplace. First, she was told that a language test was one of the requirements to apply for the program in her related field. The high score required on the test essentially blocked her pursuit of the credential she need to work her field. Second, Helat found that her lack of language proficiency triggered complications, along with her racialized gender identity, in finding a job. She was unable to find volunteer positions in mental health communities due to her language barrier. These two major challenges triggered in her a psychic fear about being able to integrate herself into the Canadian labour market. She became less confident, though she had already obtained the basic language skills needed to survive.

According to my data, I found that many of my female participants illustrated the unbalanced gender relations between men and women in their families with stories about the label of “immigrant mothers.” This negotiation of employment and household is a facet of the patriarchal power relations that shape female immigrants’ career pathways and reflects how they face multiple layers of barriers in dealing with work, family, and life in their post-migration life in Canada (Erel, Reynolds, & Reynolds, 2018; Zhu, 2016, 2017). In my research, all female immigrants were immigrant mothers, among whom many reported that their husbands suggested that they not get jobs after arriving in Canada. Instead, these female immigrants were advised to prioritize their family responsibilities. Helat implied that her husband did not allow her to take the language training she needed and asked her to manage the family. Helat said that her husband even tried to use physical means to prevent her from leaving the home, and she struggled with
the emotional and physical abuse of husband not letting her seek learning opportunities or employment for five years, until they divorced. In the interview, Helat highlighted the importance of language learning and finding a career path, which were not contradictory to her role as an immigrant mother. Instead, she argued that a woman upgrading her language and skills to land an ideal form of employment could facilitate a positive family environment in the future.

Some of my female participants were willing to put their careers on hold to take on the social responsibilities of being a housewife. In their narratives, it is vital to underline that this did not occur because my female participants were any less educated or less professional than their partners. Rather, their stories reveal that these female immigrants were more concerned with how they perceived themselves in the host society, with their dual identity of being mothers and workers. Junting landed in Canada as a dependent immigrant. While her husband found an occupation, she decided to be a housewife taking care of their kid:

If you are a mother, you really can’t do anything to look for a better job or even to have a job. As newcomers, we all know we face so many difficulties to integrate our lives in Canada. We thought kids should adapt faster. They will have new friends and quickly pick up the language. So, I thought we didn’t need to worry about our kid. Until one day, when I was on a bus, one Chinese lady told me, “You feel a lot of pressure here to work and adapt. You forget about your kid. They need to adapt too. You can’t ignore them. This is such an important time for their future development.” I talked to myself, if my plan of coming to Canada was to create a better education and life for my kid, then I should spend as much time as I can with my kid to help him/her go through this very important adaptation process. And this was what I did at that time. (Junting)

Pefals had rich experiences working in top-ranking banks and technology companies. In her transition to work in Canada, Pefals prioritized her family and worked a series of part-time jobs while looking after her son, who has a disability. She said,
My first job was in a call centre. I found it was too stressful, so I resigned. My life has been very stressful taking care of the family and kids, so it was very difficult for me. I switched [between] many part-time jobs because of my son. Even that was difficult for me to balance my work and life. Then I went to see my counsellor again in the ISA. So, they saw me and then I attended these workshops and then got to know more of them. So, there is a position available for admin assistant by that time. Four hours a day only. So, I just signed up. I can’t work a full-time job because … I still [had] my small kid at the time. My youngest son has [a] disability and I didn’t want to be more of the outside than, you know, I want to have a balanced life between my family and my work. (Pefals)

The above stories highlight two major labels, which triggers a dilemma for female immigrants in their transition to work. First, the label of “female immigrant” highlights the intersectional identities of race and gender. Female immigrants are deemed, within a normalized ideological frame, to be ideal cheap and precarious labour (Ng, 1995, p. 36). The female immigrant is seen more in terms of her skin colour and gender rather than her knowledge and skills, and “justifiable” forms of racialized and gendered institutional practices filter out female immigrants from receiving equal employment opportunities. Second, the label of “immigrant mother” provoked hardship for female immigrants attempting to balance their work with their social responsibility to their families. Immigrant mothers experience a gendered pressure to sacrifice their pursuit of career goals and submit themselves to patriarchal power. These two racialized and gendered labels shape female immigrants’ experiences of work and family, and these intersectional experiences are organized in institutional complexes that shape and coordinated their experiences of transition to work in Canada.

4.2.3 The Classed Work and Lived Experiences

Racialized immigrants are more likely to live in poverty than Canadian born (Borowy, 2006; Kazemipur & Halli, 2001; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007); they are more likely to live in
low-income households, work under poor conditions, be unemployed, and receive government assistance (Priya & Clarence, 2015). In other words, they are more likely to experience economic exclusion or be employed precariously (Mcisaac & Yates, 2018; Mirchandani, Ng, Coloma-Moya, Maitra, Rawlings, Shan, Siddiqui & Slade, 2010). In this research, the inquiry of class is present in five types of stories shared by participants: searching for survival jobs due to precarious living conditions, drawing on savings to avoid taking survival jobs, sustaining lives by government funding, working a labour job with a basic salary, and having very little savings and finding low-paid work. In delineating these five narratives in participant interviews, my purpose is to tease out how participants’ experiences were shaped by institutional relations, which reciprocally produce participants’ individual perceptions of their lives in Canada. More importantly, I aim to explore how class is socially produced through the notion of race and gender, which were also practiced and reproduced by institutional relations.

As discussed earlier, Imani endeavored to find jobs related to his bachelor’s degree in sociology and community development. Even though he employed strategies to access the labour force, responses were always negative. As such, Imani was living in poverty with little savings in his bank account, which was difficult for his transition to work. Given this precarious living condition, he decided to look for labour work.

So, the memorable experiences [were] actually when I had to send lots of resumes, and I had to bookmark all the websites for every organization that I am interested in, and I had to check every day if there are job postings. And I had to be really on the lookout just to find a job. I don’t have any other options. My bank account was almost nil. And then where to go? I’m not going for food bank and all those kinds of things, and I’m a university graduate. No, I’m not going for food banking, and even I decided to go look for temporary work and all those kinds of things just to avoid that culture of dependency for myself. That’s one area of a huge struggle for me. (Imani)
In this study, some of my female participants experienced a dislocation of class based on their jobs prior to arriving in Canada and their husbands’ employment experience in Canada. For instance, Priya’s family landed in Canada after her husband received a job offer in Eastern Canada. Throughout our interview, she made a point of emphasizing her acceptance of a social status different than what she knew prior to emigrating. When her husband got laid off, they drew on their savings to avoid survival jobs in their process of searching for their next employment. She said,

Finding a job was not easy because he was in a good position. He had quite a good salary and the offers that he was getting were for lower salaries and lower positions. So, I think that’s a common thing that immigrants go through. You know, back in your home country you have a certain status and then coming here and learning to readjust. It’s very difficult, and my husband went through those stages too. And the thing is, we had some savings so, you know, he could rely on that. So, we were very lucky because after three or four months he got the job here. (Priya)

Other interviewees discussed living in poverty in terms of their need for government support. Bijara landed as a refugee claimant with her husband and child. As a refugee claimant, she struggled to settle in a new country, and what she found most difficult was sustaining her finances while waiting to receive her work permit from the government. As such, Bijara and her husband were not eligible to find a job and had to rely on what little savings they had. They then started to apply for government financial support to continue their lives in Canada. She explained,

I think everything was like a challenge for me, but the most difficult one was finding financial recourses. I couldn’t find a job because I was waiting for my work permit for many months. At the same time, I was thinking to find any kind of job and I found I should go for a teacher. Then the credential recognition and training will be too long. I can’t just go to school without any income. After that, we tried to get
benefits from the government. So that was like really the most challenging for us. So, because we came here and then we claimed refugee [status] and then we had no source of income we had a little bit of savings then we were done with that. So, we applied, and we got benefits from government for about four months until I became a settlement counsellor. (Bijara)

Similar to Bijara, Helat arrived in Canada and later divorced her husband. As a single mother, she endured impoverished living conditions while balancing her studies and care of her child. During her seven years of full-time study, without a job or any support from her ex-husband, the only financial support she had for herself and her child was from the government. She said,

When I was full time studying, I had to reply on work support from the provincial government. I was struggling. I went to look for some basic jobs. But I can’t take those jobs because my kid was not old enough to stay alone. So, the only thing I could do was just go to school because I was coming back home before my kid came back from school…. I know I have to do this for our future actually. For my kid’s future, but for me too. (Helat)

Yifeng’s story is further illustrates that immigrants are more likely to suffer from poverty in Canada. As discussed above, Yifeng was not able to find a position in her field. Rather, she worked in a fast food restaurant, earning a basic income to support her family. Yifeng’s husband left Canada when he was unable to find a job, so she took on the responsibility of supporting her and her child on this basic income for two years. Yifeng’s work and life were challenged by the economic burdens associated with paying for her family’s rent and life expenditures on a basic income.

That was my most difficult time living in Canada. My husband went back to China because he had no job here. In China, at least he can earn some money. I was alone supporting my kid and the family. I was working in a fast food company. I earned
$6.50 per hour, and our monthly rent was $650. I had to work very hard in that low-paid position so that we could barely make a living. (Yifeng)

My informants also experienced poverty in terms of having very little savings and finding low-paid work. Amaca, for instance, was not able to find any job opportunities after graduating with an administration diploma. Instead, she went back to school to pursue a bachelor’s degree in social work. While she was in her full-time studies, her husband was suffering from not finding an employment to better support the whole family. Rather, they lived on their savings until her husband found work as an Uber driver. She recalled,

My husband did [apply for jobs]. Thousands of applications, but there was no job, no response, even not to talk of an interview. He never went for … one interview, when he applied for so many jobs. So, but Uber was [what he found] and he needed to be able to get around. You know. It’s worse. It’s bad for a woman you don’t have a job, if you know you need to work. What is even worse for a man. Oftentimes, they are defined by the fact that husbands should be able to provide support for the family…. So, what we did was … we had some savings. But he was also driving Uber. Yes. So that was what we used to support the family while I went into study full time.

(Amaca)

The above stories demonstrate how class intersects with and is determined by immigrants’ social status, their access to the Canadian labour market, and employment precarity. Class is not an isolated social category in shaping immigrants’ lived experience. In fact, the inquiry into class makes links to the relational oppression embedded in power relations and institutional relations. These uneven dynamics reproduce hierarchical social relations, further positioning immigrants in lower social brackets and shaping racialized immigrants’ career paths.
4.3 Summary

This chapter contained two threads of analysis: 1) the pathway of immigrants to becoming ISWs, and 2) immigrant’s intersectional experiences in finding employment in the local labour force. The trajectory of my participants took in becoming ISWs underlines the vital role ISAs played in assisting them in their job search. Particularly, they were equipped with employment skills, given volunteer opportunities, embraced for their bilingual skills, or advised to rebrand and recredential in order to overcome any lack that hindered their entry to the Canadian labour market. Through engaging with ISAs, the value of immigrants was recognized, and they were able to find work in the immigrant service sector. In this process, these organizations optimized their employment-related practices to develop their career potentials to be more qualified ISWs.

In the intersectional experiences of transitioning to work, the racialized and gendered practices of the labour market deemed immigrants to be ideal subjects for underemployment or unemployment (Guo, 2013b; Maitra & Guo, 2019), which thus reproduces poverty and social class. The multiplicity and complexity of institutional power relations were practiced by non-recognition and denigration of immigrants’ prior learning and working, and the labour market produced immigrants’ intersectional and disadvantaged experiences, which deepened racialized immigrants’ social stratification, exclusion, and marginalization in Canadian society.

The findings in this chapter stressed the importance of institutional complexes, which are present in everyday and translocal connections (Smith, 2005). The translocal institutional complexes between foreign credential assessment and labour market operation trigger dilemma and challenges to immigrants’ employment integration translocally, while the ISAs offered opportunities and strategies for their labour market integration. Based on the stories of
immigrants’ trajectory of becoming ISWs and their transition to work, these institutional complexes are hooked into comprehensive relations that collaboratively situate immigrants lived experiences to the local settings of immigrants’ coordination of daily practices.
Chapter Five: Learning and Ruling Power in the Workplace

This chapter examines the workplace learning of ISWs in ISAs. A workplace may be sophisticated learning environment where workers negotiate knowledge, skills, and roles in the processes of acquisition, transformation, and empowerment. They do this by participating in and practicing situated work activities (Billett, 2004; Fenwick, 2005, 2008). Learning in the workplace is a process of knowledge and skills transformation as well as a process of individual development, problem-solving, and identity negotiation (Fenwick, 2006a). In my study, these processes scaffold the analysis of my data on ISWs’ workplace learning in ISAs.

My examination of ISWs’ workplace learning indicates three types of learning. The first type of learning focuses on training and learning in the profession, which highlights the importance of knowledge production in formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings, and it captures how workers apply this learning to their workplace adaptation. The second type of learning examines how individuals integrate their cultural legacies to workplace cultures in order to understand their work and participation with others. Finally, I delineate how a focus on outcomes measurement is the centre of learning in ISAs, interrogating how the changing nature of work in ISAs are reframed in institutional and ruling relations that shape ISWs’ construction of work and their daily coordination. My findings underscore that all three types of learning are intertwined and interconnected through participation and practice-based learning.

5.1 Learning in Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal Contexts

This section dwells on how ISWs construct and acquire knowledge in formal and informal learning contexts in ISWs’ workplace adaptation. Knowledge acquisition and construction can be mediated by workplace activities, which are typically highly structured and regulated and have pedagogical properties (Billett, 2004). This learning involves “training programs, education and
development courses, or some types of experiential learning activity to acquire the competence necessary” to meet work needs (Jacobs & Park, 2009, p. 134). In a workplace, learning occurs in formal, non-formal, or informal settings. Formal learning usually follows a curriculum, providing structured educational activities or programs for individuals to receive credentials (Hrimech, 2005; Spencer & Kelly, 2013). Non-formal learning focuses on noncredentialled structured learning, which can be developed through structured professional development workshops, educational seminars, or training events organized by a workplace (Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Spencer & Kelly, 2013). Informal learning refers to how individuals acquire knowledge or skills through unstructured and nonlinear daily collegial participation and interaction (Watkins, Marsick, Wofford, & Ellinger, 2018). I treat formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities for ISWs as situated moments at which I can examine the comprehensiveness of knowledge acquisition in the workplace.

5.1.1 Formal and Non-formal Learning Opportunities in the Workplace

Twelve of my ISW respondents reported receiving formal and non-formal learning in the workplace in the form of credential-based learning or professional development training. Formal learning includes attending work-related conferences and programs outside of the ISAs themselves, with the purpose of receiving accrediting certification that assists ISWS in becoming more recognizable and competitive in their profession. For example, Changen indicated that she was sent to these training programs in an ISW training organization to upgrade her settlement-related knowledge. She said,

I participated in different training in an ISW association. Whenever there was a training opportunity open, if I needed that training and that training was good for my practice, I would be the first person to register for the training. Those programs were free and taught us how to become better service providers when
facing clients. The trainers were very professional and knowledgeable, and they were willing to answer any questions, concerns, and doubts you had based on your experiences. You always felt energetic after attending those training programs because you find yourself becoming more knowledgeable. (Changen)

Changen’s experience with formal learning both constructed her professional knowledge and established her self-confidence to work with different immigrant clients. Miaoli, for instance, participated in professional conferences as part of her formal professional development learning to renew her employment counsellor certificate, a valuable asset in the employment counseling field. She said,

We attended a professional development conference that was one of the components to renew our certificate…. It’s an academic conference. We need to have two years experience working as an employment counsellor as one of the conditions to renewing the certificate. They also require us to account for our working hours in the first three years. For example: How may workshops have you organized? How many clients have you served? How many hours have you worked in this field? How many associations do you belong to? When you have this certificate, you are more professional in the field. (Miaoli)

Apart from formal credential-oriented training, most of my participants have obtained non-formal, noncredentialled structured training and learning. For example, Priya, who was the manager of the settlement and integration department, indicated her non-formal learning was situated in organizational training based on the recent needs and trends of different immigrant social groups. She said,

We have [training on] how to work with LGBTQ clients on how to ask them appropriate questions, how to respond [to immigrant clients], or what other kind of resources to do [to work for them]. Normally, we have a two-day and a half-day training on that. Then we have [training] on domestic violence [and] how to work with clients with domestic violence. We [also] would invite different
agencies to come and do a presentation about the program so that we are always updated. Newcomers come to us for resources, so we need to be updated on what’s out there. (Priya)

Priya’s experience speaks to two major types of non-formal training provided by ISAs, including approaches to working with immigrant clients from different vulnerable communities to better understand their needs and collaborations with community service organizations to update ISWs’ work-related knowledge in non-formal settings. These types of non-formal training were also reported by Imani and Mahalia, who called this training a “professional development day,” during which organizations offered workers a full day of training, inviting professional individuals to teach them various techniques to provide quality services to traumatized immigrant clients such as youths, women, or seniors.

Besides formal credential-oriented learning and non-formal professional development training, participants reported that ISAs provided them training opportunities based on their workplace learning needs. Mahsa mentioned that her experiences of receiving training were a process of improving her workplace professional skills since her ISA took into consideration her needs and sent her to the related training. She said,

If I wanted to take some courses, for example, I want to improve my computer skills and they try to do it. It never happened to me that they don’t pay attention to my actual needs. They immediately think about it. We are always actually in the process of improving. They send us to different programs, and the third-party organization for training, as much as they can send us. And it’s a very good opportunity for us. It’s not going to happen to me if I was working in another place. But in this agency, it’s always happening. (Mahsa)

The above narratives of formal credential learning and non-formal professional development training highlight the essential role of ISAs in constituting ISWs’ professional
learning in meeting the changing nature of immigrant clients’ needs and enriching knowledge acquisition to elevate their professional skills based on workers’ requests. In combining these two factors, ISWs increase their self-confidence to provide better service to immigrant clients.

5.1.2 Informal Learning in the Workplace

In addition to formal and non-formal learning opportunities, all participants experienced informal workplace learning. The major forum for informal learning was an organizational orientation when they began their positions, which aimed to provide ISWs with a general introduction to organizational policies and departments and to familiarize them with the workplace environment. Here, I use the example of Kemi to demonstrate my participants’ learning in this informal learning context. She explained the process as follows:

Once you come in, you have to read the company policies and all that. They will give you time to do that. And then, you meet with the coordinators of each program. There are different programs at this agency. You have to meet with them. And they will help you have a little bit of knowledge, at least of what each department or each program is doing so that when you meet clients, I can refer this client to this program, which is kind of good. I did that for about three weeks because they give you a timeline to get that done. (Kemi)

Kemi’s experience provides a general picture of what non-formal workplace learning is in an ISA context. In defining informal workplace learning, Billett (2001b) highlighted this type of learning as individuals’ engagement with more experienced co-workers through “guidance, observation and interactions” (p. 210). In my study, 12 key informants reported that shadowing senior-level employees was an important source of non-formal learning. Based on their stories, shadowing refers to having mentors showcase what they do in their daily practices, including details of how they serve clients, how to enter clients’ information into different databases, and how to refer them to different programs or organizations. In ISAs, shadowing is considered an
essential collegial interactive learning process that occurs before ISWs work independently.

Helat described her experience shadowing as follows:

I was shadowing, actually, at the beginning of the three weeks, with other counsellors. So, they didn’t let me just go and see a client directly. I was just shadowing with them, [watching] what they do, how they provide information to the clients, and what kind of information they provide. Also, the way they speak with clients and how they introduce the agency and what other programs out of this agency they can access. So yeah, they gave me lots and lots of information.

(Helat)

While Helat explained the purpose of shadowing, Amaca shared with me the process of her shadowing experience:

First of all, is to shadow the staff who are already doing those things. So, I shadowed them for one or two programs. For example, the volunteer orientation or workshops my colleagues organized to newcomers. I attended each of those twice and observed what they were doing. After that, I started doing those tasks. Another thing I need to do is client orientation. Before that, I went to the program coordinator twice and observed what she was doing. Same with the client training, I observed, then I got the template from the staff who was doing it initially. I went through it with the colleague I shadowed with. And I had to start doing it myself. So basically, you have a period of learning, somebody takes you through the process. After a while, you just get in and begin to do your work.

(Amaca)

Besides shadowing, respondents noted the significance of informal learning for knowledge upgrading as well as for enhancing their problem-solving skills. Priya mentioned that as part of her informal learning, her ISA had organized internal training opportunities, inviting and creating opportunities to interact with training officers or experienced colleagues in order to update her knowledge following a recent change in a government form. She said,
We have internal training in our organization because we help the clients fill up application forms, for example, the citizenship application form, and that form recently has changed. Those training are not formal all the time. We have a training officer and the senior settlement coordinators who, actually, we sit with us and go to each and every question. In the conversation, we tried to think of different scenarios because we sometimes get really weird scenarios. So, counsellors tell us all the problem-solving skills we had with clients, so then we know how we can help them. In those conversations, we also learn how we can answer the question so that everybody is on the same page. And everybody knows what to do when such a situation arises. (Priya)

In addition to informal internal training and learning, regular staff meetings were mentioned by 16 key informants as informal learning opportunities. These were functionally similar to internal training opportunities, fostering a participatory learning space for knowledge and information sharing and problems solving. Maya discussed her experience of staff meetings as follows:

[In the staff meeting], if there are some cases that we were struggling with and then we share, and we share what we think would be the best way to deal with it [or] what have the people done to deal with this kind of situation and sharing tips and sharing resources. I learned about this one, this one, new things, news with this one. And then the supervisor, she/he shares this news from the communities with us too. (Maya)

The proceeding narratives demonstrate how informal learning is achieved by ISWs through collegial participation and engagement in their daily practices. Clearly, the learning in formal, non-formal, and informal workplace contexts exemplifies essential “learning frames” (Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, & Morciano, 2015, p. 1) that allow them to acquire their individual learning development in the workplace. While these pedagogical and institutionalized learning opportunities were significant, it is also vital to investigate how these
ISWs applied the knowledge acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning to become more professional ISWs.

5.1.3 Applying Learning to Working as ISWs

Based on my respondents’ narratives, many of them indicated that formal, non-formal, and informal learning was influential in their daily work. Gradually, they established their own ways of learning to their work adaptation. This finding is illustrated by Amaca, who explained,

People have different styles. So, you observe this staff, and you observe that staff, and then you see the styles. You also have your own style. But generally, you just look at that process, and then you would know what works for you, you just go ahead and do it with your own style. (Amaca)

From this idea, I started to explore how ISWs applied their learning to work practices and created their own working style. In my study, some participants emphasized the potential to transfer what they had learned from formal training to working with immigrant clients. Changen found her formal professional development training enriched her understanding of Canadian immigration history, which in turn refined her professional skills in her adaptation working with immigrants. She stated,

I went to one organization for different [professional development] training. The goal of that training was to provide us with knowledge and skills to become better settlement service practitioners. The training was fabulous. I learned what cultural differences mean in Canadian immigration history. I also learned how to deal with racial discrimination in Canadian society. When I know all of these, I can see a bigger picture in terms of why they [my immigrant clients] stuck there [unable to find a job]. For most of my immigrant clients, they can’t understand what is happening. They can’t step out of the box to deal with the difficulties of not finding a job. When you yourself know your clients’ reality and their difficulties, you become a more professional settlement practitioner. (Changen)
Changen’s discussion of adopting her formal learning in her work practices also speaks to how that training is the basis for her establishing her confidence in becoming a more qualified ISW. In addition to learning and integration, Xingdi stated that her formal training played an important role in her daily work practices as she employed many of the theories she learned from her certificate training to understand her immigrant clients’ needs. She noted,

I like the theories I learned from that experience [of studying for the certificate]. This is such an important experience in my work, and I am still using some of the theories now…. For example, if you are chatting with your immigrant clients, you start with how can I help you? Then the client will go, “I need a job.” And you ask, “What kind of job?” Then you start searching for jobs for the client. This is incorrect. You should start the conversation by asking, “How long you have been in Canada? What difficulties have you experienced since arriving? And, could you tell me more about it?” Then the client will tell you their stories so you can better help them…. These theories have been supporting my work for many years. (Xingdi)

In the context of non-formal workplace events, my participants indicated that learning through professional development training frequently as part of their workplace practices. Enona, for instance, in adopting her ISA professional development training, made close connections between that training and her previous work as an airline supervisor. This connection facilitated her in identifying and managing her immigrant clients expeditiously. She said,

From the professional development training I received here, I learned to have my own way of working…. I do have so many experiences as a supervisor in an airline company before, I learned to use skills in my previous position to this job. When I was working as a supervisor, I had to supervise over twenty people. I am very good at multitasking…. In my training, I learned how to collect clients’ information and their background in a file. But I have so many clients now, so I
saw the need of multitasking my clients’ files and meeting my clients. I can do these things at the same time and not creating [sic] a mess. So, I always have my personal file to identify my clients. (Enona)

Aside from transferring knowledge to ISW’s working with immigrant clients, some respondents highlighted their motivation for learning after participating in informal learning opportunities. For example, through the example of staff meetings, some of my respondents indicated that they took the initiative to update their teams with information even beyond their regular meetings. Mahsa recalled learning from her experiences in staff meetings to share information in a timely fashion. She said,

Sometimes if I cannot wait for two weeks [for the regular staff meetings] because they might need this information for their clients, we email each other that this is their new rules, this is the new law, this is the things that I have found, this is the centre that can help for example clients with diapers, this is the centre that can help the clients with clothing, so we help each other in this way. We share the information. Or if I come back from the meeting. I will send an email to the group and notify them here is the new information I have, this is the information our team can help the clients, or this is the contact information that we can use to refer clients. (Mahsa)

In the workplace, learning can be oriented pedagogically and structurally toward knowledge creation and production in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. This pedagogical approach provides guidance to learners to self-navigate in their development of knowledge acquisition skills. This process can be both situated and holistic, in which individuals link their understanding of work and work goals to obtain knowledge for workplace adaptation. Meanwhile, since in the ISA workplace ISWs encounter immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds, their learning can be culturally driven by different social relationships. Given this
context, it is therefore the purpose of the next section to examine how learning in the workplace is the product of culturally diverse social relationships.

5.2 Cultural and Relational Learning in ISA Workplace Culture

This section analyzes cultural-related learning within different social relationships in an ISA workplace. Schein (1996) argued that the concept of culture refers to “such taken-for-granted, shared, tacit ways of perceiving, thinking, and reacting,” and is “one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in an organization (p. 231). Moreover, the exploration of workplace culture goes beyond a discussion of culture to suggest a dietetical relationship between society and the people. Spencer and Kelly (2013) argued that workplace culture is a repercussion of capitalism within the current era of neoliberalism, contending that this type of culture can be promoted and developed in association with hierarchies of control and power, producing inequality in employment relations. Based on these understandings of workplace culture, I first delve into an analysis of how a culturally diverse workplace such as in an ISA creates a cultural-oriented learning environment for ISWs within various social relationships, which I refer to as cultural and relational learning in my study. Based on Spencer and Kelly’s (2013) interpretation of workplace culture, the second part of this section focuses on how the notion of workplace culture perpetuates power relations based on Canadian normative workplace values that stifle ISWs’ learning in the workplace.

5.2.1 Culture and Learning in the Workplace

This section aims to identify cultural diversity as significant to creating a context for meaningful cultural and relational learning in the ISA workplace learning environment. A culturally diverse workplace is that in which workers have “different opinions, thoughts, beliefs, norms, customs, values, trends, and traditions” (Martin, 2014, p. 89). My participants, including
Bijara, Mahalia, Maya, Miaoli, Pefals, and Samuel, underlined a culturally diverse workplace learning environment as vital to their workplace learning. Particularly, as a manager of one ISA, Samuel asserted that cultural diversity can be a means to understand workers themselves and to notice the difference of others in the workplace:

> There are times people didn’t see themselves as … having a culture, and they thought that only others had a culture. I think part of our duty and obligation is to help people understand that no one is better than the other, [they are] just different. And what are ways in which we could help bridge and create an understanding of different cultures. So, it is about the multiplicity of different cultures…. What became a driver for me was so how do we talk about cultural inclusiveness, and what does that mean [in the workplace]. We look at that as trying to bridge an understanding among all people, not just some people.

(Samuel)

Of those participants who discussed the importance of cultural diversity in the ISA workplace learning environment, Maya’s comments stood out to me. She described her ISA workplace as a culturally collectivist and sharing workplace, which creates a positive space in which to cultivate learning with others. She said,

> People care for each other. Even we have food, we share. I think when I was at someplace, even at school, I can see some of my colleagues who are Canadian born, they would just bring their own food, then they just eat by themselves. But here, everybody shares, even if it is an orange, and we share. And sharing knowledge too. I think people are very open to sharing knowledge here. And I’m not sure whether it is just the way that these people are or part of it is cultural. But I think it’s very good working with people from all over the world. And I think from working there, I really cannot see the clash or anything like that. If I work with more Canadian born people, and they have a very different point of view or different attitudes towards things, we may have some disagreement or something like that. Here is more harmony. (Maya)
Maya’s comments demonstrate how the notion of cultural diversity can be important in creating learning in an ISA workplace. By comparing an ISA workplace to a workplace where having more Canadian-born workers, she commented that her ISA workplace is not only culturally diverse but culturally inclusive, fostering learning potentials through participating with other ISWs’ work and life.

Given this culturally diverse ISA workplace context, I find my participants’ workplace learning can be comprehensively intertwined with the notion of culture. These connections are twofold: culture provides a learning space that allows ISWs to make meaning of their own work practices and make sense of others; and through interactions with social partners at work, ISWs are able to re-examine their own cultures and better explore cultural and relational learning.

ISWs’ workplace learning is also culturally located and initiated. My data indicate that culture shapes how ISWs work with clients. For example, Mahsa expressed that culture was vital in her workplace learning because her learning was profoundly rooted in ISWs’ culture. She said,

> Each of us [ISWs] is from different countries…. Actually, I think to learn other cultures is working with people from those cultures. The way that you think about other people is going to be change as soon as you start working with them…One of my co-workers is so interested in doing what she can to help the client. And she’s really focused on that part. Even if the client doesn’t show interest, she is so interested in helping because she knows the culture of her community. Like in my community, if I am chasing them, they would appreciate it, but they’re not going to be happy. They would say, “Okay, we are doing it, why she is chasing us?” But culture to culture is different…. I understand more about my culture and her culture because the ways we work [with immigrant clients] are different. (Mahsa)

While Mahsa recognized how culture mediated an ISWs work and learning with immigrant clients, Lihua’s narrative emphasized how different cultures engendered tensions in
learning between ISWs. As a program coordinator, Lihua worked closely with settlement counsellors on data entry and reporting. She stated that cultural differences resulted in different understandings of deadlines. Lihua stated,

Some practitioners, they work differently based on their culture. They have a different sense of understanding a deadline. In our staff meetings, we mentioned reporting the data on time many times. It is such detailed work for us. But you can’t control them because we need to read every single line of the data. Also, we can’t do this at the last minute. Doing it at the last minute never results in good quality work because we are all rushing. This was very challenging for me. You need to work with different staff from different cultures with different styles. Now they are getting better because of the back and forth negotiation. Before every deadline, I tell them face to face many times so that they will be aware of the time. So, you need to adapt your culture to this cultural environment, and this is how we all learn in this process. (Lihua)

To Lihua, culture informed individuals’ different understandings of work tasks, and it also challenged her to negotiation between cultures. It is also interesting to see how Lihua took this negotiation as an opportunity to learn within the culturally diverse ISA workplace.

Aside from learning to navigate culture as a factor in relationships between colleagues, Bijara, Imani, Junting, and Samuel all pointed out that working with immigrant clients provided opportunities for reflexive learning that helped them to better understand their own cultures. Samuel comes from a culturally diverse country. He also earned a master’s degree in intercultural relations. This life combination offered him, as a manager, a holistic scope for integrating his cultural identity and his prior academic training to his work with ethnoculturally diverse immigrant clients and building culturally inclusive communities. He explained,

When I look at my personal heritage, and after pursuing studies in intercultural relations, this whole business of culture identity became very important to me….
I want to see the experience of different degree of marginality and how to help people to integrate within different cultural communities…. So, we have community-based approaches working towards empowering individuals and communities to make changes through fostering community building, justice, equality, mutual respect, creating relations to support, addressing issues affecting the lives of immigrants and refugees, providing opportunities for communities to learn new skills by having people work together. So, I get to look at what is a community like and the components of community; It is not just physical space; it is a connection, a theme, it is about feelings. (Samuel)

Samuel’s comment provides an overview of how his culture can be an important asset to him in understanding the needs of ethnoculturally diverse social groups in order to establish more socioculturally integrated communities.

In addition to Samuel, Junting’s narrative provides a vivid image of how her experiences engaging with immigrant clients empowered her to better understand her cultural identity and her life. She noted,

My clients are from different cultures…. What you see is really powerful and motivates you a lot in your own life. I see a lot of values in them. Most of them are hardworking people. They are motivated and positive, and unwilling to give up…. If I was still living in China, I would just work and wait for my retirement. But here, you see that no matter what age they are, they are willing to explore their new lives. They are willing to return to school, to reselect their profession, and start their new journey. I take the experiences of working with immigrant clients to reflect on who I am as well. If I was in China, I would never meet these groups of people. I might want to stay in my comfort zone. From these experiences, you are more motivated to conquer challenges in your life. (Junting)

It is clear in Junting’s comparison between life in Canada and life in China that she recognizes her shift from staying in her comfort zone in China to being self-motivated and
accepting new life challenges in Canada. The above examples reiterate the interconnection between culture and learning within social relationships. Through working with colleagues and immigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds, ISWs cultivate a renegotiation of learning based on their cultural legacies, forming new patterns of workplace thought and action that inform how they understand themselves and their work with others.

5.2.2 The Paradox of Learning in Workplace Culture

A culturally diverse workplace learning environment in ISAs offers ISWs the context in which to reflect, develop, and construct workplace learning in terms of their self-culture and other cultures within various social relationships. However, as workplaces can be sophisticated spaces, consisting of the multifaceted components and relationships that constitute learning, my data reveal a paradoxical phenomenon related to learning in the ISA workplace culture. To start with, it is imperative to elaborate further on what workplace culture is. Workplace culture is an evolving dynamic penetrating the potential assimilating effect that produces sameness through cultural differences (Solomon, 1999). More importantly, workplace culture does not merely focus on culture itself, but rather the critical role that culture plays in an organization’s response to economic, political, and technological development (Schein, 1996). This management philosophy underpins a certain type of workplace culture that promotes productivity and effectiveness through the delivery of pedagogical learning for the neoliberal economy (Spencer & Kelly, 2013).

5.2.2.1 Assimilating ISWs to the Canadian Normative Workplace Values

In light of the above sense of workplace culture, my participants’ stories stress a paradoxical phenomenon in ISA workplace culture, whereby cultural diversity is celebrated in the workplace learning environment while, simultaneously attempts are made to assimilate them
to Canadian norms and values, asking them to ignore their cultural self in the workplace.

Canadian normative workplace values conform to Eurocentric knowledge and skills, confirming their hegemonic dominance in moulding immigrants’ experiences in western workplace contexts (Maitra & Guo, 2019). Specifically, Maitra’s (2015; 2017) studies demonstrated how normative values in the Canadian workplace operate to socialize racialized immigrant workers’ employment relations and everyday workplace practices, including ways of dressing, greeting, interacting.

A culturally diverse workplace that creates spaces for cultural and relational learning can be both positive and paradoxical. It celebrates the interactions between diverse cultures while also assimilating ISWs to Canadian normative workplace values. In the case of Kemi, for example, she noted that although the ISWs at her ISA were mostly immigrants from different cultural backgrounds, the process of learning to “fit in” triggered in her a fear, as she realized that a culturally diverse ISA workplace promoted Canadian normative workplace values. Thus, she abandoned her own cultural heritage and re-socialized herself to Canadian normative workplace values. To highlight re-socialization as an aspect of workplace learning, she mentioned that her way of interacting with people from her own culture was different from how she interacted with colleagues from other cultures. She explained,

Even though we as immigrants coming from different cultures, we’re still trying to learn to fit in. I think that’s the fear of getting job here. They’re like, “Are you sure this is going to fit in? I’ve found out that Canadians, they don’t like fights. They don’t want to step on other people’s toes, and they don’t want other people to do that to them…. For example, people never give you direct feedback compared to where I come from. If your clothes are not looking good, they are going to tell you, you look great. They don’t want to hurt your feelings…. So that is where the fear is laid. So, for me, as an immigrant, I’ve decided to come here. So, it doesn’t hurt understanding how they are and then tries [sic] to fit in. The
truth is here, for me, even if I see someone who is a Nigerian and works here, the way I’m going to be relating to that person [is going to] be different from how I relate to a Canadian. So, if I make a joke, she knows I’m joking. If I do that to someone who is not from Nigeria, the person might get offended. So, there’s a difference. (Kemi)

Kemi stressed how her ISA’s workplace culture endorsed dominant workplace dispositions related to communication, behaviour, and bodily deportment that served to initiate her into the normative Canadian workplace. She pinpointed how Canadian normative workplace values taught her normative ways of behaving, dressing, and interacting. She stated,

For me, the process [of fitting into the workplace] is holistic. It’s not just about how you talk. It could also be how you dress. So, when you get to the workplace, you observe how things are being done. How do people dress there? Some people would …, like, guess [what they need to do to fit in] …. It’s all about being very observant. You are observing, and you can take note of how people want their things to be done or how people are behaving. And then it’s easy for you to fit in. You should be willing to adjust. You don’t just want to hold on to your own ideas and all that. You want to adjust, and everything is going to flow. (Kemi)

To Kemi, she intentionally abandoned her cultural identity to adopt Canadian normative workplace values, which for her is a shared meaning that ISWs act on. My participants’ stories reveal that this compliance with normative Canadian workplace values does not merely originate in the Canadian workplace but in dominant Canadian social norms and knowledge more broadly, which strengthens the impetus to comply with the ISA workplace practices associated with those values. Priya, a manager of a settlement program in one ISA, shared with me that her understanding of workplace culture was to maintain and accommodate her thinking and acting to the Canadian normative values. She expressed,
I think in Canada, being culturally sensitive is really important. Like we talk about how local mainstream Canadians have to be culturally sensitive and culturally aware. But I feel it’s very important that the immigrants coming in should have the same cultural awareness. If I come from a particular country, I cannot expect everybody to accommodate to me. So, it’s important for immigrants to learn that there are different cultures here. I may not accept I may not believe what they believe in, but I have to accommodate those beliefs… You may not have it personally that’s your personal bias. That’s fine. But in a social arena, you have to accommodate. (Priya)

It is obvious that Priya understands her ISA workplace as one that is compliant with prevailing Canadian customs or values, which are produced and perpetuated through dominant norms present in workplace structures. The coexistence of conflicting phenomenon hinders ISAs from embracing cultural differences in the existing ethnoculturally diverse workplace, stifling ISWs’ understanding of their cultural self in workplace engagement. What is clear from Kemi and Priya’s narratives is that the workplace culture of ISAs upholds Canadian normative workplace values, which mould ISWs into a certain type of worker who fits into an institutionalized workplace formation and produces a certain type of workplace learning within ISWs’ social relationships. Thus, individual ISWs’ cultures seem less valued in this workplace context. Instead, their cultural assimilation is seen as a solution to fitting into this Canadian workplace culture.

**5.2.1.1 Cultural Racism—The Power of Culture**

This section aims to examine how culture informs discrimination toward different ethnicities. I argue that discrimination, as a form of cultural racism, shapes ISWs’ engagement with themselves and others and the ways they participate in work tasks. Cultural racism is defined as a concept in which culture functions to create bounded cultural groups and legitimates
the exclusion of “others” (Wren, 2001). Yifeng, for example, commented on how an image of her culture triggered culturally based stereotypes of how she was expected to work in a certain way. This image further shaped how she participated in work with others. She said,

We are Asians (ya yi, 亚裔), but people call us ya yi (哑裔). We are the “mute” ethnicity…. I am talking about first-generation Chinese immigrants…. They don’t know how to negotiate their rights when facing inequality in the workplace. Whenever things happen to us, you don’t know how to protect yourself, the only thing is to work hard and not complain.... That’s how people see us, and that’s how we should behave. We are expected to work hard and speak less.... That’s why most Chinese are working as subordinates in ISAs…. In order to maintain my job, I need to be very careful to work with my colleagues and immigrant clients. I fear that if I receive negative feedback or complain, they will easily fire me. (Yifeng)

Clearly, Yifeng’s relational learning is framed by discrimination on the basis of her cultural heritage. In order to survive in the ISA workplace, she has conditioned her learning to this stereotype in order to secure her job. To Yifeng, she had to accept those expectations and discipline herself to follow this cultural and racial stereotype.

Apart from Yifeng, one of Changen’s responses illustrates the stereotype of the “mute” Chinese worker:

Once, me and another colleague, who is also a racialized minority ISW, were assigned to work on the weekend. We were assigned to work on other tasks as well, and all of those tasks were on the weekends. He/She then invited our team lead and manager for a meeting and said, “This is not fair. Why do we need to work on the weekends and there are only the two of us doing so many tasks?” After the meeting, they cancelled the arrangement with him/her, but I was still there, working weekends…. This is such a brave move. This is his/her instinctive
reaction to fight for his/her rights. I can never do that; I feel safer accepting what I am given. (Changen)

While Yifeng used the stereotype of her culture as a mask to protect her job, Changen resorted to “self-muting” as a means to internalize workplace inequality in her safe zone, by which she subordinated herself to a lower rung on the workplace social structure. Changen further commented on how she continued to self-mute in response to manifestations of cultural racism:

I used to be very passionate about organizing events for immigrant clients. When I organized events, I used the space from another department. I can tell that a person [from that other department] complained about me [using that space] because I am from China…. That person, he never treated other colleagues like he did me. He was always complaining, complaining, and complaining…. Even then, I tried my best to address his complaints. Still, he was not satisfied. We are Chinese, so they know that we will accept whatever happens to us. But he has pushed me to the corner. Now, I don’t organize any events there. I don’t do anything so that he can’t complain anymore. (Changen)

The above examples indicate the presence of cultural racism that assumes some cultures are inferior and “other.” In this context, these ISWs presented themselves as hardworking and obedient individuals who were ideal colleagues for accepting workplace inequality. As such, this stereotype had significant impacts on the remaking of their participation in work goals and interactions in workplace social relationships.

This section analyzes how culture and learning are intertwined in ISWs’ social relationships in the ISA workplace culture. It unpacks how culture mediates learning and how social interactions between different social groups can create cultural-related learning. Based on participants’ stories, it is clear that ISA workplace culture celebrates cultural diversity, fostering
learning within both ISWs and immigrant clients. Meanwhile, my study reveals that this
celebration of cultural diversity co-exists paradoxically alongside the promotion of Canadian
normative workplace values that assimilate ISWs’ behaviour, communication, and their bodily
comportment to the practices of hegemonic Eurocentric knowledge and skills in the workplace.
This workplace culture socializes ISWs to view themselves as inferior and different and produces
culturally specific knowledge that shapes ISWs’ learning practices within different social
relationships. Learning can be situated in cultural diversity in an ISA workplace, and it can also
be informed by certain organizational documents (Billett, 2001, 2006; Fenwick, 2008a, 2008b),
producing a certain type of learning through textual ruling. It is therefore vital to interrogate how
workplace learning relates to textual institutional regulations.

5.3 Textual Ruling Power and Workplace Learning

Learning in the workplace emphasizes a collective perception; it is the product of
interactions not only between people but between people and institutional documents: “rules,
tools and texts,… and material environments” (Fenwick, 2008b, p. 19). In this section, I explore
the concept of outcomes and techniques for outcomes measurement, before investigating how
textual ruling power is exercised between translocal social relations and how it shapes ISWs’
workplace coordination. I argue that techniques for outcome measurement not only produce ideal
and successful immigrants (Ko, 2017) but also ideal ISWs that are self-regulated, self-
responsible, adaptable, and productive in their ISA work activities.

5.3.1 Outcomes and Outcome Measurement: Forming Textual Ruling Power

In the process of conducting my research, I did not intend to focus on the concept of
outcomes measurement in my analysis of ISWs’ workplace learning. During data collection, nine
participants mentioned “outcomes” in relation to their workplace learning, and these frequent
mentions prompted me to interrogate how ruling relations were formed through textual documents. In deconstructing outcomes, each of the nine ISWs had their own understanding of “outcomes,” describing them variously as providing “better services to immigrant clients,” “writing a perfect report,” “conducting more surveys,” and helping “immigrant clients have [find] employment.” Priya defined it as follows:

For example, let’s say for one program. I will write [in the report] that I have a workshop series or something for clients. Once the clients attend this program, they are going to have more information about community resources, and they are going to be more involved in the community. That is the outcome of the program.

(Priya)

Given this range of ways of defining outcomes, understanding what outcomes really means seems to be necessary. The concept of outcomes stems from IRCC, a government department that facilitates immigrants’ settlement and integration. In IRCC, the Settlement Program is one of the major funders for settlement and integration programs delivered by ISAs. Outcomes, in this particular workplace context, can be broadly defined as providing immigrant clients with “knowledge and skills to function in Canadian society” (IRCC, 2017b, p. 23). To be more specific, outcomes can be unpacked into the following three phases (IRCC, 2017c, p.4):

1. Immediate outcomes: Achievement within one year from participating in the service with changes in knowledge, skills, and networks.

2. Intermediate outcomes: One to five years duration of participating in services to achieve the use of acquired skills and knowledge to support independent decision making, participation in labour market or in society.

3. Ultimate outcomes: A success that is beyond a five-year period of integration within society.
It is obvious that the focus on outcomes is meant to ensure immigrants’ settlement and integration in Canada in the long term. In order to these outcomes are effectively implemented and proceeded, IRCC proposes a system of data collection and assessment to monitor funded programs at different stages. Priya commented on how ISAs are oriented by a series of evaluation techniques to contribute to outcomes measurement. She explained,

Evaluation like how you are going to measure outcomes…. So how am I going to measure them? How would you tell if these are real outcomes to the clients? Maybe I will provide the clients with an evaluation form. After the workshop series, I will give an evaluation form [to them] and ask them: Did you get the information we wanted? Was it helpful for you? So those evaluation tools are what evaluation means. There are different kinds. You can hold a focus group as well and ask [for] their feedback [on] the program. You can do phone interviews. All those kinds of things. (Priya)

Priya’s comment provides general information about what outcomes measurement techniques have been applied at the institutional level. From her introduction of these outcomes reporting methods, it made me curious to understand how IRCC defines outcomes measurement.

Based on an analysis of IRCC outcome measurement documents, I found outcomes were assessed according to four major sets of data (IRCC, 2017b, 2017c; Wright, 2019):

1. Inputs and resources—program budgets, amount of workshop hours a program will provide, number of immigrant clients a candidate program is targeting, and the number of clients a program successfully integrates.

2. Narrative reports—descriptions of the process of working with partners and of the resources used in this partnership; challenges, opportunities, and successes in providing services to immigrant clients; needs assessment approaches and performance assessment approaches to assess clients’ needs.
3. The Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE) system—number of served clients and their background information, geographic distribution, and language progress.

4. Newcomers’ surveys—collected during or after attending a workshop or program, information about clients’ understanding of information about Canada, progress in learning an Official Language, integration into the labour market, and community connections.

These data sets do not simply exist to measure the outcomes of immigrants’ settlement and integration. More importantly, they have become the core for assessing the outcomes of immigrant service programs. For example, the Government of Canada Call for Proposal 2019: Settlement and Resettlement Assistance Program Funding Guidelines (IRCC, 2019a), underscores the dual purpose of these date sets, defining outcome-driven programming as follows:

Outcomes-driven programming is based on evidence and data. It is designed to provide the best outcomes for clients from the beginning to the end of their resettlement and/or settlement journey. It means being able to track both project outputs and measure client outcomes to recognize success in the immediate, intermediate and long term (p. 2).

In order to strengthen the outcomes-driven approach, IRCC created its Settlement Program Logic Model to connect the idea of outcomes and outcomes measurement to departmental management and program delivery practices. This Logic Model aims to provide a holistic guideline for the institutional operation of immigrant service programs, including program management and engagement (program operations), enabling services (care for children, transportation, translation, crisis counselling, and needs assessment), direct services
(information, language, employment, and community engagement), and indirect services (building community connections and sector capacity building). All of these service divisions request input numbers, and demonstrate output in terms of accountable services in the form of bullet points that highlight the number of workshops, training programs, orientations, and so forth for the purposes of outcomes measurement, linking their assessment outcomes to the three phases of outcomes (immediate, intermediate, and ultimate) outlined above.

What is clear from the above description is that outcomes and outcomes measurement are interconnected. The emphasis on outcomes forces ISAs to work toward this ideological conception as their ultimate institutional goal. Meanwhile, these techniques for data collection for outcomes measurement serve as a powerful instrument in forming certain types of institutional social relations. It is important to clarify that it is not my intention to assess the merit or demerit of outcomes or outcomes measurement as a means to assess the effectiveness of programs. Rather, my focus on outcomes and their measurement allows me to shed light on the power of text at the federal government level, connoting a form of textual ruling power that is translocally expanded and reinforced, and functions within institutional relations, organizing and moulding ISWs’ learning in the workplace.

5.4 Producing Ideal ISWs: The Ruling Textual Power and Learning

The data-collection techniques for outcomes measurement have imposed certain changes on ISAs’ operation, which further shapes ISWs’ workplace learning. IRCC (2017c) has stated that in measuring outcomes of ISA services, they aimed to “deliver the right package of settlement services, to the right client, at the right time, for the right duration, to achieve the right outcomes” (p. 12). I am interested in asking what the word “right” means in this context. I find that “right” does not merely gesture to the means of providing services for immigrants but also
the production of *ideal* ISWs, who are self-regulated, self-responsible, adaptable, and productive in the social relations of the institutional textual ruling power. To deconstruct the textual ruling power in ISWs’ daily learning in the workplace, I focus on three types of learning that emerged from my data: textual-mediated learning, pedagogical learning, and relational learning. By analyzing these three types of learning and the textual ruling power that rules them, I explore how ISWs’ workplace learning is translocally located, constructed, and deployed through the textual ruling power of outcomes measurement.

### 5.4.1 Ruling through Pedagogical Learning

Working in ISAs, ISWs were expected to adopt institutional norms and values to work as *ideal* ISWs in serving immigrant clients. In this process, some of my participants confronted pedagogical learning they received in the formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities, which shaped them into a certain type of ISW. For example, Helat described how her experience of shadowing as part of her training produced in her a certain way of thinking and acting. She explained that there was a difference between what she learned from her previous professional experience, working as a psychotherapist, and what she learned working as an ISW.

She stated,

> So, for me it wasn’t easy because the group I was working with, those clients who really [were] facing challenges, and they could sometimes make me actually sick and [they] had trauma. I give them time and a chance to talk. And it wasn’t good for me and even for my job. So, during the shadowing, I noticed, like, counsellors just provide them [immigrant clients] information about all [the] organization’s programs and what they can access what they cannot, asking about their, like, family situations, incomes, everything. And that’s it. And if they are eligible, we tick yes [on the case note]. If they are not eligible, we tick no. (Helat)
Helat’s training was consistent with a “question and answer approach,” rather than her being trained to become involved with immigrant clients’ difficulties in their lived situations. The counselling process becomes one-directional and simple by asking “what do you need?” and “here is the information,” and immigrant clients were then grouped into different categories to fulfill the outcomes measurement in various reporting formats.

Similar to Helat, Maya, who received a social work bachelor’s degree and worked in some community service organizations before becoming an ISW, was astonished by the lack of professionalism she witnessed during her shadowing. When she found areas for improvement, she was not given the space to provide feedback to improve frontline workers’ practices. She indicated,

It’s just a way to interact with people was very short. Like and very.... So, we have values too and ethics in social work. And I don’t think not only in social work but in helping related professions like these. You have some ethics that you don’t judge people, or you don’t talk to people like that or you don’t tell them what to do. Those are the main things. I think I observed that in what I’ve seen when I was shadowing. The clients were being judged and told what to do…. If they came here, there is a reason. But we are taught [in my degree] we are not supposed to judge. It was not a professional way to deal with the clients. But I was not given this space to say okay you can give us feedback. It was just you go and shadow these people and then we do the job. (Maya)

For both Helat and Maya, through their pedagogical learning experiences with both workplace expectations and the reality of working with immigrant clients, were not necessarily opposed to the implementation of outcomes measurement in her workplace learning and practices. Instead, they gradually accepted and normalized them through their participation in work activities, which produced a particular kind of ISW in service to the nation.
To further strengthen my analysis of the production of ideal ISWs, my study reveals that ISWs’ learning was not only standardized by shadowing but that they progressively adopted pedagogical learning to act on immigrant clients’ lived experiences. Mahsa, for instance, told me that the most useful and adaptable learning from her formal training was the skill of translating her clients’ questions for third party organizations. She stated,

One of the best learning [from my certificated training] was translation…. My clients they don’t know English, they speak the same as language that I speak. I have to actually call IRCC, for example, on behalf of them while they are sitting with me…. So, I thought that, okay, just interpretation is enough, but it’s not like that. When you are interpreting something, you have to translate your words word by word exactly to the other person. I’m not in the position to judge if this question is actually not appropriate or inappropriate. I am just the interpreter. I am just an interpreter and they have just to translate. That’s it. (Mahsa)

It is clear that Mahsa took this formal training as an opportunity to consider her immigrant clients’ difficulties as an objective work task and simplified the purpose of interpretation to a word-for-word process instead of spending time understanding and discussing the reasons for her clients’ difficulties. As a result, this translating skill increases the efficiency of working with immigrant clients while simultaneously neglecting the value of analyzing the clients’ situation, which is more complicated than can be understood via a simple phone call.

In addition to Mahsa’s application of formal learning, Bijara emphasized the importance of the needs assessment she learned from her non-formal work training to understanding and assessing the needs of immigrant clients. She said,

When we are doing intake, we do have [an] assessment form. Some people [immigrant clients], they can just understand from what they see we can understand what they need. We assess their employment needs, language,
emotional, and family, financial as well [and] we figured out that what they need. We fill it up according to our understanding. For example, the client is coming. I’m talking about have family issues. So, you just speak about this, this family circumstances. Which kind of situation is it very critical? It is intermediary like you are stable. (Bijara)

The above types of pedagogical learning represent a psychological and practical shift, from ISWs who did not uphold the organization-provided pedagogical learning in implementing outcome assessments of their daily interactions with clients to a certain type of ISW who is gradually indoctrinated into the institutional social order. Ultimately, they became part of the system to serve the outcomes measurement techniques. While immigrant clients are taken as the major source of outcomes production, ISWs have become socialized to pay less attention to and expend less effort to understand immigrant clients’ needs in their settlement and integration. Through their on-going participation in work tasks and interactions with social partners, their thinking and acting serve the institutional agenda rather than immigrant clients.

5.4.2 Ruling through Textual-Mediated Learning

Participants indicated that institutional textual accountability, what I call textual-mediated learning, was an essential form of learning in the workplace. For example, Imani implied that his ISA was rationalized by outcomes measurement, embodied in various forms of action and involving a range of institutional practices.

Basically, the organization does have lots of deadlines and all those kinds of things at the workplace. Lots of deadlines, from time to time, the whole year. I mean the government [reporting requirement] has a three-month … period, which is one quarter, then there is [a] half-quarter [6 weeks] reporting request. In total, there are three [reports] over a … quarter [12 reports for the year]. That’s how the government divided the organization’s work. We rational[ized] it [our daily work]
that way just to make sure that we get the data to report for that specific period of time. (Imani)

Imani’s workplace learning exemplifies how the textual ruling power is translocally ruling institutional social relations, the interrelated sequence of actions between the government, ISAs, and ISWs. His story also illustrates that ISAs follow a translocal ruling order based on the textual ruling power, which was exercised and acted on by the ISWs. Lihua, for example, pointed out that the reporting system was a chain service meant to ensure every level of worker provides quality data based on the Logic Model. All these actions aimed to build a positive reputation for the program with the hope of receiving future funding. She said,

We work like a chain service to make sure we meet the funder’s expectations on outcomes measurement: Front desk customer services need to be professional and guide clients to the right place. Counsellors collect data and enter it to the iCARE system. After that, coordinators check if the outcomes are well organized and written. Are the outcomes following the Logic Model? Do they match our organization’s Strategic Plan? After that, coordinators will submit outcomes reports to managers so that they can write their reports and funding proposals. When they write, they will check the model too. This rigid and hierarchical reporting system makes sure we provide good services. All of us know good services decide outcomes, and outcomes decide funding. (Lihua)

To further tease out what Imani and Lihua mentioned about reporting, I visualize the reporting system in the ISAs below:
To further address this reporting system, I summarize the reporting process in four steps based on my participants’ narratives:

Frontline workers are responsible for collecting first-hand data from immigrant clients, including their background information and services they received, and reporting it to the governmental and organizational databases. Next, program coordinators review the data entry, collect numbers, summarize the main services provided, and report all this to managers. Managers condense and categorize service numbers and the types of services provided into descriptions of outcomes. Based on managers’ reports, directors expand on the key points addressed in the managers’ reports to strengthen the descriptions of outcomes. Finally, the CEO reports outcomes from all divisions and highlights the outcomes and achievements to the board.

Obviously, this reporting system demonstrates that all ISWs have a role in reporting outcomes to the funder. These steps, then, underline how the textual ruling power created ruling social relations to textual-mediated learning. In other words, reporting has not only become institutionalized practice, but it also pressures ISWs at different levels to work collaboratively on the excessive textual-mediated burdens. For instance, Priya, a program manager, noted that her work routine was heavily burdened by reporting. She stated,

Each program, I would say, has at least around 20 reports. 18 to 20 reports per year. It’s not like simple one-page reports. It’s like 50 pages. Everything has to be very detailed because the funder can pinpoint the outcomes in the reports. So, I have to keep meticulous records of all the programs’ output… [For example], how many clients have the outcomes been made? How many partners we have? What activities we’ve done? How many people have attended? What is going to happen in the future? All this information has to be compiled. So, I have to keep
all these records [for the reports]. It’s a challenge. Actually, updating this data daily is a big challenge to us. (Priya)

While managers were heavily involved with report writing, frontline workers acted as data collectors with a series of textual accountabilities which contain two parts: filling out different forms of immigrant clients’ information and entering clients’ information, progress, and their services into the two different systems (iCARE and the organizational database). Kemi described her typical workplace as textual oriented:

I do the intake on a paper form, and then I have to go back to my desk and do and take in the computer filling like the services I provided. I have to explain it in the database. So, I have to put it in my own terms. I need the term that even if someone comes from outside, the person can still understand. Even a layman can understand it. I have to do that. And then, we also have access to iCARE, which is a database for IRCC. I have to enter that as well. So, it’s very challenging. While this is happening, you have all the clients calling, [and] they need may need referrals to get furniture. So sometimes it could be very busy and a lot of workloads. (Kemi)

Kemi’s experience of a typical workday indicated that she did not interact with immigrant clients but with documents and forms. Based on the descriptions provided by frontline ISWs in my study, I summarize how frontline workers interacted with work documents and texts as follows (also see Figure 2): When serving intake clients, ISWs had the client sign a consent form, and then used an intake form to collect clients’ background information. After that, ISWs assessed the needs of immigrant clients by means of an assessment form. Then, in order to evaluate the counsellor’s services, there’s an evaluation form for clients to fill out to trace their settlement and integration progress. Meanwhile, each client is contacted and requested to fill out a follow-up survey, each on a different cycle based on the funder’s requirement. Frontline workers were asked to document every single step to update their services. Moreover, frontline
workers were also required to enter all the information on the forms into the data system. This process was mentioned by all the frontline ISWs in my study.

![Diagram of textual interactions for frontline ISWs]

Figure 2: Textual Interactions for Frontline ISWs

From these ISWs’ stories, reporting was described as a “nightmare,” a “headache,” or “a painful procedure.” Though this type of learning was passive, they still followed this textual ruling power, functioning as the “machine” of the ruling. It is noteworthy that the outcomes measurement emphasizes a textual ruling power that wields a top-down implementation. By exercising this power, the role of ISAs has shifted from attending to the lived experience of clients to “an impersonal institutional order,” which ultimately becomes the apparatus of the state (Ng, 1996, p. 46). More importantly, this shifting role of ISAs generates textual ruling social relations that translocally produce ideal ISWs to serve the governmental function of the state.

5.4.3 Ruling through Relational Learning

As workplace learning is rooted in participation and interaction, textual ruling power can be exercised through different social relationships. In my interview with Yifeng, she emphasized the paradox between quantifying immigrant clients as numbers in the chase for outputs and outcomes and attending to their difficulties as living individuals. She calls this paradox a
“sandwich,” and she elaborated on the challenge of dealing with numbers while providing quality services as follows:

Clients are treated as “counted heads.” We need to pay attention to work efficiency because the organizations, they only look at the numbers. A lot of frontlines are chasing the numbers as that’s what the ISAs are requesting. Numbers are money. Numbers are funding. The funder, they gave you this much and you need to work with this many clients to continue getting your funding for the next cycle. But this is very difficult for us. We work like sandwiches. For example, if you spend 30 minutes, or an hour, or two hours on the clients, the quality of the services are totally different. It’s similar to a doctor’s appointment. If the doctor kicks you out in 15 minutes, and asks you to come back next time, you won’t receive good service, right? If you don’t receive good services, you will complain us. So, we are like sandwiches balancing the number and providing good services. But we don’t have time. We just don’t. (Yifeng)

Yifeng continued, commenting on her learning and thinking within the institutional social organization:

If you are in the system [of the ISA] for so long and you work here as an insider, you unconsciously do the things that the organization expects you to. We know these tasks are requested by the funder, and that’s how we survive. So gradually you become a machine listening to the organization…. This is my survival skill; it protects me to keep my job. (Yifeng)

Yifeng’s story illustrates that textual ruling power can become an influential form of ruling power, shaping ISWs into a certain way of thinking, acting, and doing; ISWs’ requested workplace tasks in measuring outcomes then exist, paradoxically, alongside workers’ intentionality of learning, what they really want to do in working with clients. Similar to Yifeng, Maya pointed out the tension between her work intentionality and the demands of outcomes measurement in dealing with immigrants’ complex situations. She discussed with me, in
particular, how her practice of channeling highly skilled and educated immigrant clients into entry level jobs was both inherently normalized by the ISA system and counter to her own intentionality with clients. She noted,

At the beginning, when I started this kind of job, I was upset about it [suggesting professional immigrants for entry level jobs], but then I was into it…. When I started to look at the reality of the clients, they have these degrees and everything, and experience and everything…. We don’t have any other choice than suggesting them go and do these [entry level] jobs. It is very upsetting, from that point of view. But I think, after some time, you just kind of get used to the system, and your brain is kind of trained to guide your clients do that too. It’s really unfortunate, but then we have to go with the reality too. At our level, there was nothing we can do about it. (Maya)

Both Yifeng and Maya’s narratives reflect a tension between what they thought ISWs should do and what they have been conditioned to do. For Yifeng, the skills she has been trained in by the organization have become skills to protect her employment, whereas for Maya, her interactions with immigrant clients have been subtly transformed from “upset about it” to “into it.” Therefore, it was not simply that ISWs channel immigrant clients to entry-level work, but that they have been shaped and organized to think and act through repetitive daily work tasks.

The textual ruling power’s emphasis on the self-responsibility of immigrant clients was the major indicator in many of participants formulating the clients’ integration, and its success or failure, as a “self-direct[ed] and self-realized project” (McCoy, 2014. p. 238). For example, Miaoli, grouped her clients into those who were “self-motivated” and those who were “unmotivated” and focused her energies on the former because they could generate more value in terms of outcomes reporting. Her narrative emphasized client’s self-responsibility in integrating into the host society. She stated,
We motivate all clients from our perspectives and provide them with resources and information. But if you want to achieve your personal goals, you need to work very hard and spend a lot of effort on it. You need to walk toward the direction of the goal. For some of my clients, they will listen to me and tell me about their progress…. They said to me: “Miaoli, look, you are older than us, you are still learning new skills, and you are a good model to us, so we should motivate ourselves to learn more skills.” This is the motivated group. But there are some clients, they said to me: “Miaoli, I know your suggestions are for our own good. But I just can’t do it.” So, for these clients, you can’t do anything right. You don’t have any option either. Really. You don’t have any way to support them. (Miaoli)

From the above two stories, two major issues emerge that are also indicated in Ng’s (1996) study: the first issue is the use of a quantitative approach to assess immigrant clients who are real people and thus cannot be encapsulated by a statistical category; the second issue is that it is problematic to use objective knowledge to attend to subjective experiences. In working with clients, ISWs have learned to privilege requests for outcomes measurement over the needs of clients, and their learning thus functions to serve the needs of the institutional textual ruling power; they have become gears in the outcome measurement machine.

The textual ruling relations craft exemplary subjects who embody the normalization of ISWs’ agency of learning; ruling them to submit these agencies to organically become part of the governmental apparatus, to uphold and maintain this function as the core of their learning and institutional social order. ISAs internalize ruling relations to the institutional operation and configure intertextual coordination. In this coordination, ISWs become textually sanctioned actors and agents to produce accountability in “interconnected institutional discourses, rationalities, and coordinative procedures” to contribute to institutional sustainability (McCoy, 2014, p. 246).
5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I started by examining formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities and learning experiences of ISWs that highlighted their professional development training, job orientation, shadowing, and staff meetings as the centre for creating their own workplace learning in their work adaptation. Next, I contested the concept of culture by stressing how individual workers integrate their cultural heritage to a culturally diverse workplace like ISAs, and how this learning of culture is embedded in different social relationships. The last section investigated the textual ruling power of outcomes measurement from the federal government that shapes and produces ideal ISWs in the workplace in the translocal settings.

From the presentation of the above findings, it is clear that ISWs’ workplace learning is constituted between people, work, and power. The first two factors are intertwined and interdependent, and they stem from individuals’ cognition, reflection, action, and the cultural and historical self, which allow them to selectively engage with the negotiation work participation and the changing work requirements (Billett & Pavlova, 2005). Textual ruling power operates through a translocal institutional discourse where knowledge and learning are formulated in the textual ruling power that formalizes ISAs accountabilities to become state apparatus. ISWs internalize the textual ruling power to their daily practices, and their learning is framed to serve to produce ruling working knowledge in translocal institutional coordination. As such, these three factors emphasize that ISWs’ learning is situated in the complex interplays of contextual practices, which are translocally entangled within everyday social, material, cultural, ruling, and institutional configurations.
Chapter Six: Intersectional Experience in Transition to Work, Workplace Subjectivity, and Textual Ruling Relations

This chapter discusses my findings on participants’ intersectional experiences in transitioning to work and becoming ISWs, as well as on how textual ruling power produces the governed self. This chapter consists of three sections. First, in discussing participants’ transition to work, I apply intersectionality theory, focusing on how race, gender, and class inform participants’ experiences in institutional complexes. In exploring participants’ becoming ISWs, I consider their trajectory entering the immigrant services field and the learning they experienced in ISAs. In this section, I adopt the notion of workplace subjectivity to unpack how these ISWs’ workplace subjectivities are situated in their trajectories of becoming ISWs and the learning opportunities that are available to them as ISWs. The last part of this chapter aims to analyze the textual ruling fabric of outcomes measurement within translocal institutional relations. Employing Foucault’s concept of governmentality and connecting it with discussions of ruling power in IE, I elucidate how the textual ruling power in ISAs is formed, developed, and distributed, and how it constitutes ideal ISWs.

6.1 Theorizing Intersectionality to Immigrants’ Transition to Work

Intersectionality theory addresses how social categories such as race, class and gender interact, amplify, and shape people’s lived experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As presented in Chapter 4, immigrants encounter many barriers in their transitions to work, and these barriers discriminate against immigrants, informed as they are through the intersection of race, gender, and class, and thus create and shape their experience of settling in Canada. In this section, I analyze how race, gender, and class, respectively, intersect in shaping immigrants’ experiences in order to underscore the complexity, ambiguity, and multiplicity of immigrants’ integration into
the Canadian labour market. It needs to be pointed out that my intention is not to separately investigate race, gender, and class as individual social categories. Instead, in each section, I focus on one form of social dominance (racism, sexism, poverty) and align it with intersectional social identities to examine how each of these three forms of social dominance intersectionally shape immigrants’ integration into the local workforce and produce social inequality in institutional complexes. Moreover, it needs to be highlighted that the concept of institutional complexes in my research refers to the social organization in labour market operation including governmental credential recognition assessment systems and employment-related hiring practices. Thus, the analysis of my findings in this section emphasizes race, gender, and class as core concepts are rooted in these series of institutional complexes.

6.1.1 Racism and Racialization in Securing Employment

Race is a determining form that produces racism while racialization is a process that deepens racism based on individuals’ race. With racism, racial differences are primary traits and capacities that produces an inherent superiority or inferiority (Schaefer, 2008), while racialization stratifies people according to the social construction of race (Brigham, 2013). One of my major findings is that my participants experienced denigration, devaluation, and deskilling racialized practices that are ingrained in institutional complexes of credential assessment organizations as well as in the Canadian labour market. These multifaceted racialized practices obstruct these immigrants from successfully entering the host labour market. Many of my respondents, such as Amanca, Bijara, Enoca, Helat, Kemi, and Yifeng, all indicated that credential recognition is fundamental in a job search, and the credential assessment process presents two layers of struggles to them: 1) The prolonged credential recognition process meant that participants often had to live without any income. 2) Even when their credentials were
recognized, immigrants’ prior learning and work experience was denied or devalued. These two layers of struggle are what Guo (2013) described as a “glass gate” that blocks immigrants’ professional employment opportunities by devaluing their credentials and work experiences. This “glass gate” in the credential recognition system captures institutional complexity, serving as a discriminatory racialized practice that identifies immigrants as lacking in Canadian work experience and systemically filters and discounts immigrants’ skills and knowledge.

In exploring labour market ambiguity, my findings emphasize that participants faced various dimensional challenges in their job searches. Participants also experienced the humiliation of being denied access to the professional community their prior work experiences should have afforded them. This challenge aligns with Guo’s (2013) “glass door” effect, which, in failing to completely translate their skills into job opportunities in Canada, denies immigrants entrance to highly paid professional communities. While facing external denigration and devaluation to secure employment in the Canadian labour force, as my findings reveal, immigrants internalized these racialized labour market practices by adopting an “aim-low” approach. Although my participants who had work experience in management and professional occupations sought low-skilled positions, many of them still found it difficult to get interview opportunities or to secure employment after an interview. Yifeng, for instance, described her application as a “needle in the ocean,” having never received any response from potential employers. Consequently, these immigrants had to move between various part-time labour jobs or live in conditions of poverty to survive in Canada.

To trace the roots of non-recognition of foreign credentials for immigrant professional social phenomenon, Guo (2009) argued that the epistemological misperceptions of difference and knowledge pertain to a deficit model that conflates immigrants’ knowledge as “different”
and “deficient.” As a result, professional knowledge has been racialized based on people’s nationality and ethnicity so that immigrant professionals, particularly those from developing countries, are considered deficient, incompatible, inferior, and invalid (Guo, 2009, 2010, 2015). This analysis echoes the experiences of many of my participant, such as Bijara, Changen, Junting, and Yifeng, who are all internationally trained teachers and who indicated that the prolonged credential assessment process was infeasible when weighed against the immediate needs of their families. Yifeng pointed out the denigration of skilled immigrants’ cultural and social values within the Canadian job market, and she described the long process of credential assessment as an “excuse” to place highly skilled immigrants in precarious forms of employment. In Enona’s narrative, her friends who had worked as professionals in their home countries had to delete their highest education, deskilling and devaluing themselves, in order to find entry-level work. Hence, Guo (2010) proposed a paradigm shift away from a one-size-fits-all criterion for measuring immigrants’ credentials and experience, which preserves the hegemony of capitalism by manipulating immigrants’ access to a profession, to an approach to credential recognition that acknowledges and embraces differences as legitimate and constructive interpretations of human investment.

My findings reveal that racialized immigrants’ foreign credentials, job skills, and work experience are devalued and denigrated based on the colour of their skin. This confirms Guo’s (2015) findings on employment market transitions of recent immigrants in Canada, which assert that racialization remains central to the operation of a hierarchical skills regime, with skin colour rather than qualifications as its basis for discrimination. Imani, in my study, stressed that the ambiguity of his skin colour rather than his knowledge and skills worked to preclude him from securing employment after job interviews. My participants difficulties of finding a niche in the
Canadian labour market conforms with Guo’s (2015) inquiry that it is the “colour” of the skill associated with immigrants’ skin colour rather than the skill itself that triggers the deskilling and devaluation. The series of racialized hiring practices manifest in institutional complexes regulate which ethnicities have the prerogative to racialize others and which ethnicities are racialized (Kelly, 1999; Winant, 2004), which ethnicities have the power to define “what is normal and natural, acceptable and desirable” (Fleras, 2018a, p. 213). Brigham (2013) concurred that this analysis further exposes that racism exists in different forms and contexts, and it is perpetuated by “ideological and epistemological agendas” (p. 122), locating immigrants in a certain racialized social construction that stifles their workforce opportunities and outcomes.

To further examine the role of race in in Canadian hiring practices, it is important to note that immigrants’ labour market integration plays out in institutional complexes in a colonial context. According to Maitra and Guo (2019), the racialized power of “whiteness” and Eurocentrism precipitates devaluation and denigration. Due to their racialized backgrounds, immigrants’ knowledge and skills are derecognized based on the Canadian standard. This devaluation of immigrants’ knowledge and skills unveils the tension that metropolis societies experience with a growing number of racialized immigrants from former colonies entering and occupying metropolitan space. Connecting to my participants’ challenges in their transition to work, Amanca, Changen, Mahalia, Miaoli, and Xingdi all discussed the process of assimilating their knowledge to the Europocentric standard. Changen, in particular, noted that successfully finding employment in Canada was bound to an immigrant’s ability to forget who they are and to the application of the Canadian standard to their lives. In the same vein, Xingdi mentioned that to live in Canada is to participate in a social selection; it is a game for those who follow the Canadian patterns. Given these findings in my study, Maitra and Guo (2019) further explained
that the metropolis redraws *an abyssal line* in reacting to the shrinking space and through a racialized lens consider immigrants’ knowledge and skills to be inferior and incompatible. In light of my findings, it needs to be noted that assimilation does not merely aim to integrate these immigrants according to a Canadian standard but to mould their transition to work in an institutional process, producing a social sequence that channels them into a certain racialized social order.

6.1.2 *Gendered Experience of Work and Power*

The findings of my study illustrate that female immigrants face more complex gendered, racialized, and structural barriers in their transition to work. The sexism that female immigrants face in these barriers are informed by both race and gender. Compared to male immigrants, female immigrants, who landed as immigrant dependent, find it far more difficult to locate themselves in the host labour market. This finding echoes that of Man’s (2004) study on Chinese female immigrants’ work and migration experiences in Canada. Her research asserted that the male is often designated as the principal applicant to maximize their opportunity for immigration admission. As a consequence, the majority of these women came to Canada under the family immigrant status as dependents of their husbands, who are the principal applicants. The gendering of principal and non-principal applicants results in treating women as less desirable due to institutionalized, racialized, and gendered practices embedded in the immigration process. As such, their fluidity and flexibility as human capital is prohibited in the complexity of these patriarchal power relations and are deepened through the stratification of domination, inclusion, exclusion, subordination, and marginalization.

Though some of these female immigrants are highly educated and highly skilled, my female participants were situated in a continual cycle of denigration of prior work and learning,
underemployment, and unemployment. Their social labour assets were ignored and devalued, and they were marginalized as either dependent immigrants who were supposed to be unemployed or as ideal candidates for, that is, individuals willing to accept, unskilled and precarious employment. According to the sexist practices which exist at the intersection of “gender is raced”—these women are dependent immigrants—and “race is gendered”—these women’s skills are devalued (Jones, Misra, & McCurley, 2015, p. 2)—immigrant women are positioned to accept these practices because “that’s how it is” or “that’s how it should be” (Ng, 1995, p.36). To this end, these immigrant women report “feeling uncomfortable” with and “less confident” about their language or professional skills in entering the local labour force. This self-doubt did not reflect the reality of the level of skills and knowledge that they obtained, but was a product of the social structure of power, leaving them limited and precarious space to be accepted as valuable subjects in Canadian society.

In order to integrate notions of power into the discussion of gender and race, I focus on how neoliberal institutional complexes shape female immigrants’ feminized and racialized experiences in their transition to work. As praxis, institutional complexes operate according to an ideological practice that transforms the image of “immigrant women” into hegemonic organization and the production of institutional racism and sexism, which shapes their work and lives (Ng, 1992; Ng & Shan, 2010). This mode of governance has conjured a racial and gender contract in a contradicted site where immigrant women are formalized to the interdigitated role under the neoliberal power, within which the spaces to negotiate their intersectional identities are circumscribed. As such, many of my female participants tried various means to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to be competitive in the labour force, while others struggled to deskill themselves by erasing their prior learning and professional experiences. Thus, immigrant
women are geared to be submissive participants who ironically not only merely participate in but also consolidate social hierarchy and social segregation.

Immigrant women in my research reported that their work opportunities were considerably impacted by the “motherhood” label. All of my female participants were immigrant mothers, and they discussed their familial obligations and responsibilities. Studies have stressed that immigrant women struggle with the gendered expectations and family obligations that come with motherhood, with the tension between family and work, and this ultimately contributes to mental depression (Miszkurka, Goulet, & Zunzunegui, 2010; Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2018).

Helat, for instance, experienced domestic violence when her husband prevented her from attending language training, triggering a plight of both physical and mental torture. Instead of living passively under this familial depression, however, Hetal translated it into an empowering self-motivation to upgrade her skills in the service of her child’s future. Additionally, it is vital to note that all immigrant mothers in my study were willing to yield their career opportunities to their duties to their family. In the stories of Juting, Pefals, and Yifeng, they all highlighted a willingness to shoulder their accountability as immigrant mothers, as many of them stated “I’m a mother first” or “I’m here because of a better life for my kid(s).” This echoes with what Zhu (2016) referred to as the concept of “ideal immigrant mothers,” who are vigorously engaged in seeking employment opportunities to secure their position while being proficient in family-centered practices. Therefore, the dilemma of underemployment or unemployment they encountered seemed acceptable, as these immigrant mothers were supposed to be ready manage and maintain positive familial relationships in their post-migration life.

Patriarchal power relations contribute to the production of ideal immigrant mothers. In intersectionality, patriarchy is a fluid and shifting set of social relations in which men oppress
women by different degrees of power and control (Collins, 2002), and it is conceived of as a cultural idea or as interpersonal domination (Mojab & Carpenter, 2019). Premji and Lewchuk (2014) found that some immigrant women’s daily practices are embedded in gendered household relations, including the high load of household and caregiving work, the insufficiency of supportive male partners, and the paucity of affordable childcare. Some immigrant women prioritize their family obligations before working (Hon, Sun, Suto, & Forwell, 2011; Shan, 2009c), as was mentioned by Amanca, Helat, Lihua, Pefals, and Yifeng, while others experience unequal family relations that aggravate the burden of social adjustment between work, work-related learning, and family (Maitra & Shan, 2007). As a result, the implications for these immigrant women’s work-life balance constitutes varying layers of risks that shape their career path as less important or undevelopable (Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2018).

6.1.3 Class and Poverty

Class can be an artificial, statistical group that does not have any life of its own or any coherence because of the structure of inequality that exists within it (Porter, 2015). When approaching class in intersectionality theory, Anthias (2012) attempted to radically move away from monolithic understandings of social division that interrelate social relations and people’s lives because they are considered to be “mutually constitutive” (p. 126) in experience and practice. Therefore, rather than delineating people’s objective and subjective demographics or social divisions, I understand class as individuals’ perceptions of life experiences and established social relations in society. My discussion of class is closely linked to poverty. Poverty refers to the economic condition of people who live in low-income households, work under poor conditions, or are unemployed or on welfare, and those who mainly rely on government assistance (Ross & Clarence, 2015). Poverty can also be defined as the condition of those who
are in economic exclusion, with “disparities in income and wage divides, precarious employment, and wealth and asset deprivation” (Gingrich & Lightman, 2015, p. 4). To reiterate, I identified poverty among my participants in five ways (see Chapter four): working survival jobs because of precarious living conditions, relying on savings to avoid taking survival jobs, sustaining lives by government funding, working a labour job with basic salary, and having very little savings and minimal income from an entry-level job. It is clear that these five precarious living conditions contribute to precarious employment as many participants were underemployed or unemployed. More importantly, it is vital to note that these impoverished living conditions are closely related to race and gender relations, which act together to contribute to the poverty that many immigrants, especially workers, experience.

The term “racialization of poverty” underscores the emergence of “structural socio-economic features that pre-determine the disproportionate incidence of poverty among racialized group members” (Galabuzi, 2005, p. 16). In other word, immigrants who are culturally and racially distinct from the Euro-Canadian population are more likely “to be subjected to possible views and discriminatory acts” (Kazemipur & Halli, 2000, p. 71), which leads to a significant feature of the Canadian labour force: the racialization of poverty. This analysis illustrates the historical patterns of racialized discrimination in the Canadian workforce and the entrenchment of privileged access to economic resources by powerful ethnicities, resulting in social and economic marginalization and polarizations in income and wealth in Canada (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). Likewise, Kazemipur and Halli (2000) used the term “colour of poverty” to capture how racialized immigrants are more likely to experience precarious working conditions compared to the non-racialized immigrant population. Their study demonstrated how the odds of poverty among racialized immigrants increased due to lower levels of return-to-quality conditions such
as length of stay in Canada, education, language barriers, and type of employment, along with the penalizing effects of such factors as racial origin and immigrant status. It is clear that these factors intersectionally manifest a classed and racialized social structure that determines poverty in racialized minorities as this phenomenon aggravates social exclusion, which interacts with people’s daily experiences including powerlessness, marginalization, voicelessness, vulnerability, and insecurity (Galabuzi, 2008). As such, structural inequality—characterized by the processes of group or individual isolation within societal institutions—engenders a sense of exclusion, limited options, diminished life chances, and related health and violence concerns.

Moving on from the “racialization of poverty,” the intersection of class, race, and gender is also characterized by a “feminization of poverty, which sheds light on the feminization of work (Evans, 2010; Galabuzi, 2008; Labadie-jackson, 2008; Lee, 1999). The feminization of poverty associates women’s entry into the labour force or the changing gender composition of jobs with their social class (Labadie-jackson, 2008). It also refers to labour subcontracting toward women, whereby labour-intensive, lower-wage, more informal activities are given to women workers (Cranford et al., 2003; Standing, 1989). The mode of feminization can be understood as “the production and reproduction of life through the wage relation” (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019, p. 4), in which surplus value from waged labour for producing capital has the ultimate goal of social production. In my research, female immigrants are victimized as those individuals who commodify themselves to provide cheap and docile labour under insecure and exploitive conditions (Ng, 1999b). This echoes with what Yifeng pointed out in her interview: “We didn’t have a choice but to live in poverty, because we are immigrants and we are women.” This systematic social production is dependent on the feminization and racialization of poverty and places immigrant women in positions of vulnerability and insecurity, resulting in poverty
(Galabuzi, 2008; Saraswati, 2000). Thus, to my female participants, class does not merely signal economic failure. Instead, it is an intersectional oppression formed on the basis of racialized and gendered social constructions, and it is also an institutional suppression ingrained in a social reproduction based on the historical and political social organization. It is these two layers of relational inequality that structurally filters racialized female immigrants as oppressive targets and existences from the host society, and they manifest the institutional complexes that translocally form and shape individuals’ experiences in the local settings.

It becomes clear that immigrants’ transition to work is intersected with notions of race, gender, and class, which are interconnectedly embedded in the social organization of the institutional complexes. Though confronted with intersectional barriers in their transition to work, my participants’ narratives fill a vital gap in indicating that they tried different ways to remain active and motivated in the labour market. In the next section of this chapter I discuss the becoming of ISWs and their workplace learning in ISAs.

6.2 The Becoming of ISWs

This section concentrates on the workplace learning experience of ISWs. Specifically, I adopt the notion of subjectivity of workplace learning to examine the becoming of ISWs. Based on my findings, three forms of subjectivities emerged, which are discussed below. Constructive subjectivity refers to the identification and exercising of certain social assets that ISWs possessed by virtue of their transnational cultural backgrounds and that ISAs helped identify as assets to enrich ISAs’ services for immigrant newcomers. Professional subjectivity refers to the subjectivities my ISW participants constructed through formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities provided by ISAs. And cultural subjectivity refers to the sense of self that
ISWs develop from learning in a workplace environment that claims to value cultural diversity and paradoxically seeks to produce workers who embody normative Canadian workplace values.

Different disciplines define and apply the concept of “subjectivity” in different ways. I define subjectivity, as it relates to workplace learning in this study, as the sense of self that individuals develop and learn through their relationships to their work activities and among their co-workers. According to Billett (2006a, 2011), workplace subjectivity is the product of the following factors:

1. The exercise of personal agency in transforming cultural practices through participation and learning, understood ontologically and epistemologically in terms of both individuals’ experiences and the relationship between individuals and their social worlds.

2. The negotiation between objective and subjective integration, understood in terms of psychology as an account of thinking and acting that grants individuals’ cognition to learning and in terms of sociology and philosophy in terms of the importance of the social structures in which individuals navigate the interaction between the subjective learning autonomy and the objective knowledge.

3. The participatory practices that individuals adopt in the context of their workplace affordance, which is to say, all the possible practices offered to them in their workplace.

4. The relational interdependence of individuals, that is, the degree to which individuals think of themselves in terms of their relationships to others in their workplace environment or workplace culture.

5. The transformation of cultural practices in the workplace through the adoption of new technologies, artifacts, and requirements.
Based on these five factors, Billett (2006a) highlighted subjectivity as “manifestation and projection of a sense of self” (p. 3), which compromises the conscious and non-conscious conceptions, dispositions, and procedures that direct individuals’ agency and intentionality to different degrees and in varying directions through engaging in work and learning throughout their working life. Workplace subjectivity is socially constructed in work and learning. It stresses that workplace learning subjectivity acknowledge a broader set of personal workplace factors that shape individuals’ learning and work-related development so that workplace learning appears to be mediated by workers’ subjectivities.

Fenwick (2006) offered a different perspective on subjectivity, focusing on how the intervention of the subject influences the formation of subjectivity. To Fenwick, subjectivity can be “a space of possibilities” (p. 29) that creates a subject’s actions or choices to intervene with symbols, concepts, ideas, and activities in a situated moment in the workplace, and it can be formed in specific social, historical and cultural practices and relationships, within which individuals choose among various diverse possibilities of behaviour and self-enunciation (Fenwick, 2008a). Furthermore, Fenwick (2006) incorporated power into her analysis of subjectivity, contending that “subjectivity is produced by power and acted on by power” (p. 27). Subjectivity can be exercised within different forms of power, and it can also rupture power structures, while power simultaneously engenders emergent and individualized subjectivity production. It needs to be pointed out that ISWs’ workplace subjectivity is neither linear nor fixed, the production of their ISW workplace subjectivity is an ongoing process through which agency, experience, and action are interwoven.

Many scholars have pointed out that subjectivity and identity are interconnected. Billett (2006b) emphasized the association between subjectivity and identity, arguing that both have
personal and societal connotations. Specifically, identity is a product of the self presented to the social world and refers to the social practices with which an individual wish to be associated. As such, subjectivity and identity are both associated with individuals’ conceptions of their social worlds. Alfred (2006) pointed out that identities can be “multiple, fluid, and contradictory,” and the construction of identity helps individuals negotiate spaces or contexts and impacts the perception of subjectivity (p. 221). However, Fenwick (2006) rejected any connection between subjectivity and identity, arguing that identity is “an image” or “a symbolic code” that the subject desires to process or to identify with (p. 26), whereas subjectivity is “continually constituted and re-signified,” and although it is derived from practices of identification and identity in cultural discourses, it exists in the presence of joint activities, encounters with others, and work internationality (Fenwick, 2006c, p. 27). In my research, the relationship between subjectivity and identity facilitates my understanding of how ISWs’ identities can be an essential factor in their workplace participation, collectively impacting the perception of their subjectivities in the workplace.

Subjectivity is inextricably linked to and mutually articulated through intersections of race, gender, class, and power. To analyze subjectivity formation, it is necessary to focus on specific cites and locations where the social processes by which individuals are subjected to particular discourses and practices occur (Calás, Ou, & Smircich, 2012; Staunes, 2003). And to examine subjectivity formation through an intersectional lens, a multisystemic approach is necessary in order to understand how privilege and oppression are structured at the macrolevel as well as how social categories—race, gender, class—become reified and even transcended on more micro-interpersonal levels (Alfred, 2006). Attending to the role of class in subjectivity formation is especially vital as class structures the dialectical tensions between the acquisition
and distribution of the means of existence, on the one hand, and levels of differentiation and expertise, on the other (Katz, 2001; Porter, 2015). Class can be a primary actor to construct intersectional identities and subjectivity as this interdependence is fluidly engaged with the pursuit of material through symbolic social activities (Soni-Sinha, 2012; Nightingale, 2011). Therefore, the sensibility of identity relating to the construction of subjectivity are collectively interwoven through the discursive and material practices of gendering and racialization, directly and indirectly shaping individual experience of economic hardship. This process constructs individuals’ lived experiences within structural power so that it is implicated in the production of subordination, segregation, and stratification (Billett & Somerville, 2004; Nash, 2008).

6.2.1 Constructive Subjectivity as Social Asset to ISAs

In my study, my respondents’ constructive subjectivity is developed in their trajectory of becoming ISWs. A growing literature has indicated that ISAs have played an essential role in facilitating immigrants’ labour market integration. One of the prominent discussions emphasizes that immigrant organizations assist immigrants’ participation in mainstream society and that they function as a transitional entity to accommodate diversity and problems confronting immigrants from racialized minority backgrounds (Guo & Guo, 2016; Ko, 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2005b). In this context, these organizations facilitate immigrants to seek their autonomy for subjectivity reconstruction. Affiliations with ISAs actively help immigrants to build confidence for employment preparation through instrumental and informational support (Thomas, 2015), and their involvement in professional bridging programs establish career potentials by using the knowledge and transferrable skills immigrants bring with them to Canada (McCoy & Masuch, 2007). Guo and Guo (2009) argued that ethnic immigrant service organizations provided accessible learning resources that prepared immigrants to be independent and productive.
citizens. In accordance with the above studies, it is clear that the significance of ISAs is not merely in supporting immigrants’ labour market integration but also in helping immigrants, through interaction and participation in ISA programs, to recognize and build their agency and potential.

To further unpack *constructive subjectivity*, it is crucial to understand what subjectivity means to the immigrant population. Alfred (2006) described migrant subjects as transnational agents, who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language, and can negotiate between multiple discourses at work sites. As my participants, who are racialized immigrants, endeavoured to integrate into the Canadian labour market, they were confronted with the institutional complexes that filtered them from successfully entering the local work force. Oftentimes, their subjectivities as migrants were ignored, denied, or devalued in the labour market operation. Through varying ways of being involved with ISAs, these immigrants learned to play an active participatory role, which allowed them to construct “positive identities” and to renegotiate their subjectivities as constructive social assets, which in turn enabled them to view their subjectivities as employment advantages in the opportunities afforded in the workplace.

Subjectivity, as Billet (2008) explained, is the

…learning realized by humans as they deploy their capacities, interests and values in their work activities. These things are not only exercised by a social practice. Indeed, there seems to be no common or objective basis for how work is enacted, because it is ultimately a subjective experience.” (pp. 46-47)

As this quote suggests, an individual’s personal ontogenetic legacy is determined by their life experiences, which shape their epistemological self-conception in relation to how they work, how they learn, and what they learn. More importantly, personal agency and social suggestion in the workplace are enacted in equal parts or ways that are equally shared to reconfigure
individuals’ intentionality of their work. Gibb, Hamdon, and Jamal (2008) underlined that ISAs can play an instrumental role in affording spaces for immigrants to negotiate their identities and create workplace knowledge or conceptions. In their engagements with ISAs, immigrants were invited to follow their dual trajectories as who they are in their home countries and who they are now working as ISWs in ISAs. In doing so, they constituted their individual ontogenetic legacy in their life historical experiences in epistemologically reconstructing their self-conception while involved with ISAs activities. Put differently, ISAs created inclusive spaces to develop and enrich the agency of immigrants and supported them in learning to understand their advantaged and valuable self, which ultimately constituted their sense of constructive subjectivity to become ISWs. Thus, these ISWs became constructive subjects who were active and intentional agents within the ISAs.

In connecting the investigation of intersectionality to my findings, it is also important to analyze how the formation of constructive subjects is interwoven with ISWs’ intersectional identities, especially class. The perceived racial backgrounds of immigrants, as well as their social capital, marketable skills, and work experience, contribute to the production of a certain type of class relations. ISAs play a fundamental rule in producing these relations, constituting immigrants’ class through daily workplace activities and stratifying immigrants’ capital to preserve a capitalist economy in the Canadian labour market (Ko, 2017; Ng, 1996; Thomas, 2018). This analysis echoes with Yifeng’s statement that “If we are ISWs, we will be ISWs forever because it can be hard to transfer our skills to other occupations.” And although other ISWs, such as Bijara, Kemi, Mahsa, and Pefals, are satisfied working in their comfort zone as ISWs, their previous professional skills are not transferable to their work as ISWs. In this way,
these immigrant women are given a certain class status and actively participate as constructive subjects in the production and reproduction of class in Canadian society.

6.2.2 Developing Professional Subjectivity in the Workplace

The development of professional subjectivity is rooted in the professional learning that my participants experienced in the workplace. Professional learning is constituted by workplace knowledge transmission in the form of formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Fenwick, 2006a; Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, & Morciano, 2015). Professional learning opportunities direct ISWs in establishing their professional subjectivity. In light of my findings, professional learning highlights the connection between the individual and the environment, underscoring formulation of personal and professional growth as an integral component for individualized knowledge acquisition and construction.

Professional learning, in my research, contains formal credential-oriented learning, non-formal professional development training, and informal learning through such activities as shadowing and staff meetings. Formal and non-formal training and learning was mentioned by many of my participants, including Changen, Enona, Mahalia, Priya, and Samuel, who pointed out that these learning opportunities generated significant potential for knowledge acquisition to enhance their professional practices. In addition, one participant, Mahsa, expressed that her ISA tailored their learning requests and sent her to work-related training to fulfill her learning needs. Based on their stories, these formal and non-formal learning opportunities represent effective means to achieve practical comprehension of the changing dynamics of immigration and the needs of newcomers. However, upgrading ISWs’ professional skills not only serves to enhance their workplace practices; it also serves the goal of achieving organizational demands.
In workplace learning, formal, non-formal, and informal learning are indispensable. Formal workplace learning can not be narrowly restricted to a physical location or a fixed pedagogical approach that provides workers with surface-level skills (Jacobs & Park, 2009). Rather, formal learning provides participatory learning spaces where individual align their self-directed learning needs with knowledge acquisition and skill improvement to achieve vocational goals (Billett, 2002). Additionally, through individuals’ workplace interaction, the semi-structured or unstructured learning occasions afforded by non-formal learning generate self-initiated, deliberate, experiential, conscious or unconscious learning moments for knowledge creation and production (Eraut, 2000; Hrimech, 2005). According to Sambrook (2005), these three types of learning can be understood in the concepts of learning at work and learning in work, which collaboratively produce professional subjectivity in the context of my research. Learning at work focuses on both formal credentialed programs and courses and non-formal planned trainings and courses with educational and professional purposes. Learning in work is associated with more informal processes such as meetings and discussions, observing, asking questions, and problem solving.

The production of professional subjectivity is both objective and subjective insofar as its construction is the product of transmitting objective work information and knowledge learned in formal, non-formal, and informal settings to subjective cognitive knowledge. Sejtkanova, Maslennikova, Gryaznukhin, Leontev, and Mamadaliev (2018) identified four professional consciousness at work in the development of professional subjectivity:

- Moral (principles, honesty, responsibility, justice);
- Intellectual (independence, flexibility and criticality of thinking, observation);
- Character (perseverance, commitment, self-organization);
- Psychophysiological (endurance, mental endurance, sensitivity). (p. 377)
Based on this analysis, it becomes clear that professional-learning activities provide learning components for the professional consciousness to connect the subjective self in social space to cope with individuals’ work demands. This analysis demonstrates the impacts of reinforcing subjects’ personal agency at work in order to create continuous professional development in workers.

Furthermore, professional subjectivity encompasses three aspects of self-inquiry: post-structural self-inquiry, in which individuals selectively engage and negotiate with the social suggestions embedded in intentions to develop and maintain their ontological trajectory (Billett, 2006c); cognitive learning, which relates to individual critical reflection (Fenwick, 2010); and the integration of individual’s experiences into knowledge creation—translating objective knowledge learning to individuals’ workplace learning intentionality (Billett, 2006b). Thus, professional subjectivity refers to how an individual constitutes learning by converting objective knowledge in the workplace through reflection and integration of their own ontogenetic legacy to epistemological knowledge reconstruction. In other words, the formation of professional subjectivity is derived from a given work-related arrangement to propose a direct role for rebuilding an autonomous sense of self, configuring workers’ learning through participation and interaction at work.

Connecting the analysis of professional subjectivity to my research findings, formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities create capacity for ISWs to reflect on their own lived experiences and skills so that they can make connections between objective knowledge and subjective learning, reconstructing professional learning and their understanding of the self, and apply them to their daily work practice. More specifically, professional subjectivity is situated in the process of knowledge acquisition and reconstitution at both the organizational level and the
individual level. At the organizational level, ISAs provide objective knowledge to enrich and enhance ISWs’ professional skills and practices. Concurrently, at the individual level, formal, non-formal, and informal learning empowers ISWs to link what they learn in these three settings to knowledge reconstruction by implementing the individualized understanding of knowledge to make work achievements. Meanwhile, another layer of analysis at the individual level is that constructive subjectivity and professional subjectivity are closely linked to the formation of class. Constructive subjectivity can be a process of subjectivity construction rooted in the engagement with ISAs, locating immigrants to a certain social class as ISWs. Upon becoming ISWs, professional subjectivity can be further reinforced through series of professional learning workplace activities, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning, intensifying class reproduction through this ideological construction.

6.2.3 Crafting Cultural Subjectivity through Cultural and Relational Learning in an ISA Workplace

In workplace learning, culture is accorded a privileged position to “structure the way people think, feel and act in organizations” (Gay, 1996, p. 41), involving workers’ own analysis of the self to articulate the relationship between the complex, collective, and contested nature of a workplace where workers intervene in their own learning (Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Somerville, 2015). A culturally diverse workplace culture is characterized by individuals who integrate their learning in diversity initiatives related to ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and physical disabilities in the workforce into their workplace practices in order to collaboratively achieve goals (Fine, 1990; Martin, 2014). In this ISA workplace learning environment, part of my findings indicate that workers’ culture and their learning within diverse social relationships form their cultural subjectivity.
In connecting cultural and relational learning in a culturally diverse workplace like an ISA, workplace, Billett (2006a) referred to the role of culture in workplace learning as the cultural development, which generates learning outcomes between the individual (the cognitive outcomes based on their personal experiences) and the culture (the remaking of cultural practices based on the interaction with work and others). In thinking through the relationship between culture and subjectivity, Billett (2008) described the relationship between individual learning and cultural change as interdependent, resulting from personal and social factors comprising norms, practices, and techniques that are derived from the historic cultural enactments of the workplace. This historic cultural enactment forms subjectivity in two ways: historical cultural experiences construct individuals’ subjectivities and mediate their interpretation of the self and interactions with others in the workplace. The inquiry of culture in workplace participation and social relationships facilitates ISWs in negotiating their understandings of themselves and others, allowing for new ways of knowing, thinking, and learning to emerge. In this way, this process can also be reciprocal, remaking culturally derived practices and developing cultural and relational learning, constituting cultural subjectivity.

In my research, cultural subjectivity manifests in how ISWs understand their cultural self and create learning with others through a cultural lens. Many of my participants, including Lihua, Kemi, Mahalia, Maya, Pefals, and Samuel, indicated that culture acts as a mediation creating learning in the workplace. From participating in daily work activities to engaging with ISWs from diverse cultural backgrounds, this range of work events provide opportunities for participants to make connections between their own cultures and those of other individuals, be they other ISWs or immigrant clients. Through these diverse cultural interactions in ISAs, these ISWs experienced a renegotiation of work engagement, collaboration, and interaction, enriching
and developing their cultural and relational learning to become more embraced and more inclusive in a multicultural workplace.

Although these interactions with cultural others is one factor in the construction of cultural subjectivity and thus evidence of a culturally diverse workplace, the workplace culture of ISAs also, paradoxically, upholds Canadian normative workplace values through the promotion of dominant ways of communicating, interacting, behaving, and dressing. This promotion of the dominant culture devalues certain types of cultures, shifting the discussion from what culture means to an organization to what culture can do to the workers (Somerville, 2015). In other words, workplace culture demonstrates a practice of cultural-oriented power that shapes workers’ cultural subjectivities. Alfred (2006) highlighted a “bicultural” existence, examining immigrant workers who struggled with making sense of their own cultural dynamics, whose cultures are considered subordinated or marginalized cultures to a Eurocentric host workplace culture. This inquiry echoes Shan’s (2012) examination of “a competitive, masculine, and individualistic” engineering workplace culture, where Asian and Chinese engineers, who are supposedly from an emotional and relational culture, are neglected in the workplace. Both studies illustrate that workplace culture manifests a technology of corporate control used to subvert learners’ own cultural subjectivities in managing work and managing people (Solomon, 1999). In this inquiry of workplace culture, the ISA workplace is revealed to be a space where ISWs are socialized into compliance with dominant workplace values through their everyday participation and interaction, assimilating their cultural and racial values to the dominant and normative culture.

Cultural subjectivity can be shaped by the notion of cultural racism, also known as “differential racism” or “new racism.” Cultural racism engenders exclusion or discrimination
based on the difference of cultures, and racialized cultural groups are blessed or burdened by their cultural traits, which in the latter case are treated as cultural deficits. Moreover, cultural racism depicts culture as “an insurmountable obstacle” for racial minorities or “an insurmountable advantage” for dominant racial groups (Mukhopadhyay & Chua, 2008). Scholarly studies have highlighted how cultural racism in workplace learning perpetuates dominant culture narratives (Alfred, 2006; Hasford, 2016) or produces systemic discrimination in hiring and workplace promotion (Gilbert, Carr-Ruffino, Ivancevich, & Lownes-Jackson, 2003). My findings suggest that cultural racism is manifest in discriminatory practices that are based on workers’ cultures or ethnicities. These narratives shed light on how perception of cultural differences reconstructs a social doctrine so that some ISWs from certain cultures are supposed to or expected to act and behave in workplace.

My findings also suggest that cultural racism is exercised at the intersection of race, gender, and class. This intersectional cultural racism others some female ISWs from certain cultures as marginalized cultural subjects and disempowers their learning in the workplace. It becomes a racial and gendered ideology of inequality, resulting in the lack of voice or representation in decision-making positions or low-self-esteem and self-doubt, influencing ISWs access to work opportunities and engagement within different cultural relationships. Meanwhile, class plays a vital role in class-related environments, promoting differences in practices and values relating to cultural and ethnicity diversity (Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Schooler, Samuel, & Oates, 2004). Cultural subjectivity is constituted through “socio-cultural hierarchies and power dimensions that produce complex relations of inclusion, exclusion, domination, and subordination” (Egeland & Gressgard, 2007, p. 207). The intersections of race, gender, along with the power of class has been developed as a form of doctrine, ingrained in individuals’
historical, racial, cultural experiences, triggering socio-cultural stratification and power relations in the workplace and reproducing marginalized ISWs’ *cultural subjectivities* in the ISA workplace.

My findings suggest that cultural and relational learning is nested in the structure of power relations in workplace culture, which Spencer and Kelly (2013) refer to as managerial power in employment relations and hierarchies of control and power in profit relations. In the same vein, Fenwick (2008) further theorized these power relations in relation to the production of workers’ subjectivities from both a radical and a discursive point of view. From the radical point of view, the workplace is understood as a site of ideological struggle between the process of production and the exploitation of knowledge and labour. From the discursive point of view, power is seen as circulating through regimes of knowledge and discursive practices, and it is not controlled by particular people or institutions but is constantly created and readjusted through relations among people and practices, notions of what is normal and what is valuable. In terms of my findings, through the integration of the cultures of ISWs to ISA workplace culture, individuals sustain and interact with these power relations within their own culture and the ISA workplace culture, which further disciplines and represses their *cultural subjectivities* and learning opportunities in the workplace.

The preceding discussion reveals that workplace subjectivity can be constructively, professionally, and culturally oriented. ISWs’ workplace learning emphasizes the participation in work tasks and the fulfillment of outcomes measurement, which generates textual ruling power and becomes the nature of their daily work, it is therefore important to scrutinize how textual ruling power is deemed to be the essential knowledge that ISWs are required to manage in ISAs and how this process of learning constitutes *ideal* ISWs.
6.3 Governmentality and Textual Ruling Power

In this section, I first contextualize the connection between governmentality and IE, with a focus on power and power relations. Next, I use Foucault’s discourse of knowledge formation and workplace knowledge in IE to reinforce the discussion of how textual ruling power is a form of knowledge in the workplace and how it is distributed within institutional relations between IRCC and ISAs. The last part of the section stresses how this textual ruling power translocally shapes the local setting and ISWs’ workplace learning. Combining all three parts, I aim to analyze the formation of textual ruling power and how it translocally governs ISWs’ learning in workplace. It needs to be pointed out that the connection I make between Foucault governmentality and IE is done in order to scrutinize how the textual ruling power can shape ISWs’ learning in the production of ideal ISWs.

6.3.1 Understanding Governmentality and its Connections with IE

Governmentality combines the terms government and rationality, examining two types of power: 1) the techniques or practices addressed to individual subjects within particular local institutions, and 2) the techniques and practices for governing populations of subjects at the level of political sovereignty over an entire society (Gordon, 1991). Foucault first used the term “governmentality” in his 1978 lecture “Security, Territory, Population.” The term governmentality originally comes from the French adjective “governmental,” which, prior to Foucault, was the basis for “governmentality” as used by Roland Barthes in the 1950s to describe how “the government [was] presented by the national press as the essence of efficacy” (Barthes, 1989, p. 130). The term governmentality was later used by Foucault to emphasize a series of action forms and areas of practice that steer individuals and groups in complex ways (Foucault, 2007).
Governmentality can be a means to study power and its relations with people through the fundamentals of power mechanisms, including sovereign power, disciplinary power, and governmentality. Sovereign power refers to power over a territory and capital, and how that power rules individuals who live in that territory and controls territorial resources (Elden, 2007; Rabinow, 1984). Disciplinary power refers to hierarchy and the distribution of power that acts through individuals’ own freedom (Dean, 2010; Rose & Miller, 2010). And governmentality connects these two senses of power in the analysis of neoliberal governmentality, which integrates sovereign power over geographical location with the disciplining of the bodies of individuals to secure power over a whole population (Foucault, 2007). In other words, the discourse of power has shifted from a geographical location where individuals passively receive control to power distributed among populations so that individuals are instructed to govern themselves.

Analyzing Foucault’s governmentality with the notion of power and power relations allows me to pinpoint the essence of governmentality as threefold: First, power can be an influential force that impels governance in different settings to forge a “docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1978, p. 198). Second, governmentality illustrates the complex and contradictory array of practices enacted within and across diverse sites and how these practices orient individuals, shaping their behaviours in particular ways (Teghtsoonian, 2016). Third, in the neoliberal context, governmentality considers the thesis of “economization of the social” (Bröckling, Krasmann, & Thomas, 2011, p. 20) or “the economic approach to human behaviour” (Bröckling, 2011, p. 257) under the concept of neoliberal governmentality. Combining these three layers of analysis, the intended outcome of governmentality is to reorient state activity and social relations toward the economic,
constituting of a new human subject, who conceives of the self in terms of economic optimization and maximization (Martin & Waring, 2018).

The examination of governmentality is related to the examination of ruling power in institutional ethnography (IE) in the sense that both focus on everyday experiences and practices in local sites and the wider distribution of power and its relations to people. This distribution of power is referred to in IE as “ruling relations” and in governmentality as “governing.” To Smith (2005), power is situated in the translocal institutional relations that deliver social organization and social relations to local sites and individuals; its construction and distribution occurs reciprocally between multiple institutions and people. This conception of power is closely related to Miller and Rose’s (2008) discussion of how local and non-local “modes of managing, intervening and administering become modes of power to the extent that they are generalized and linked to a centre, or at least linked up with other comparable or similar modes” (p. 20). This examination of local and non-local processes of power traces how power linkages formed and connections were established to shape the local parts of economic and social life (Miller & Rose 2008, p. 21).

In addition to their conceptions of power, both governmentality and IE take individuals’ lived experiences as “problematic” in tracing the translocal social relations between state, organizations, and the people. They are both concerned with instituted models of self-knowledge and individuals’ history, and illustrate how individuals are formed by a desirable or indispensable objective knowledge and how it is established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts (Rabinow, 1997; Smith, 2005). In governmentality, Foucault developed technologies of the self and technologies of power to further pinpoint the complexity of translocal power. Technologies of the self are concerned with the rationality of governing: how individuals act on
themselves, what work should be carried out on the self, and how one should govern the self by performing actions, achieving objectives, and employing instruments (Foucault, 1991; Rabinow, 1997). *Technologies of power* are concerned with the practice of governing; the process of observing, monitoring, shaping, or controlling the behaviour of individuals situated within a range of social and economic institutions (Gordon, 1991, p. 3). Together, these two concepts of governmentality and IE aim to scrutinize a macro sense of power in individual’s lived experience and to analyze how this power operates on organizations and its translocal relations, coordinating individual practices.

The notion of discourse in IE is built from Foucault’s concept of discourse, and it stresses translocal relations coordinating the practices of individuals talking, writing, or reading in particular local places at particular times (Smith, 2005). Similarly, discourse to Foucault is rooted in textual language and it becomes a type of objective knowledge that leads to different forms of conduct within institutional sites within society (Rabinow, 1997). According to Foucault, discourse is “ways of talking” or a means of understanding systems of representation, and it entails textual passages that are connected and produce rules and practices to develop the social practices and interconnections between people (Hall, 2001, p. 72). Foucault asserts that discourse represents a range of statements or articulations that provide a language for talking about something at a particular historical juncture (Miller & Rose, 2008; Rabinow, 1984). Discourse contains two parts: how language is contextualized and developed, on the one hand, and how people implement constructed language into their practices. Thus, discourse demonstrates how texts or languages are articulated by institutions, how these textual-based languages normalize or regulate discourse in particular institutional settings, and how individual deploy these discourses from institutional texts and languages to articulate their practices and performances.
The similarities between IE and governmentality in terms of how they conceive of power, individuals’ lived experiences, and the discourse and social relations help me to conceptualize the ruling relations between the state, ISAs, and ISWs, and explore different patterns of learning based on the notion of outcomes measurement. As such, in this section, I will unpack the main concepts of governmentality and IE and integrate them in order to discuss how ISWs’ learning is organized and normalized by textual ruling power that produces ideal ISWs in the workplace.

6.3.2 The Production of Ideal ISWs

This section analyzes the key features of ideal ISWs who are produced through the social relations between the state and local ISAs sites. First, drawing on Foucault’s idea of discourse and knowledge, with a comparison to the idea of workplace knowledge in IE, I aim to examine how outcomes measurement (see Chapter 5) has become a knowledge discourse (in the language of governmentality) and ruling social relations (in the language of IE) to govern the conduct of individuals. By investigating outcomes measurement through this connection, it underlines how the state legitimizes its agenda to translocally produce ideal ISWs. The next section intends to scrutinize how ISWs’ learning has been organized and moulded through textual-mediated learning, pedagogical learning, and relational learning. Lastly, this section integrates governmentality into the inquiry of textual ruling power and its coordination to the production of ideal ISWs. By combining the concepts of Foucault and IE, I seek to investigate how textual ruling power is connected, distributed, and strengthened between institutions relations, shaping ISWs’ learning at the local site.

6.3.2.1 Textual Ruling Power between the State and ISWs

My findings indicate that outcomes measurement has been shifted from one of the basic institutional operations in ISAs to the most essential guiding textual language in ISAs’
organizational routine. My findings demonstrate reciprocal ruling relations between the outcomes of immigrants’ settlement and integration, outcomes of the IRCC funded programs, and these programs’ sustainability. In order to map the ruling relations between state, ISAs, and ISWs, I construct a relational chart to demonstrate these ruling relations below.

Figure 3: The Construction of Ruling Relations between the State, ISAs, and ISWs

This chart indicates that the ruling relations between state, ISAs, and ISWs are interrelated. Based on my findings that many of my participants highlighted immigrant clients’ outcomes as their most vital work achievement, these outcomes assessments standardize the measurement of outcomes in those funded programs in ISAs. By presenting the outcomes of immigrants, this measurement determines the status of these programs’ upcoming funding application with the government. In this chart, it is clear that textual accountabilities are thoroughly threaded between and within each step, thus naturalizing, organizing, and reinforcing textual ruling relations between the state, ISAs, and ISWs. As IRCC is the major funder of programs in the immigration sector, successfully receiving funding from IRCC directly leads to ISAs’ sustainability.

This hidden rule, as demonstrated in the chart, constitutes the ruling relations, which are contextualized by neoliberal approaches to marketization, competition, and productivity that
mark the funding process for programs offered through ISAs (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005; Sending & Neumann, 2006). The ruling relations develop and solidify outcomes measurement in the immigration service sector, delegating the responsibilities of immigrant settlement and integration to the local ISAs (Baines, Cunningham, & Shields, 2017; Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005). As such, the goal of IRCC does not simply and utterly measure the outcomes of immigrants but the outcomes of funded settlement programs in ISAs, delegating this measurement to local ISAs and ISWs and engaging them in serving the state agenda and thus legitimizing this agenda as the essential workplace knowledge and, in turn, producing a certain discourse and coordination at the local setting.

Workplace knowledge refers to what people understand their work in the workplace to be and how this knowledge is coordinated with their work with others (Smith, 2005). This conceptualization of workplace knowledge shifts the investigation of what knowledge is in the workplace to discovering how knowledge can be presented in certain workplace institutional formats. Workplace knowledge is also developed through the individuals’ standpoint, as the fundamental assumption of what is known about a particular something depends on how, and from where, it is known (Teghtsoonian, 2016). Workplace knowledge organizes sequence, circuit, and the organizational form that emerges in work engagement (Smith, 2005). Knowledge in the workplace can be viewed as a material world of labour with ideological practices, which establishes authorized logics, circulates conceptual practices of power (Smith, 1990), and legitimizes workers’ perception of knowledge as “neutral, objective, or common sense,” which are material features of people’s lived experience (Rankin, 2013, p. 243).

Outcomes measurement becomes a mode of workplace knowledge as a type of translocal coordination, which Smith (2005) described as follows: “what they [people] are doing is
connected with others’ doing in ways they cannot see” (p. 225). This textual workplace knowledge becomes institutionally and professionally legitimized, constructing ISWs’ ways of doing, thinking, and acting. This mode of knowledge, therefore, turns outcomes measurement into related accountabilities to become ISWs’ essential learning in the workplace. The function of ISAs has shifted from attending to immigrant clients’ lived experiences to providing information, and they have become textually sanctioned agencies (Smith, 2005) or the state apparatus (Ng, 1996) that exercise two types of textual ruling power. First, the agencies follow outcomes measurement of IRCC as the essence of their daily work operation, and these series of actions shape how ISWs view learning in the workplace. Second, implementing techniques of outcomes measurement as ISW accountabilities creates an internalized institutional power within the ISAs that hierarchically organizes ISWs’ workplace learning in participation in workplace activities and interaction within varying social relationships. As such, ISWs are an apparatus of the state, functioning the state agenda to produce ideal and successful immigrants in Canada. By implementing this outcomes production, it reproduces ideal ISWs who are self-governed to achieve various textual accountabilities in the workplace.

6.3.2.2 Production of Textual Ruling Power: Ideal Immigrant Settlement Workers

The preceding section focuses on how outcomes measurement is formulated as the essential workplace knowledge in the ruling relations between the outcomes of successful immigrants and the outcomes of the funded programs, which both lead to ISAs’ sustainability. This section takes this inquiry a further step to analyze how ideal ISWs are produced in this textual ruling relation at the local site. Particularly, I adopt Foucault’s concepts of technologies of power and technologies of the self to examine how self-governed ISWs emanate from the
governing textual ruling power at a distance that normalizes *technologies of the self* through textual observing, monitoring, and reporting in outcomes measurement.

I find that *ideal* ISWs are constituted by the textual ruling relations through their translocal participation in and interaction with outcomes measurement textual accountabilities. Drawing from what participants stated, three major rulings emerged in my findings: Ruling through pedagogical learning, ruling through textual-mediated learning, and ruling through relational learning. These three aspects demonstrate a progressive relationship. First, pedagogical learning highlights textual accountabilities that regulate ISWs’ work routine through formal, non-formal, and informal learning. This learning process constitutes an ideological control where the art of ruling is intertwined with the art of institutional ruling pedagogy, constructing ISWs’ workplace knowledge to uphold and maintain the textual ruling relations. The series of pedagogical ruling and learning impact ISWs’ daily workplace practices. Second, textual-mediated learning has become a hierarchical workplace regime focused on entering data, writing narrative reports, and conducting client-based surveys and research based on ISWs’ work titles, treating them as “products” whose work participation and requirements are labeled according to their outcomes in the “production line.” The ruling textual relations configure these ISWs to a certain way of thinking, acting, and learning and focus their practices of pedagogical ruling and learning and textual accountabilities on governing their relational learning between themselves and immigrant clients. These three types of governing echo my preceding analysis regarding how ISWs’ learning serves the state agenda to deploy the textual power of ruling, which reproduces *self-governed* ISWs.

In the language of Foucault’s governmentality, these three types of ruling in workplace learning establish outcomes measurement as state technologies of power, encouraging ISWs to
establish self-governed actions that translocally produce certain workplace practices, moulding them into self-caring, self-regulated, self-accountable, adaptable, and productive subjects. By participating, interacting, and practicing these technologies of power based on the state agenda, their learning in the workplace becomes institutionally coordinated and constructed. As such, this production of ideal ISWs reproduces self-governed ISWs who not only strengthen textual ruling coordination by implementing and operating the objectives of outcomes measurement but also reinforce the textual ruling relations that is governed between institutional relations through a range of self-governance actions.

It is clear that ISWs’ learning is organized and imposed by textual accountabilities and objectives. The inquiry into outcomes measurement as a technology of power in governmentality and as workplace knowledge in IE deconstructs the textual ruling power and its relations to local coordination, laying bare the state agenda to mould ideal self-governed ISWs. This production of ideal ISWs can be examined in the following forms: First, the textual ruling power of outcomes measurement is reinforced through the coordination of ruling relations, including textual-mediated learning, pedagogical learning, and relational learning. Each of these forms of learning addresses, structures, and operates the state technologies of power in measuring the outcomes of both immigrant clients and ISAs. Second, by participating, interacting, and practicing these textual accountabilities, this textual ruling power produces self-governed practices that uphold the state’s governing agenda to render self-caring, self-regulated, self-accountable, adaptable, and productive ideal ISWs.

The production of ideal ISWs reciprocally influences ISWs’ agency of learning and learning with others. First, these workers’ individual learning desires are viewed as deficient, and their self-determination and self-capacities for learning are neglected in favour of problem-
solving in order to achieve institutional textual objectives. Furthermore, instead of treating immigrant clients as lively individuals, ISWs’ workplace intentionality in working with this social group has been reduced to the performance of textual accountabilities. Within consultations of limited duration, these workers can only insufficiently attend to identifying clients’ struggles and difficulties based on their professional analysis because they are required to survey clients about the services and to quantify immigrant clients’ lived experiences according to the categories of outcomes measurement. Thus, textual ruling power constructs outcomes measurement as workplace knowledge and a technology of power. By participating, interacting, and practicing this textual ruling power, ISWs mould themselves into self-governed subjects, submitting their learning agency to serve the state agenda and coordinating their work engagement to reinforce their role as an apparatus of the state.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed three major findings. In the section on transition to work, I examined my participants’ intersectional experiences of work and scrutinized how notions of race, gender, and class intersected to impact their integration into the local labour force. Drawing on this intersectional approach to IE, it is clear that social inequality of these immigrants’ labour market participation is shaped not only by their intersectional identity but also the social relations of the institutional complexes in labour market operation, coordinating social inequality in immigrant’s lived experiences at the local site. Unlike many of the employment institutions which devalued, deskillled, and denied my participants’ prior qualifications and work as social investments, ISAs embraced the value of these immigrants by allowing them to integrate their previous learning and professional experiences into the workplace, enriching their constructive subjectivity to fulfill work goals. In the process of becoming qualified ISWs, ISAs provided
learning spaces for developing *professional subjectivity*, encouraging them to align objective professional knowledge with their subjective cognition and reflection for knowledge reconstruction. Additionally, learning can also be situated in the negotiation between culture and different social relationships to configure cultural subjectivity through participating in cultural and relational learning.

The last part of the discussion of my findings emphasized the analysis of textual ruling power and how it is formulated, organized, and developed as both workplace knowledge (in the language of IE) and *technologies of power* (in the language of governmentality), which uphold textual ruling relations through the social relations between institutional relations and the coordination of the ISWs’ learning. By engaging with textual accountabilities as their essential work objective, textual ruling power constitutes workers’ *self-governed* practices to become *ideal* ISWs, serving and implementing the state agenda.

The discussion of my findings demonstrates that institutional relations are presented in daily practices and they are distributed in the coordination of the translocal and the local. Institutional relations can be intersectionally complex and textually mediated; they can be a multi-dimensional social presence that translocally perpetuates the institutional contradictions between power, organizations, and the people. In these positive but negative, inevitable but developmental institutional relations, ISWs’ lived experiences are linked to their intersectional identities, generating struggles, strategies, and success in their transition to work. Their autonomy of learning in the workplace is organized, normalized, and naturalized by the textual ruling relations to reinforce the state agenda.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Implications

This research investigated immigrants as ISWs, their experiences transitioning to work in the Canadian labour market, and their workplace learning in ISAs in Canada. My study demonstrates that the experiences of ISWs of transitioning to work and learning in the workplace are constructed in institutional relations that organize and shape the coordination of individual practices in local setting. I first explored my participants trajectories in becoming ISWs. From there, I analyzed how race, gender, and class intersected within the institutional complexes between governmental organizations, employment institutions, and ISAs, shaping their transition to work. I then turned my focus to these immigrants’ workplace learning after they became ISWs. In the concluding chapter, I summarize my research findings, discuss the theoretical and methodological contributions, and both propose the integrative subjectivity framework and address its implications for critical adult education and further research in Canada.

7.1 Summary of my Research Findings

My study focused on two major areas: immigrants’ transition to work in becoming ISWs and their workplace learning thereafter. In terms of the transition to work, I illustrated the trajectory of immigrants in becoming ISWs and their efforts in seeking employment in the Canadian work force. Through the notion of workplace learning, I examine emerging learning opportunities for ISWs in the workplace and their learning within different social relationships. Moreover, I untangle the textual accountabilities of these ISWs and scrutinize the textual ruling power that produces certain types of learning in the ISA workplace. My investigations have resulted in the following three findings.

First, by examining immigrants’ transition to work as situated in institutional complexes, my study stresses the significance of translocal institutional relations to organizing the everyday
lived experiences of ISWs. My research demonstrates that the experiences of immigrants seeking employment are shaped by their intersectional identities of race, gender, and class, which further produce social oppression in their integration to the local work force. These racialized, gendered, and classed experiences in the transition to work, I argue, are embedded in institutional complexes between governmental credential recognition and employment hiring practices. The governmental credential recognition process, which institutionally devalues immigrants’ learning and employment histories, subjecting those histories to filtering and erasure, triggers in immigrants struggles in relation to their qualifications in a competitive job market. Furthermore, labour market hiring practices act as a second filtering mechanism, straining immigrants’ professional skills as different, deficient, or dubious. Given this context, immigrants’ transition to work is shaped by the complex interconnections and intersections between race, gender, and class. Simultaneously, these intersections complicate and intensify the institutional complexes that translocally perpetuates social inequality in the local labour market. Thus, institutional complexes are hooked into translocal social relations that collaboratively shape immigrants’ employment seeking to local settings and their coordination of daily practices.

Second, my focus on the becoming of ISWs demonstrates workplace subjectivities between work and people. In conceptualizing workplace subjectivity, I unpack ISWs’ formal and non-formal learning and the notion of culture in the workplace into three different constructed forms: 1) Learning in the workplace is the exercise of personal agency, both ontologically and epistemologically, in the production of knowledge and the reconstruction of knowledge. 2) Learning in the workplace emphasizes participatory practices in the learning of work activities and the performance of work, configuring the perception of learning in workplace affordance. 3) The negotiation of culture in the ISA workplace constitutes cultural-related relational learning
that explores ISWs’ potential to understand the self and others in different social relationships. These three forms of learning reciprocally construct three major subjectivities for the ISWs: 1) *Constructive subjectivity*, through which immigrants come to view their previous learning and skills as social assets to ISAs. 2) *Professional subjectivity*, through which ISWs integrate subjective knowledge from their personal histories with objective knowledge, tailoring individualized knowledge acquisition and creation. 3) *Cultural subjectivity*, an indication of how ISWs’ workplace learning can be developed through interacting with colleagues and clients from diverse cultural background. Meanwhile, cultural power relations, through which ISWs both yield aspects of their self-culture to fit into the Canadian normative workplace values and impose cultural discrimination against certain social groups. These three emerged subjectivities align well with three different constructed elements in workplace subjectivities, which offers me the capacity to examine how learning is socially and relationally organized.

Third, my research demonstrates that translocal textual ruling relations play an essential role in shaping, organizing, and normalizing ISWs’ learning in the workplace. These textual ruling relations become an essential workplace knowledge that produces *ideal* ISWs who are self-caring, self-regulated, self-accountable, adaptable, and productive in different types of textual accountabilities for outcomes measurement. In order to become *ideal* individuals achieving textual accountabilities, ISWs’ learning is moulded through textual-mediated ruling, pedagogical ruling, and relational ruling. Pedagogical learning is a form of ideological control, establishing outcomes measurement as the workplace knowledge and legitimizing textual accountabilities as natural, acceptable, and justifiable. Pedagogical learning and textual interaction configure a certain way of thinking, acting, and learning, subsuming the learning agency of ISWs to textual ruling power. Given this analysis, I adopt Foucault’s framework of
governmentality to examine the production of *ideal* ISWs. I argue that outcomes measurement becomes *technologies of power* that produces *self-governed* workers, which re-entrenches ISAs as apparatuses for the governmental textual ruling power. This process naturalizes the production of *ideal* ISWs—diminishing the importance of their own learning autonomy, channelling their learning toward obtaining the capacity to achieve the institutional textual objective of outcomes measurement, and finally claiming this capacity as the product of ISWs’ own individual desire.

### 7.2 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions of my Study

My research contributes to the scholarship on intersectionality and IE in three significant ways. Intersectionality informs the examination of my participants’ difficulties in seeking employment. In this investigation, I found that immigrants’ experiences of the host labour force were shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and class. More importantly, this intersectional lens allows me not only to scrutinize the dilemmas these immigrants faced when seeking employment but also to deconstruct the structural power in the job search process that produces social oppression in the labour market. It needs to be reiterated that my intention was not to categorize the experiences of immigrants’ transition to work in terms of a single social domain of race, gender, or class. Instead, I intend to tease out the interconnections between these three categories in order to examine how immigrants’ stories of entering the labour force are shaped by their intersectional identities.

The integration of intersectionality theory and the methodology of IE allows me to explore systematic social oppression in the institutional context, how institutional relations are woven into the complexes between different institutions in labour market operation. Moreover, this combination of intersectionality and IE allow for a holistic examination of immigrants’ experiences of work. IE illustrates how people’s lived experiences can be situated in the
institutional relations that possibly marginalize them during their integration into the workforce (McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Shan, 2013), which provides me a horizontal landscape on which to explore the structural barriers between varying institutions that produce the social oppression of these immigrants. Meanwhile, intersectionality allows me to go a step further with IE, to understand how individuals’ lived experiences of work are shaped by their intersectional identities, and it offers me a vertical depth to contemplate how these immigrants as living individuals relate to their intersectional experiences of work. These vertical and horizontal planes enrich my analysis of both the micro level of individual experiences and the macro picture of the production of systematic inequality.

In workplace learning, I go beyond exploring the intersectional identity of immigrants’ work experiences and adopt the notion of workplace subjectivity to investigate the becoming of ISWs, including the renegotiation of their social assets to ISAs, the experiences of formal and non-formal learning, and the role of cultural and relational learning in ISWs’ workplace learning. All of these are shaped by three key pillars: the adaptation of their qualifications and skills to the ISA workplace, the exercise of personal agency in negotiating between objective knowledge and subjective meaning making, and the participatory practices within relational interdependence and cultural integration. Thus, intersectionality provides a lens through which I not only scrutinize the intersection of race, gender, and class but, in recognizing that ISWs’ workplace learning occurs at the intersection of these three factors, articulate the possibilities for holistic learning interventions.

Finally, my study integrates IE and Foucault’s framework of governmentality, focusing on how ruling relations normalize workers’ learning and shape a certain type of *self-governed* individual in the workplace. Scholarly studies have stressed the necessity of connecting
governmentality to inquiries of the state, power, and people (Creese, 2011; Ko, 2017; Soveran, 2011; Teghtsoonian, 2016), which find conceptual analogues in the crucial IE stance of institutions, ruling, and workers. Integrating IE and governmentality illuminates the dialectical connections between workplace knowledge, *technologies of power*, textual ruling power, and *technologies of the self*, and it sharpens my analysis of the textual ruling relations that produce *self-governed* individuals who are ideal ISWs for implementing the state agenda.

7.3 Research Implications

7.3.1 The Integrative Subjectivity Framework

In light of the findings of my research, I propose the *integrative subjectivity framework*, which integrates the diversity of immigrants’ experiences of transitioning to work and the multiplicity of workplace learning, with the purpose of creating a more inclusive and welcoming workplace environment for the immigrant population. Instead of examining ISWs’ experience of work and workplace learning through a one-dimensional approach, the *integrative subjectivity framework* aims to highlight the necessity of understanding ISWs’ learning in the workplace through an intersectional and holistic lens, adopting intersectional identities, workplace subjectivities, as well as institutional power into the investigation of how these factors can collectively shape ISWs’ subjectivity in the experience of work and workplace learning. To better demonstrate the *integrative subjectivity framework*, I visualize this framework in Figure 3, with the goal of reinforcing the discussion and analysis of immigrants’ and ISWs’ transition to work and their workplace learning, derived from my research findings related to intersectionality, subjectivity in workplace learning, and IE.
Figure 4: The Integrative Subjectivity Framework

To further elucidate my framework, it is vital to point out that the integrative subjectivity framework pushes the boundaries between the transition to work and workplace learning and connects these two perspectives comprehensively. Before becoming ISWs, immigrants’ intersectional identities shape their transition to work in the institutional complexes of power in labour market operation. While facing a series of challenges, these immigrants turned to ISAs, where their prior working and learning were deemed to be social recourses in facilitating the transition and settlement of newcomers. This pathway demonstrated how their experience of work is linked to their learning in the workplace. Additionally, the situated workplace determines what workers can learn, what they need to change to fit into the workplace, and how they learn within varying social relationships. I take these factors as learning premises that the ISA workplace affords these workers. Based on these learning premises, workers engaged with
diverse work-related activities and constructed their subjectivities through personal, social-relational, and cultural dimensions.

In addition to connecting the experience of work and workplace learning, the integrated subjectivity framework emphasizes social inequality in immigrants’ experiences of work in order to focus on how notions of race, gender, and class marginalize immigrants and to ensure their intersectionally oppressed voices can be heard. In other words, this framework constitutes a space for immigrants’ autonomy, where their social values are neither neglected nor differentiated and they can embrace their personal and experiential knowledge as social subjects crucial to societal development. In this view, immigrants’ experiences of work can be renegotiated through institutional mechanisms in the labour market operation to reinforce and embrace social diversity (Guo, 2015b; Maitra, 2015b; Shan, 2012a).

It is crucial to pinpoint how intersectionality, especially as it relates to notions of class and social reproduction, are understood within the integrated subjectivity framework. Here, I use reductionism, exceptionalism, and elitism to demonstrate the relationship between my framework and the social reproduction of class. Reductionism holds that social reproduction is an integrated and adaptable part of a production system (Humphries & Rubery, 1984). Immigrants are seen both as individuals devoted to self-development in the host society and as, essentially, dependents who are interconnected within the broader economic system (Martin, 2010). Within this connection between the individual and the broader system, immigrants’ intersectional identities do not merely capture the experience of living under multifaceted social oppression, but reciprocally stratify the dimensions and the structures of social reproduction. Exceptionalism holds that Canadian immigration is a unique process that embraces tolerance and diversity and, through the points system, promotes immigrant contributions to the local economy.
(Bloemraad, 2012). Rosenbloom (2013), however, contended that exceptionalism with regard to immigration functions as a “plenary power doctrine,” enforcing sovereignty and system preservation in determining the entry of applicants within its dominions (p. 1982). Elitism is the promotion of a superior culture and artistic, intellectual, and creative excellence (Chandler & Munday, 2016). One critique of elitism as it relates to immigration is that the production of class from an elitist standpoint is a function of one’s education and skills (Brown & Lauder, 1996) even though the possession and performance of knowledge and skills cannot be the only means to determine the outcomes of settlement and integration in Canada.

Using reductionism, exceptionalism, and elitism to discuss the integrative subjectivity framework in terms of the social reproduction of class calls attention to the relationship between social reproduction and knowledge, learning, social justice, and institutional relations of power (Katz, 2001; Ng, 1996). In these power relations, it appears a contradictory and complex process since power is situated at who owns the means of power production and who conforms to the production of power. These multidimensional social relations produce immigrants’ class position translocally and reinforce social reproduction through an internal and external process. Thus, the integrative subjectivity framework aims to unveil the embodied assumptions about racialized immigrants that structurally and institutionally speak to the social inequality of immigrants’ knowledge and skills and how the multiplicity and complexity of structural and institutional power “class” immigrants’ labour market integration and their learning in the workplace.

The integrative subjectivity framework seeks to explore not only the experiences of race, gender, and class that inform immigrants’ transition to work but also the social and relational forms of workplace learning. It underlines the importance of how different social categories intersectionally shape individuals’ experience of work and how intersectional experiences are
related to social and relational components of personal agency, participatory practices, and cultural integration of workplace learning. The *integrative subjectivity framework* collects the three key factors shaping workplace learning (personal agency, participatory practices, and cultural integration) under the umbrella of social and relational workplace learning components and posits them as generating collective social actions that are evidence of the complex relationship between work and workplace learning. For example, immigrants’ experiences of oppression or discrimination in their transitions to work, which are embedded in their intersectional identities of race, gender, and class, affect how they demonstrate their personal learning agency in the workplace, how they integrate their own cultures with those of their colleagues or that of the workplace itself, and how they work with others in various participatory work practices. Thus, this framework proposes a more integrative social transformation in order to articulate the significance of individuals’ agency in working and learning in the labour market, connecting the inquiry with different social categories of intersectional identities as well as social and relational components of the workplace (Alfred, 2006; Fenwick & Somerville, 2006).

The *integrative subjectivity framework* emphasizes the importance of institutional power in both immigrants’ transition to work and workplace learning. Within institutional relations, I identify two types of power: structural power and textual ruling power. In immigrants’ transition to work, structural power produces racialized, gendered, and classed demands, configuring immigrants’ daily practices in their search for employment. This structural power positions immigrants as socially vulnerable, oppressed, and disadvantaged (Fleras, 2018; Maitra, 2015a; Shan, 2009a), thus naturalizing the exploitative nature of their transition to work and reinforcing sharply demarcated social boundaries. Meanwhile, the *integrative subjectivity framework* stresses translocal textual ruling power that coordinates, organizes, and normalizes individuals’
learning in the local settings. This process neglects workers’ own learning agency and naturalizes their learning of “outcomes measurement” as the most vital workplace learning in ISAs. Thus, this type of workplace learning knowledge produces multi-dimensional power since it reconstructs workers’ understanding of what workplace knowledge is, how they learn, and how they understand themselves and interact with others.

7.3.2 Implications of the Integrative Subjectivity Framework for Critical Adult Education

Critical adult education is linked to notions of social justice and democracy in adult education. In the context of immigration, critical adult education upholds a long-standing commitment to social inclusion by working toward a more inclusive learning space for marginalized social groups, including immigrant workers, women, and racialized minorities, and to acknowledge and affirm cultural difference and diversity as “positive and desirable assets” (Guo, 2015a, p. 15). Given this context, the implication of the integrative subjectivity framework can be crucial in promoting an inclusive and embracing learning environment to critical adult education in Canada at the social, organizational, and individual level.

At the social level, the issue of integration has become increasingly significant for the culturally diverse population in Canada, and ISWs play an essential role in newcomers’ settlement in the host society. As the position of ISW has been taken for granted, many people do not realize that ISWs mostly come from racialized and first-generation immigrant backgrounds and have experienced social barriers in both seeking employment and serving newcomers. My framework draws attention to the employment trajectories and workplace learning of ISWs from racialized, first-generation immigrant backgrounds. Moreover, it provides the necessary foundation for understanding the ISW population in general and their adult education needs in order to better support both their transitions to work and their workplace learning. By better
understanding the experiences of immigrants in both transitioning to work and workplace learning, ISWs would be able to better serve newcomers. The *integrative subjectivity framework* provides an educational foundation for the better integration of diversified immigrant communities—creating, sustaining, and maintaining a welcoming space for more inclusive community development.

At the organizational level, because little research has been done on ISWs’ transition to work and workplace learning in Canada, the *integrative subjectivity framework* fills scholarly gap by offering a holistic landscape for both governments and ISAs to unpack the importance of ISWs’ trajectory of becoming ISWs and their learning in the workplace. Particularly, it facilitates organizations in pinpointing what intersectional challenges these immigrants have confronted, how these barriers are embedded in their intersectional identities that naturalize the production of marginalization in the Canadian labour force. By linking work and workplace learning in my framework, it reveals ISWs’ strategies, successes, or difficulties of becoming ISWs and how they participate and interact with people and work activities as ISWs. Furthermore, the *integrative subjectivity framework* illustrates how the institutional ruling power coordinated between ISAs significantly shapes ISWs’ daily practices at work. In light of these functions, the *integrative subjectivity framework* prompts stakeholders and policy makers to reconsider ways of approaching immigrant labour in the immigration sector, providing necessary training to not only reinforce their professional skills but focus on creating different ways of learning based on the countless textual-related accountabilities.

Last but not least, at the individual level, the *integrative subjectivity framework* offers a conceptualizing frame demonstrating varying strategies to better understand ISWs who are racialized and first-generation immigrants themselves and to empower them to reflect on their
lived experiences between the transition to work and learning in the workplace. This framework can be an important paradigm shift to foster a revisiting of immigrants’ experiences, taking them as essential social resources to deploy in the educational agenda and examining how intersectional identities, subjectivity construction in the workplace, and pillars of institutional power can intersectionally and holistically shape immigrants’ experiences in the host society. This proposed framework identifies informal learning opportunities as important to the creation of inclusive workplace cultures that not only participate in but embrace and value cultural and ethnic differences as social resources and assets in the workplace (Gibb, Hamdon, & Jamal, 2008; Guo, 2010). Additionally, as there has been a lack of focus among adult educators in integrating issues of immigration and migration into critical adult education (Alfred & Guo, 2012), the integrative subjectivity framework can bring positive impacts on curriculum and pedagogy for adult educators and related practitioners as it challenges the existing pedagogical and curricular approaches to immigrants’ daily learning. It also facilitates adult educators and practitioners to capture the individual, organizational, and social forms of tensions perpetuated in immigrants’ work and workplace learning. Practically speaking, this framework can help design pre-service workshops or training for immigrants who are willing to become ISWs to better transition to the ISA workplace. Workshops and training can be also presented to ISWs themselves, to generate learning potentials that are hidden in the institutional power. In this way, the curriculum and pedagogy can ensure that an individual’s voice is heard, constituting a more embraced learning space for immigrants’ development in Canada.

7.4 Implications for Future Research

My study draws attention to the need for future research in immigration studies as well as in studies of adult education. My research emphasizes, on the one hand, racialized immigrants’
transition to work and, on the other, their workplace learning in ISAs. Building on these two areas, my research not only investigates racialized immigrants’ workplace learning in ISAs but broadly addresses their learning in the Canadian workplace. As such, it is these three aspects of my study that have implications for future studies in both immigration and adult education studies.

As my research aims to examine racialized immigrants’ transition to work, this investigation can shed light on recent studies of this social group with the purpose of addressing their difficulties and challenges in labour market integration in Canada. While focusing on racialized immigrants’ workplace learning, this analysis can provide first-hand resources for studies relating to racialized minorities’ learning at work. In addition, as the study of ISWs’ workplace learning in ISAs remains underdeveloped, my research can significantly fill this research gap to enrich and develop studies on racialized ISWs’ workplace learning in related organizations in the immigration sector. Moreover, researching racialized ISWs’ learning at work accentuates the importance of this group of individuals to different levels of governmental institutions, demonstrating how governmental decisions can be influential in shaping their learning in the workplace and helping policy makers to understand ISWs’ difficulties, struggles, and learning intentionality in ISAs.

All the preceding ideas for future research in immigration studies can be crucial for studies of adult education. First, studies on racialized immigrants’ transition to work, learning at work, and workplace learning in the immigration sector highlight the struggles, strategies, and difficulties of this social group, illustrating the need for in-depth studies in adult education. Meanwhile, these three aspects of my research indicate the value of racialized immigrants as social, cultural, and institutional assets in terms of their participation in the Canadian labour
market and their contributions to Canadian society. Third, from a practical perspective, these three aspects of my study challenge existing adult education pedagogy and curriculum with the goal of enriching and enhancing related teaching and learning practices.

In conclusion, it needs to be reiterated that this study does not intend to generalize immigrant’s experiences of transition to work in the Canadian labour market or immigrants’ trajectory of becoming ISWs and their workplace learning in ISAs. Instead, through the communication with my participants and the analysis of related documents, I try to pinpoint and piece together how these two parts of lived experiences are connected and situated in diverse institutional relations. And although my participants all reside and work in western Canada, where I conducted my interviews, their stories and experiences could happen in any ISA throughout Canada. Moreover, it needs to be pointed out that, although these experiences are possible among ISWs at ISAs across Canada, my participants stories are their individual experiences and are not necessarily the experiences of all ISWs across Canada. To conclude, I hope this research can generate both the possibility of and necessity for Canadian society to cultivate inclusive spaces for integrative social transformation in Canada.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Educational and Career Background

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself?
2. What is your highest degree? In what major?

Reasons for Immigrating to Canada

1. When did you arrive in Canada?
2. Did you come alone or with your family?
3. How did you come to the decision to immigrate?
4. What did you expect to do in Canada at the time of your immigration?
5. What was the biggest difference between your expectations and the reality after immigration?

Career Trajectory in Canada

1. Could you tell me your employment history in Canada?
2. How did you look for jobs in Canada?
3. What kinds of resources did you use in your job search?
4. What strategies did you use to find a job in Canada?
5. What barriers did you encounter in your job search?
6. How did you deal with those barriers?

Workplace Learning in Immigrant Service Agency in Canada

1. Could you please briefly introduce your title and your work in your ISA?
2. What responsibilities do you have?
3. Who do you mostly work with, in what way?

4. Could you describe your typical workday?

5. How do you do your job?
   1) Could you please describe a typical assignment of yours?
   2) Where do your assignments come from?
   3) What software have you used?
   4) Whom do you report to?
   5) How do you report?
   6) Is there a time sheet that you need to fill out?

6. What training does your organization provide?

7. What barriers to work have you encountered?

8. What strategies have you taken to deal with those barriers?

9. What roles do you think you are playing in supporting immigrants?
Appendix B: Consent Form for Interview

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:
Jingzhou Liu, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, jingzhou.liu@uclagary.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. Shibao Guo, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, guos@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project
Immigrants as Settlement Workers: An Inquiry into their Experiences of Work and Workplace Learning at Immigrant Service Agencies in Canada

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. With the supervision of Dr. Shibao Guo, the study is being conducted by Jingzhou Liu, who is a doctoral candidate in Adult Learning for her doctoral research. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of work and workplace learning of immigrant settlement workers at immigrant service agencies in Canada. Findings from this research will provide valuable insights to understand the experiences of work and workplace learning of immigrant settlement workers at immigrant service agencies and how the experiences could be improved and better support newcomers in Canada.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?
Participation in this study involves completing an in-person interview. It is anticipated that the interview will take about an hour. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and this will be used as the data for the study. You will be invited to review your interview transcript if you wish to do so. Researcher will send you the transcript by email after your interview has been transcribed. If you read your transcript and wish to remove any material, you will be permitted to do so (two months after the interview). Please note that you would not able to withdraw (e.g. after data has been anonymized or the study has been published). Please make your selection below. During the interview, you will be asked questions related to your work experiences in your home country, reasons of immigration to Canada, career trajectory in Canada, experience of working in your organization, and future expectations on your work and organization. An example of the interview questions is “Could you share with me your work experiences at the immigrant settlement service agencies?” You do not have to answer all of the questions and you can decline to answer any question if you choose. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study until your individual data has been amalgamated into group data (two months after the interview).
I wish to receive the transcript: Yes: ___ No: ___
Please provide your email: _____________________________________

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your name, your position, the year you landed Canada and the years you are in the organization. The researcher will attempt to keep all participants anonymous in the presentation of the findings and you will not be asked to provide your name at any time in the interview. There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio recorded: Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to and quote me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___
The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____________________________________

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
There is the potential that while answering questions in this study that you may feel a range of emotions, including positive feelings or negative feelings on your work and workplace experiences. These feelings are normal and should be temporary. The results from this research will provide a better understanding of the work and workplace learning experiences of immigrant settlement workers. It is anticipated that the research findings will help create better experiences for the workers and a better relationship among workers, organizations, and the state.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
Participation is completely voluntary, and confidentiality will be maintained. You are free to stop participation at any time except when your individual data has been amalgamated into group data. If you withdraw from the study prior to completion of data collection, your data will be destroyed. However, if you withdraw from the study after data collection is complete and your data has been amalgamated (two months after the interview), your data cannot be destroyed because data is stored without identifiers and cannot be linked to participants. When quotations are used, those specific participants will be asked if these quotations share any identifying information that the researchers may not be aware of. The data will be encrypted and kept in a password-protected computer where only authorized persons may access the data. No one except the researcher will have access to the interview responses. After the study is complete, all research documents will be stored for five years in a locked filing cabinet. As the Tri-Agency Statement of Principles on Digital Data Management directs that researchers should be prepared to make data available as appropriate, the anonymous data of this research will not be destroyed at any point in time. It is anticipated that the results will be included in conference presentations and published in peer-reviewed journals.

Signatures
Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project until your individual responses have been amalgamated into the group responses (within two months after the interview). You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) _____________________________________
Questions/Concerns
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Jingzhou Liu, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, jingzhou.liu@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you’ve been treated as a participant, please contact Research Ethics Administrators, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.