

**INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES, IDENTITY FORMATION,
AND SENSE OF HOME AND BELONGING:
IRANIAN FEMALE AND MALE NEWCOMER YOUTH IN HALIFAX**

By
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Abstract

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This thesis provides a qualitative study of integration, identity and the sense of home and belonging of a small sample of young, first generation, Iranian, upper-middle class immigrants in Halifax, responding to the hypothesis that identity and sense of home and belonging undergo major transformations through the process of integration. Twelve interviews were conducted covering language, education, employment, social and parental relations, community participation, ethno-cultural beliefs, dress code, sexuality, and gender identity. Using an intersectionality theoretical framework and a gender-based analysis, various psychological, ethno-cultural, gendered, aged, and class-based challenges in the process of integration, leading to identity transformations were explored and analysed in relation to senses of belonging in Canada. The findings were then contextualised within the socio-cultural conditions of Halifax. This study concludes with a series of policy recommendations and suggestions for further research on young immigrants.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

ISIS – Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services

AMC – Atlantic Metropolis Centre

NSNP – Nova Scotia Nominee Program

GTA – Greater Toronto Area

REB – Research Ethics Board

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since I was a kid, I always wanted to move out of Iran and go to Canada. When I was 13 or 14, I had painted the Canadian flag and had it put up on my bedroom wall and also when I was going to school I had carried a painted Canadian flag in my binder to show that I like to go to Canada... Our immigration process took four years and in the meanwhile I left Iran to study in one of the neighbor countries. When our entering visa had issued I joined my family in Frankfurt airport, so I had spent 58 hours to flight to Halifax. When we arrived in Halifax, surprisingly I wasn't tired at all; instead I was so excited... it was like I had reached my dream... I felt like here is the place I've always wanted to be... (Sina, Male, 27, Halifax, 2012).

Iranians of all classes and social backgrounds regularly enjoy travelling, both within Iran, and beyond its borders. From ancient times with archaic transportation means to the present time with advanced travelling technologies, Iranians have always journeyed to other cities or countries for various reasons including pilgrimage, or the desire to visit historical places, have fun, or meet with relatives. Across different eras, travelling has served Iranians more complex needs. Moving from smaller cities to bigger ones, especially to the capital city, or migrating from Iran to other countries to pursue better career, study, and life opportunities has always been a common occurrence and constitutes a popular theme in Iranian culture.

Canada has long been one of the main destinations for Iranian immigrants. This study more specifically examines the integration experiences of young, first generation, Iranian immigrants after moving to Halifax, Canada, and how these experiences shape their identities in the new country. In so doing, the concept of 'home' and sense of belonging among these young immigrants is explored as well as the impact of gender on their integration experiences.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND: PERSONAL INTERESTS

I came to Canada/Halifax as an international student from Iran in 2010, to complete my Master's degree. Immediately after my arrival at Saint Mary's University, I met another Iranian student who introduced me to some Iranians of about the same age. Very soon, they became my close friends and thanks to Iranian hospitality, I was invited by their families to dinner or parties. Such connections led me to get acquainted with more Iranian families, as well as to participate in the Iranian ceremonies and traditional festivals that were taking place in Halifax. The very first noticeable aspect of many of these ceremonies was the presence of young people who were mostly in their 30s.

After approximately 6 months, it became apparent that Halifax has a fairly large, young and dynamic Iranian community. The majority were newcomers who came to Halifax with their families under the Nova Scotia Nominee Program¹ (NSNP) in the past 5-6 years. These newcomers were mainly upper-middle class families, with young children, who had emigrated from large Iranian cities and now they were mainly residing in private houses in Halifax, primarily in the Clayton Park and Bedford areas of the city. Most of the children either were attending a university in Halifax, or planned to leave Halifax and attend universities in bigger cities. The proliferation of Iranian restaurants and food shops, the existence of Iranian Business World Trade Shows, as well as the opening of a Farsi school for Iranian children all attest to the increasing numbers of Iranians in Halifax in recent years. All these very personal understandings of this

¹ Provincial Nominees:

Persons who immigrate to Canada under the Provincial Nominee Program have the skills, education and work experience needed to make an immediate economic contribution to the province or territory that nominates them. They are ready to establish themselves successfully as permanent residents in Canada. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/provincial>.

population mark the beginning of my interest in studying them. And so, not only my own understanding of this population, but also its growing presence in Halifax, explain the significance of this study, personally, and on various sociological, economic, and political levels, as well.

At the same time, as I was settling my new life in Halifax, I noticed that my identity as a young Iranian *woman*, my beliefs and my attitudes toward other Iranians and Iran were changing gradually, and 'Home' slowly acquired a new meaning for me. Therefore, unconsciously, I started to compare my life and my new situation, as a *young female Iranian student*, with those of my immigrant friends, who were gradually becoming my frame of reference. Of course, I knew that my legal status in Canada and the way I entered to Canada was totally different than their status (because I was on student visa, and they were permanent residents in Canada), nevertheless, being young, and leaving our hometowns in Iran, in search of a better life in Canada, were our common experiences.

Therefore, I decided to explore these interests by focusing my thesis on Iranian immigrant youth in Halifax. I wanted to know more about how these people were 'living' in Halifax rather than their reasons for 'leaving' Iran. I sought to understand their 'integration' experiences as *young* Iranian immigrants in Canada, and *how* they managed to set up a new life in Halifax. However, my main focus was on their identities and I wanted to find out what were the impacts of all their experiences on their relationships, beliefs, attitudes (after immigration) and practices, on their identities. Moreover, by hearing about their different attitudes during our conversations about whether they

preferred to leave or stay in Halifax, I became curious to know more about their idea of 'home' after immigrating to Halifax, and, where they felt they belonged now.

With very few exceptions, such as, J. Porter's study on *The Settlement Experiences of Iranian Immigrants in Halifax* (2010) research on the Iranian immigrants in Atlantic Canada, has been practically non-existent, and, in particular, there is no available research on the growing number of young Iranian immigrants. However, even outside Atlantic Canada, there are only a very few studies on young Iranians. Nabavi (2011) has studied the experiences of citizenship among young Iranians in Vancouver; and Khanlou, Koh, & Mill (2008), have studied the experiences of discrimination among Iranian and Afghan immigrant youth in Canada, from a psychological perspective.

In sum, I embarked on this thesis, first, to satisfy my own curiosity, and second, in order to try to fill the research gap about Iranian immigrants in Canada in general, and young Iranian immigrants in Halifax, in particular.

1.2 IRANIANS IN DIASPORA - YOUNG POPULATION IN IRAN

Although Iran has faced many different emigration waves during its long history, it is generally agreed that the main wave of Iranian emigration to other countries started during the first days of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, and continued long after the revolution came to an end (Lewin, 2001; McAuliffe, 2008). In the Islamic revolution, the secular Pahlavi regime of Iran changed into the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, most high-ranking officials of the Pahlavi regime, members of the political elite, affluent members of the urban upper classes, as well as significant numbers of religious minorities

like the Baha'is (Bozorgmehr, 1993; Bozorgmehr, Sabagh and Der Martisian, 1993; Lwein, 2001; McAuliffe, 2008; Swanton, 2005) were compelled to leave the country. Later on, under the weight of eight years of bloody war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), the trend of emigration continued and “a steady flow of migrants and refugees” (McAuliffe, 2008, p. 65) moved to other countries, especially to the USA, Canada, UK, Sweden, France and Australia (McAuliffe, 2008). After the war and in recent years, many people followed, joining their families and friends who had previously left Iran as the ongoing political and economic difficulties in Iran have intensified.

- **Young population in Iran**

A significant portion of Iran's population are young. According to Memarian and Nesvaderani (2010, para. 1) “youth is the largest population bloc in Iran. Over 60 percent of Iran's 73 million people are under 30 years old”. The enthusiasm of having better life opportunities among the young, best-educated Iranians has resulted in the proliferation of young Iranians outside of Iran. They mainly emigrate with their families, or as highly skilled individuals, but also as refugees or international students. Nevertheless, there is no recent available statistics or literature on the exact numbers of this nascent group of migrants.

This long period of forced and voluntary migration combined with Iranian migrants' social networks and the size of the youth population, all contribute to significant numbers of Iranians in diaspora communities and to their diversity. Some studies, for instance Naficy (1999), examine the experiences of Iranian immigrants in 1980s in Los Angeles, refer to the ‘nature of exile’, as shared communal experience among Iranians out of Iran; other studies (e.g. Mirfakhraie, 1999) mention that ethnic,

linguistic and religious differences are persistent in Iranian diasporas. As Lewin (2011, p. 122) concludes, "...the [Iranian] refugees and immigrants comprise an incongruous spectrum of people ranging from the most westernized to the traditional"; [with] different age, gender, educational, political, and ideological backgrounds. Moreover, as Nabavi (2011) mentions, "for ideological and political reasons, some Iranian émigrés identify only as Persian² rather than with the 'Islamic Republic of Iran'³ as their country of origin" (p. 7). These different forms of identification make it almost impossible to determine the precise number of Iranians abroad, even from official statistics. However, many unofficial websites claim that currently three to five million Iranians live out of Iran, which they call 'Iranians abroad' or 'Iranian Diaspora' (Naghdi, 2010, p. 197).

- ***Canada: A Main Destination***

As noted previously, Canada has always been one of the most significant destinations for Iranian immigrants. According to Statistics Canada (2006), currently more than 92,085 Iranian- Canadians live in this country, and in the years between 2006- 2008, Iran was one of the top ten source countries for permanent residents in Canada (CIC, Facts & Figures, 2008). This population is not equally distributed amongst Canadian provinces, and thus different parts of the country have different-sized Iranian communities. However, size is not the only indicator of diversity amongst Iranian communities. Nabavi (2011) refers to the diversity in language of Iranians in Canada who speak "sixty- plus dialects of Farsi" (the formal language in Iran), as well as religious, ethnic, and cultural

² "Persia", the ancient name, became the official name given to the country in 1935 by the Shah (equivalent to the Western rank of Emperor), Reza Pahlavi (Nabavi, 2001, 7)

³ The name given to the country after the 1979 revolution.

diversity- “including Armenian Christians, the Baha’i faith, and various sects of Islam” (p. 6).

The biggest Iranian community is located in Ontario, specifically in Toronto. Based on Statistics Canada (2006) data, currently more than 40,000 Iranians live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Because of this large population, many Iranians ironically nicknamed Toronto as “Tehranto” (Tehran is the capital city of Iran). The presence of many stores and Iranian restaurants with titles written only in Farsi, especially in the York and North York areas of the city, reflect the large and diverse Iranian population in Toronto.

However, in recent years, mainly because of the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) Atlantic Canada, especially Halifax has become a popular Iranian immigrant destinations. According to Porter (2010) and his studies on the settlement experiences of Iranian immigrants in Halifax, as well as the statistics of Nova Scotia Office of Immigration (2007), between 2005 and 2009, Iran became the 10th most prominent immigrant source country of immigration to Nova Scotia. And by 2006, Iranians were the fourth largest immigrant group and the largest non-European immigrant group in Nova Scotia. Presently, based on estimates of the Iranian community in Halifax, about 2500 Iranian immigrants live in Halifax.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS/ PURPOSE OF STUDY

This research was undertaken within the framework of my hypothesis, that migration influences the identity of young Iranian immigrants in gendered ways in which

age, class, and nationality also intersect to shape diverse outcomes and experiences. My thesis proceeds to document and to develop an understanding of the daily settlement and integration experiences of Iranian immigrant (newcomer) youth in Halifax. More specifically, the aim is to map out the process of Iranian immigrant youth's renegotiations of their identity in Canada, and to explore the meaning of home and sense of belonging among these newcomers. Within the framework of intersectionality theory, this study asks a two-part question: *How has the identity of young Iranian immigrants in Halifax changed through their experiences of immigration, settlement and integration; and how have these changes affected these young people's sense of belonging and home?*

Through twelve open-ended interviews, I explored various aspects of these young immigrants' daily life after migration to Halifax, in order to determine how they coped with the changes and challenges they faced in the new Canadian society. These changes and challenges stemmed from various realities such as: facing language barriers and having a different ethno-cultural background than the 'white' majority, as well as experiencing changes in their friendships, relationships, family relations, gender roles, sexuality, dress code, ethno-cultural beliefs, etc. I questioned whether and how these factors played a role in shaping a new ethnic, gender, and cultural identity, and whether and how such changes have defined their sense of "home" and belonging.

After documenting and evaluating the answers to these questions, it became apparent that the elements of gender and class played significant roles in shaping identity. Although all my participants came from a fairly homogenous socio-economic background, that is, upper-middle class families brought up in a country with a dominant patriarchal and traditional culture, their integration experiences varied considerably with

other immigrant groups. Nevertheless, there was a consistent sense of feeling at home in Halifax and having a sense of belonging to Canada. My study will also analyse the reasons behind this sense of belonging and home.

Alongside gender and class, this study emphasises the importance of age in the process of migration, and thus counters existing literature, which tends to have a more homogenous representation of immigrant women or immigrant men regardless of how old they are. Based on the research findings, in comparison to other immigrant groups, the young age of my participants, gave them a strong ability to adapt to changes and handle the challenges they faced, it helped them to get involved in new social networks and communities, to create a new 'home', to develop their sense of belonging to Canada, and to adopt Canadian social norms. Although this study is not representative of 'the first generation young Iranian immigrant population', it nonetheless serves to direct attention to the diversity and sense of belonging of a young group of immigrants who constitute a significant human resource for the province of Nova Scotia and for Canada. Certain implications and recommendations for migration policy at a local and national level will be discussed in the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I embarked on this thesis in order to explore the impacts of integration experiences on young Iranian immigrants' identity, and how they go about adapting and making a home for themselves in Halifax, Canada. The core framing concepts of my study are integration, identity, transnational home, sense of belonging, youth and immigrant youth, within the gender-based and intersectionality theoretical framework. In this chapter, I will review the existing literature on these concepts at a general level, followed by a discussion of intersectionality.

2.1 INTEGRATION

Moving to a new country is challenging on multiple grounds. Upon their arrival, and in a relatively short period, newcomers face enormous ethnic challenges (Driedger, 1996), as well as various socio-cultural barriers, and adaptation challenges. It takes time for them to become involved in the new society and adapt themselves to the indigenous population (and their behavioural norms, values, institutions) (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006), and in this process, newcomers experience gradual changes to their identities. In analysing this phenomenon, social scientists (e.g. Driedger, 1996) have adopted different approaches and have coined different terms for different stages of this process, such as 'absorption', 'adaptation', 'assimilation', 'acculturation', 'inclusion', 'integration', and so on. However, in recent years, immigrant 'integration' has become both the 'lingua franca' as well as become a prominent issue for immigration research centres and policy makers, especially in immigrant receiving societies such as Canada. Integration, literally becoming a part of the society of settlement, is considered a central concept in debates

over the rights, settlement and adjustment of immigrants (Strang & Ager, 2010) because “regardless of class or ethnic background, all immigrants undergo an integration process” (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000, p. 1).

In contrast to this literal meaning, in the immigration literature, there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration (Ager et al., 2002). As a result, integration is a controversial concept, or as Robinson (1998) states, integration is a chaotic concept, a word used by many but understood differently by most. There is an ongoing debate on the concept of integration among researchers and social scientists. For instance, Castle et al. (2002) undertook a survey, between 1996 and 2001, and provide an overview of current and recent research on the integration of immigrants and refugees into UK society, in order to guide policy and practice. In this study, drawing on an extensive literature, including 3,200 bibliographic references, it was determined that:

There is no single agreed understanding of the term ‘integration’. Meanings vary from country to country, change over time, and depend on the interests, values and perspectives of the people concerned. Research on immigrant and refugee integration is based on a set of assumptions, concepts and definitions that are often tacit rather than explicit. Such assumptions and concepts are multi-layered and complex, and may lack coherence or even contradict each other. It is therefore necessary to discuss the varying meanings of ‘integration’ (p. 112).

Michel Page (1992) supports Castle et al.’s findings regarding the multidimensional feature of integration and mentions that, integration is a non-linear process that depends on the position of various ethnic groups in society, the location and wishes of individuals, and the structure of institutions.

Having said that, many researchers have agreed upon the “processual character” (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005, p. 2) of integration, which means, integration is a process

and it does not happen suddenly, but it starts from the very first moment of arrival in a new country (Strang & Ager, 2010) and “it continues as long as the ideal integration is not achieved” (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005, p. 2). The concept of “ideal integration” will be explained later.

Based on the aforementioned elements, and what I have learned from my study, I will define integration as an “ongoing process” (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005, p. 2) in which Iranian immigrants are simultaneously involved in their (Iranian) heritage and their new national society (Canada) (Berry, 2010).

The process of integration happens on different levels: social, cultural, economic, national/ institutional, labor market, etc. In the following paragraphs, I define the most relevant- to my study- aspects of integration:

Social integration is defined as “a process, unfolding over time, through which individuals increasingly develop their capacities for connectedness and citizenship” (Ware et al., 2007, p. 469). *Connectedness* refers to the construction and successful maintenance (through social, moral, and emotional competencies) of reciprocal interpersonal relationships. And *Citizenship* denotes the (full) rights and privileges enjoyed by members of a democratic society and the (full) responsibilities these rights engender (Ibid).

Cultural integration, according to Archer (1985) defines in comparison with *cultural system integration*. She defines cultural system integration as “a logical property characterizing relations between ideas” (p. 333) while cultural integration is “a casual property pertaining to relations between people” (Ibid). Some scholars consider cultural and social integration together and refer to it as socio-cultural integration.

Many researchers focus on the significance of economic and *labour market integration*. Tastsoglou & Preston (2005) define *Economic Integration* as “a process that aims at equitable distribution of resources for immigrants” (p. 2), while labour market integration “is a process of accessing employment and income that are commensurate with one’s qualifications, within a time-frame that is equivalent to that of Canadian-born people with similar qualifications” (Ibid).

In my study, the focus is on the participants’ socio-cultural integration, and, to a limited extent, on their labour market integration, as only a few respondents were employed at the time the interviews were held. Immigrants’ integration experiences take place in different domains. Ager and Strang conducted a survey in 2004, to compile the indicators of integration, which could help policy makers and organizations to better assist refugees and immigrants. In this study, Ager and Strang (p. 3) identify ten domains of integration falling in four categories:

1. Means and markers: Employment; Housing; Education; Health.
2. Social connections: Social bridges; Social bonds; Social links.
3. Facilitators: Language & cultural knowledge; Safety and stability.
4. Foundation: Rights and citizenship.

In this study, I focus on my participants’ integration experiences with respect to language, social relations, education and employment, community participation, ethnic and cultural practices and beliefs, and parental / intergenerational relationships. Here, I review briefly, the importance of these domains in other studies.

- *Language*

There is a vast literature about the significance of language for immigrants in the process of social integration (see e.g. Ellis, 1994; Krashen, 1982). Some scholars contend that women put greater emphasis than men, on the importance of language in their daily communications such as shopping. For instance, Rublee and Shaw (1991) in their study on the Latin American immigrant women in Canada, support this idea and assert that,

Perhaps the major barrier affecting the Latin American women was a lack of English language skills. Again, this directly affected employment opportunities, and at the same time had a considerable constraining effect on leisure and community access. Language confounded virtually all the other barriers identified by the women.

Similarly, these findings resonated in my study in that my female participants emphasized more, than male respondents, the significance of language in their daily connections, communications and identities. The reason for this will be analyzed in the chapter on the study's findings.

- *Social Connections and Networks*

Many scholars confirm the significance of social connections and networks in shaping immigrants' integration experiences in the host society. Krissman (2005) states that network migration can be described as webs of interpersonal relations based on friendship, kinship (real and fictive), or shared ethnic and national origin. Valenta (2008) in his study on first generation immigrants in Norway, examines the challenges, and integration experiences that immigrants face in their social interactions and relations after migration. His participants assert that it is difficult "to build bridges to the mainstream" (p. 97) in the host society, and for doing so, there is a wide range of strategies needed to

be deployed in finding new friends and building up new friendships. Similar to my study group who mainly felt alienated from Canadian-born people, Valenta's participants "seldom have friends among indigenous locals and they seldom meet indigenous locals within the context of informal interactions and relations" (p. 16). Further studies on the importance of social networks in integration are those of Boyd, 1990; Korac, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990 among others.

- ***Racism and discrimination in University/ Employment***

The existing literature emphasizes the vital role of nationality and ethno-cultural background in university environments and in the labour market on shaping immigrants' integration experiences. Although the majority of studies refer to diverse university environments, in which youth face "friendly racism" (Tastsoglou and Petrinioti, 2011, p. 191), in the realm of labour market, the experience of discrimination is more prevalent. Kwok and Wallis (2008) critically analyze the significant role of race (and gender) in immigrants' social exclusion at work places, and assert that, "many immigrants felt that in Canada, speaking with an accent or owing foreign credentials is often used by employers as an excuse to screen them out of job competitions. Consequently, many talented immigrants are prevented from working in their fields, even in professions where labour shortages exist" (p. 134). However, in some studies, such as the one on integration experiences of Greek and Jewish second-generation youth in Halifax (Tastsoglou and Byers, 2008), some of the Greek participants assert that, being a member of the broader Greek community brings advantages for them in the labor market, and it helps them to get a job because of personal relationships which exist between families in the community. In my study, the participants experienced racism both at universities and the

labour market. However, those experiences were gendered as will be discussed in the following chapter.

- ***Parent-Children Relations***

Family relationships change significantly through the immigration and integration process, as documented by several scholars (see e.g. Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). For instance, Tastsoglou & Petrinioti (2011), Sweet (1974), and Ahdab-Yehia (1974) underline the strength of family ties and kinship among Lebanese/Arab communities in Canada, which affect the integration experiences of Lebanese youth. They state that in Lebanese communities, the strength of family ties, and the manner in which children are raised within Lebanese households, differentiate them from their Canadian counterparts. For instance, Lebanese-Canadian second-generation youth feel controlled by their parents in terms of their life outside of school, who they meet, and socialize with. Ella (one of the participants in Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011, p.188) refers to “self-reliance” as one of the “norms” in Canadian culture, whereas in contrast, Lebanese youth, mostly live with their families until they get married, and maintain ongoing, emotional and material ties with their families. These differences can bring about arguments and challenges between parents and children, and affect their integration process. Among the young participants of my study, similar arguments, and changes in relations with their parents were reported. More details will be provided in chapter five.

As can be seen from the review above, integration covers a broad spectrum of life experiences and processes. Nevertheless, as stated in my hypothesis, I am researching the

relationship between the various dimensions of identity, such as age, gender, class, ethnicity and culture and the integration experience of immigrants. Thus, I now turn to the literature, which focuses on understanding how this relationship is formed. In particular, I focus on the two variables of gender and age and the ways they affect the integration process, as they constitute the two core concepts of my study.

There have been ongoing debates about the importance of gender in the integration process. Previous theoretical debates and empirical findings (such as Driedger and Halli, 1996; Page, 1992). Driedger and Halli (1996) tried to develop an integration model ignoring gender in this process. They assumed integration was encountered by immigrant men universally and specifically took into account race, individual circumstances, the role of ethnic groups, and the demands of the larger society (Driedger and Halli, 1996) as the main variables for integration. Recently, however, many studies have been done to show the significance of gender in the integration process, and the differences in emotional, social and cultural barriers immigrant women and men experience in this process (e.g. Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005; Ralston, 1988; Nyakbwa and Harvey, 1990; Moghissi, 1999). Tastsoglou & Preston (2005) define integration through a feminist perspective, and mention, “integration is a process of acquiring both racialized and gender parity” (p.2), and this is the “ideal (labour market) integration”, or the benchmark by which actual integration is assessed. Nyakbwa and Harvey (1990) point to the enormous stress that immigrant women endure through the migration process. For example, the stress of familial conflicts regarding changing family dynamics and values, such as changes in gender roles, or the stress of finding a good job in the host country, in order to be considered a successful immigrant. Language barriers and lack of language

skills also limit immigrant women's social activities, either in the labor market, or in their leisure activities, such as shopping (Ruble and Shaw's, 1991). In addition, "systemic racism" (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000; Bolaria and Li, 1988; Calliste, 1989; Henry, 1994; James 1995) is mentioned as one of the other issues visible minority immigrant women encounter in the 'white' host society. Moreover, Moghissi (1999) mentions that as a result of class and racial discrimination of the predominant white, western society, immigrant women turn to "cultural resistance" (p. 209), leading them to end up being marginalized and excluded from the new society. In a male-dominated culture, the negative effects of exclusion and marginalisation are doubled for immigrant women.

As a result of the aforementioned issues (such as changes in gender roles, facing familial conflicts, language barriers, systemic racism, etc), "immigrant women's social networks are deficient, their life satisfaction is low, and they suffer from emotional isolation" (Nyakbwa and Harvey 1990, p. 138), and therefore, they have a more shallow integration into the new society.

However, Kibria (1990) through her ethnographic study of women's social groups and networks in a community of Vietnamese immigrants settled in the U.S., takes a different position. Comparing the social integration of men and women, she argues that because of the economic dependency of women upon men, together with the concept of family which is highly valued in Vietnamese culture, these women immigrants prefer to preserve patriarchal authority within their families. Nevertheless, through the women's groups and networks, they make connections with the 'outside' world, but also find a job and build up social status. Having such independence helps them to integrate in to the new society. Therefore, there is no doubt that gender plays a significant role in *how* and

to what extent an individual can merge in to the new society, and there are ongoing debates on to whether it acts to hinder or facilitate integration for women immigrants.

In my study, gender plays a pivotal role, and as my analysis will show, my interviewees are aware of the role that gender plays in shaping integration experiences, and also, understand how gender identities are transformed through these experiences. As indicated in the literature, gender can influence integration outcomes both negatively and positively, and I will explore this in greater detail in regards to my study group. Some of my participants displayed sensitivity to the issues surrounding life in patriarchal societies, and made in-depth comparisons with the life they had in their new society. Furthermore, I witnessed how the responses of my participants to various aspects of the integration experience, such as dealing with language barriers or forming friendships were gendered. In this study, the element of age also plays an important role in the process of integration. As we shall see, many of my participants compared their experiences with their parents' and they mentioned that being young had helped them to start their life "from scratch" more easily than their parents. They believed that because of their age, they could integrate sooner and more easily than the rest of their older siblings and their parents. More details about immigrant youth and their integration process will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 IDENTITY

The concepts of identity, in general, and immigrant identity, in particular, have been discussed at length in the literature. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that identity

consists of ambiguous concepts, and contradictory meanings and connotations, and in general, identity does not exist, but is rather a “catch-all” term used to represent almost anything pertaining to the self. However, other scholars affirm the existence and relevance of identity and they attempt to define it. For instance, Rummens (2000) mentions that identity may be defined “as the distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group” (p. 10). Tastsoglou (2001) argues that identity is “socially constructed and subject to ongoing negotiation and reconstruction” (p. 1); i.e. as social contexts and group relations change, so do identities. Therefore, identity is variable, other referenced, and always in a process of becoming. Stryker (1968) mentions that identities are reflexive and symbolic; come out of interaction with others and regular idea exchange; and therefore, meanings come to be understood most clearly through performativity during interaction with others. Stryker (1968) states that identity, at its most basic, is how we make sense of ourselves, along with all the subjective feelings associated with everyday consciousness as they are embedded in wider sets of social relations.

Demuth and Keller (2011) focus on young adults and their narratives about their identity formation. They state: “...identity formation is the main learning and developmental task at the transition to adulthood” (p. 426). They adopt Erikson’s (1968) notion of a successful identity development as an “interplay of two dynamics: *identity synthesis* and *identity confusion*”. Identity synthesis refers to “...achieving the *consistent* and *coherent* self-understanding and to be responsible for one’s decision and life course”; whereas, identity confusion is the opposite of identity synthesis. They conclude that,

“The identity formation can be considered to be successful to the extent that identity synthesis predominates over confusion...” (p. 426).

In the case of immigrants’ identities, Tastsoglou (2001) states that, the main assumption is that the social process of immigration has an impact on the identities of immigrants. As they are faced with new needs and social relations, they re-negotiate their individual identities in interaction with other people, and they try to build a new, hybrid identity.

There are numerous aspects of cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, etc. identities. Each of them, reflects a unique criterion (e.g. sex, gender, age, generation, sexual orientation, dis/ability, socio-economic (class), occupation, culture, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, language, ideology, and territorial allegiance), which may be used to differentiate between individuals or groups, or, alternatively, to establish or reinforce commonality among or within them (Rummen, 2000). Each identity could be analysed and examined separately, and may be based on its own criteria. Nevertheless, the majority of identities are usually intersecting and such intersections span the entire socio-cultural and the subjective psychological spectrum of experiences (Demuth and Keller, 2011).

- ***Ethno - Cultural Identity***

How do immigrants negotiate their cultural heritage from their countries of origin in their new societies? To answer this question, I look at the concept of ethno-cultural identity as developed by various scholars.

Through a socio-psychological perspective, Phinney et al. (2001) focus on adolescents from four immigrant-receiving countries, and offer this definition of ethnic identity: “Ethnic identity is dynamic and progressive; it also changes over time in response to social psychological and contextual factors... Ethnic identity is generally seen as embracing various aspects, including self-identification, feelings of belongingness and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one’s ethnic group” (p. 496) . The participants of this study all show great awareness of these factors, as well as showing strong appreciation for their Iranian cultural identity.

Studies such as Nourpanah (2010) contend that, in the process of cultural identity formation, culture and its identifiers play the most significant role: race, history, nationality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, food, dress code, and so forth can be considered as the identifiers of culture. Pratt (2006) mentions that culture is not something that individuals possess, rather, it is a social process in which individuals participate, in the context of changing historical conditions. Gupta & Ferguson (1992) posit that:

It is so taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society that the terms ‘society’ and ‘culture’ are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states, as when a tourist visits India to understand ‘Indian culture’ and ‘Indian society’, or Thailand to experience ‘Thai culture’ ... (p. 6-7)

It is notable that culture is not a “discrete, object-like phenomenon” occupying “discrete spaces” (Ibid), but it is moveable and follows people’s relocations. For instance, when immigrants move to a host society such as Canada’s, they carry selected elements of their culture and bring them into the Canadian society. It is this reality that contributes to the rise of multiculturalism as a fact in Canada. Therefore, “the disjunction of culture and place” (Ibid) is less significant, and as a result of moving to a new country, while

immigrants take their culture, they also try to embrace the culture of the host country and construct a new cultural identity.

Nourpanah (2010), in her study of Afghan refugees in Halifax, focuses on the identifiers of Afghans' culture such as home decoration, food (what they eat and how they eat), hospitality, and cultural experiments with families, friends, and schools in Canada and evaluates the participants' "Afghan-ness" and the process of their cultural identity formation. She mentions that her participants preferred to "select" out of each set of cultural practices, what they think will work for them, and as a result, each individual forms a cultural identity different from that of the others. However, while they appreciate the benefits (safety and security) of living in Canada, they prefer to keep their Afghan cultural identity rather than exchange it for a mere Canadian one and to adopt a fully "Canadian" lifestyle.

My study will show how the identities from the country of origin and their new society combine to form a particular ethno cultural identity, which contributes to developing the sense of home and belonging.

- ***Gender Identity***

Judith Butler contributed greatly in the late 1980s to our understanding of the concept of gender identity and its related topics. Ten years later, in 1990, in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she developed further her arguments revolving around the differences between biological sex and gender. In this book, Butler focuses on the concept of "women" as the subject of feminism, as well as examining Freud, Lacan, Foucault, and Kristeva's perspectives about gender and gender identity. Following up on her work, many scholars have focused on the medical and

psychological sides of sexual orientation and gender identity formation (see for e.g. Reiner, 2012; Newman, 2010). In March 2007, the Yogyakarta Principles - principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity-, have declared that 'gender identity' refers to:

Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms (p. 8).

In migration literature, the effects of migration on gender identity manifest themselves in changes in gender relations, gender equality, and the "politics of belonging" (Tastsoglou, 2006). For instance, Tastsoglou (2006) in her study on immigrant women in the Canadian Maritimes examines the importance of gender in immigration, identity formation and citizenship. She states that although the women of her study "have the fear and stress that comes from building new homes and selves in a new country", they have very positive experience of immigrating, settling in Canada, and building their identities. They believe that as women, by moving to Canada, they have the opportunity to experience internal "growth", "primarily in terms of their ability to develop a 'double consciousness'", as well as to discover the "aspects of themselves they never knew were there before" (P. 225). Such positive attitudes resulted in these women having a stronger sense of belonging to Canada.

Moreover, in recent years many scholars have focused on immigration from countries known for their highly patriarchal cultural backgrounds, questioning whether emigration from these countries to more liberal countries brings about more gender equality for immigrant women. For instance, Cha (2009) in her Master's thesis focuses

on the changes of gender relations after immigration among Korean immigrant families in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She questions whether immigration brings more egalitarian gender relations for Korean immigrant women, and answers that in the process of renegotiation of gender relations, as immigrant women work outside the home and generate income, they benefit from increasing their bargaining power within the family regarding housework and decision-making. However, because of the existing racism in the Canadian social structure, and ongoing patriarchal practices and ideology in and outside the family, such gender equality is limited.

Nyemah (2007) in his research on five Liberian couples in Halifax supports Cha's view. He shows that access to equal education and employment opportunities for women and men, as well as the presence of freedom of expression and more control over their lives have brought about more gender equality within the family after immigration. This was achieved even though both men and women participants expressed that they wanted to protect patriarchy and masculinity in the name of maintaining their cultural values in the country of settlement.

In a nutshell, it can be said that there are various aspects of identity, each of them could be changed based on different situations, and analyzed separately. However, these identities intersect and their intersections help to form each individual. My research will focus on these intersections amongst members of my study group, exploring how the integration experience has contributed to their identity formation. In particular, ethno-cultural and gender identity comes up in the interview discussions as crucial elements in the processes of integration, which will be explored at some length.

2.3 TRANSNATIONAL HOME AND SENSE OF BELONGING

What immigrants consider their 'home' and their sense of belonging, are issues that have received attention by social scientists in recent years. In this section, definitions of home through a transnational lens, and its relation with the sense of belonging will be reviewed.

- *Home and Transnationalism*

Whereas, the notion of *home* was traditionally viewed through a singular, physical and tangible framework, in more current studies, scholars tend to view *home* through a transnational lens and offer more expansive definitions: 'Home' refers to "both physical places and symbolic spaces" (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002, p. 3). Macgregor Wise (2000) asserts that ideas of home do not simply refer to collections of inanimate objects; instead, 'home' is established by repetition of actions and thoughts. i.e. "it involves the ways in which we feel homes as ours, through the presence of habits and the effects of spouses, children, parents, and companions" (p. 299). Based on this transnational definition of home, people can have multiple "homes" at the same time.

In the migration literature, transnationalism allows immigrants to "maintain, build, and reinforce multiple linkages with their countries of origins" (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995, 52). Based on this conception of transnational migration, Naficy (1999) defines 'home' as "anyplace"; "it is moveable, and can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory by acts of imagination" (p. 6). Abdelhady (2008), in her study on Lebanese immigrants in Montreal, New York city, and Paris, supports transnational definitions of home, and mentions that, Lebanese immigrants in the diaspora have plural, dynamic, temporary and inclusive images of *home*. The participants she interviewed asserted that they have

multiple homes: "...home is not a specific physical territory to be found in Lebanon, in their old houses or among old family and friends" (p. 66). Instead, through a "routine sets of practices, specific social relations and symbolic constructions" (p. 68), they recreate and reconstruct home in the new setting, which "allows them for a sense of continuity with the past and familiarity in the present" (Ibid).

- ***Home and Sense of Belonging***

While some scholars define sense of home and sense of belonging separately, in this section, similar to my findings of this study, sense of home and belonging are interrelated. For instance, Abdul-Razzaq (2006) in her study on Arab immigrant women in Halifax, investigates the personal and gendered dimensions of sense of 'home', and asserts that, there is a relation between sense of home and belonging after migration. For instance, Leila (one of her participants) who has undergone many different migrations finally has found her comfort zone/ home in Canada. She calls herself a Muslim, and above all, she belongs to Canada. While, on the other side, Aisha, has a dilemma of where home is for her, and cannot define where she does belong. Although she believes that Canada is a better place to live with respect to safety and economic opportunity, she still feels alienated, because her friends and memories are based in Yemen. As a result, she calls herself an Arab woman, with less attachment to Halifax/ Canada, though she is not fully attached to Yemen either. Based on seven interviews, Abdul-Razzaq concludes that, "home and belonging are neither tangible nor easily measurable, but multifaceted and ongoing experiences" (p. 3).

Moreover, Migdal (2004, p. 15) explains the 'sense of belonging' in terms of formal and informal aspects: formal belonging has an instrumental sense in that it is

related to one's status while informal belonging defines one's sense of identity. Based on this definition, and what is mentioned above, it becomes apparent that people "can accommodate multiple senses of belonging, even ones with radically different principles underlying their practices" (Migdal, 2004, p. 23).

Other than the importance of 'home' in forming a sense of belonging, Pearce (2008) reviews the existing literature and examines the other components, which might influence the sense of belonging among immigrants. He focuses on the significance of social capital (that refers to the economic benefits derived from social relations, involving networks and institutions), and trust on community attachment. In addition, community size, length of time in Canada, education level, place of education, and personal income seem influential in forming immigrants' sense of belonging. First, he hypothesizes that all of these components affect immigrants' sense of belonging. However, after analyzing a substantial body of literature, he indicates that none of the aforementioned components seems to have significant impacts on immigrants' sense of belonging except for trust in community and neighbours, which are important to some extent. He finds that there is a positive relationship between age and sense of belonging, which appears to have the greatest impact of all variables. He also refers to the importance of gender in developing a sense of belonging:

With respect to gender and marital status, females and respondents in relationships (married or common law) have a stronger sense of belonging to Canada than others. This could be because immigrant females in relationships take on traditional maternal roles and may engage with the wider community and/or family and friends day to day while their partner is at work (p. 25-26).

In accordance with the literature, my study corroborates the transnational definition of home, which is not a fixed or immovable concept. Home can be defined as

part of a greater sense of belonging in a particular society, which is developed by immigrants as they experience integration. I will explore how the elements outlined by Pearce, such as gender and age, contribute to developing a sense of belonging in my study group. I will also examine how the city of Halifax (as a limited immigration destination in Canada), plays an important role in defining my participants' feeling of home.

2.4 YOUTH AND IMMIGRANT YOUTH

Having explored the general concepts of integration, identity, home and sense of belonging in the literature, I will now turn definition of youth and immigrant youth.

Research about youth and debates around issues facing youth have been on the rise. There are numerous, and to some extent different, definitions from public policy makers and scholars about the category of youth. Ariès (1965) and Gillis (1974) bring a social and chronological construct of youth, and assert that, youth was created with the emergence of the industrial revolution and its concomitant changing requirements for new labor integral to capitalist development, for family structure and home life. Marquardt (1998) takes issue with studying youth from an “age range” perspective and says: “youth is not a particular age range. It is a social status characterized by a period of life in which a person is either partly or fully dependent on others, usually family, for material support” (p. 7). In contrast, Tyyska (2001, p. 9) argues that in today’s society, the youth category’s definition needs an “age limit” and “dependency or semi-dependency” is not a sole criterion to define youth, because “we could just easily fit other

large segments of the population into this category, including stay-at home mothers and most co-dependent wage-earners.” Tastsoglou (2008) defines youth as a “transitional stage” in life in the sense that “youth is the stage in life when major transitions usually take place, such as graduating from school, entering post-secondary institutions, entering the labor market, forming new households, but also coming to terms with ethno-cultural identities” (p. 1). Youth in my study, similar to Tastsoglou’s (2008) stand in a transitional stage, in which, either they have entered university, or have just become employed, and struggling to build up their identities.

- ***Immigrant Youth***

In the case of immigrant youth, many of aforementioned transitions take place in the new society, where they constantly struggle with integration experiences to reconcile themselves with two, or more different cultures and to build a new, hybrid identity (Massey, 1998) and sense of belonging. Nabavi (2011) mentions that, the experiences of immigrant youth are constituted between the binaries of “emigration/immigration, local/global, familial/peer, and ethnic/main stream”, which result in “migrants’ engagement with two or more national identities” (p. 2). Similarly, Hebert et al. (2008) state that immigrant youth in diaspora, “struggle to find an enabling interaction of cultures of origin and residence” (p. 72), in order to dwell somewhere in between two cultures and “create themselves” (Ibid).

Several factors have been identified in the literature as significantly impacting immigrant youth’s integration in Canada:

- ***Multiculturalism:***

It is worth noticing that in Canada, transition, integration, identity formation, and changes in the sense of home and belonging are taking place within the context of official, institutional multiculturalism. In Canadian policy multiculturalism “celebrates the ability of new immigrants to maintain their national identity while adopting a new one (Nabavi, 2011, p. 2). There is a significant debate going as to whether multiculturalism is helpful for young immigrants to integrate more easily (e.g. see Belkhodja, 2008), renegotiate their identities (e.g. see Tastsoglou, 2011) and develop their sense of home and belonging (Nabavi, 2011); or whether multiculturalism brings about more challenges for them (see Bannerji, 2000). Ali (2008), in her study on the second-generation youth in Toronto, examines the beliefs surrounding the “myth” of Canadian multiculturalism, and raises a very interesting point. She mentions that multiculturalism in Canada is a double-edged sword for young immigrants. When they are younger, they do not experience discrimination, and they are happy about being with youth of different ethnicities. However, as they grow up, they face the challenges of being non-white, experience exclusion, and start to realize their own subjectivity in relation to the power of white people and institutions. As a result, “these confident, ambitious, and globally connected young people are likely to get deeply disappointed as they uncover the myths of Canada's multiculturalism in the world beyond their ethnically concentrated schools and neighbourhoods” (p. 1).

However, in my study, the multiculturalism referred to by my participants was by and large equivalent to the fact of “demographic diversity” (Porter, 2010, 147), rather than the official Canadian policy. My respondents were keenly aware and satisfied in

living in a society in which different cultures exist, where they faced various cultures other than a dominant Canadian one. Nevertheless, even the liberal co-existence of diverse ethnicities takes place in a framework of formal recognition and individual equality, thus not completely devoid of the institutional dimension.

- ***Youth's Generation***

The extent of cultural challenges, the process of integration in the new society, identity formation and developing a sense of home and belonging are dependent on the youth's *generation*. Generally *first generation youth* immigrants in Canada were born and raised overseas and relocated either alone or with their families to Canada when they were young. *Second generation youth* as defined by Tastsoglou & Byers (2008, p. 6) are “young people who were born in Canada or came to Canada before they entered school, but whose parents (or at least one parent) were not born in Canada.” Their definition covers the so-called *one-and-a-half generation*, those Canadian raised who were born out of Canada (Kobayashi, 2008). For defining *third* and *later* generations, Tastsoglou and Byers (2008) draw on Jantzen's (2008) definition which considers “young people whose grandparents or great-grandparents were the ones born outside Canada, but both of whose parents were born in Canada” (p. 6), and again recognizes the possibility of half-generations.

In this study, my participants are first generation youth who are the children of immigrants from the Middle East and were born and raised in Iran. In the category of first generation youth, the element of *age* is homogenized and the experiences of the whole generation, regardless of the age of their entrance to Canada, are considered all the same. For instance, the experiences of a young first generation immigrant who came to Canada

when he was 15 are very different from the one who arrived at 25. Nabavi (2011) in her studies on the experiences of Iranian first generation immigrant youth in Vancouver (which is demographically very similar to my study group) brings up the same problem and voices concerns (which I also have) by stating that:

The experience of first generation immigrant youth varies considerably based on their age at time of migration as well as the traversals of migration. These differences account for diverse identities and belongings; thus, a blanket term to categorize a variety of migratory experiences is not useful (p. 8).

The immigrant youth of my study are those in the range of between 22- 28 years old, and arrived in Canada when they were at least 18.

In addition to the significance of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘generation’ for immigrant youth in Canada, some scholars also refer to the importance of the specific place of settlement (for instance, Halifax), family and community expectations, institutional norms of Canadian society, ethnicity and, religion as other important factors in young immigrants lives. (See among others: Tastsoglou and Byers, 2008; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti; 2011, and Belkhodja, 2008). In my study, I used many of these factors to explore the process of integration, identity formation and senses of home and belonging of my participants. (For the importance of other parameters such as education, employment, and economic future, see Hassan et al., 2008; Jurva & Jaya, 2008; Amarasingam, 2008; Yan, Sean & Jhangiani, 2008).

2.5 GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

This study was conducted and analyzed through the lens of intersectionality, a feminist sociological theory. Intersectionality was originally highlighted by Kimberlé

Williams Crenshaw in the late 1980s and derives from the word *intersection*. It explains the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations (McCall, 2005). It defines how diverse and marginalized social and cultural components, (for instance) gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, class, culture and nationality intersect to shape a person's identity, and it mainly focuses on identities in transition (Knudsen, 2005). According to Stasiulis (2005), in the application of this theory, based on historically and geopolitically specific contexts, the researcher may include more components into the study. Intersectionality, as Knapp (2005) has mentioned, is one of feminism's well-known "travelling theories" and is recommended by many scholars and applied to different fields, for instance, in Public Policy (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011); International Business Research (Zander et al., 2010); and Psychology (Cole, 2009). In Women's Studies, many scholars believe that intersectionality is absolutely essential to feminist theory and has made the most important theoretical contribution so far (see, McCall, 2005, 1771; Davis, 2008, 67). However, ironically, as Davis (2008) explains, many scholars are still confused about the ambiguity of the concept of intersectionality. Because intersectionality does not have a specific definition or guideline, researchers are concerned about where, how, and to what end intersectionality could- or should- be used in feminist inquiry (McCall, 2005). Davis (2008, p. 78) argues:

The controversies have emerged about whether intersectionality should be conceptualized as a crossroad (Crenshaw, 1991), as 'axes' difference (Yuval-Davis, 2006) or as a dynamic process (Staunæs, 2003). It is not clear whether intersectionality should be limited to understanding individual experiences, to theorizing identity, or whether it should be taken as a property of social structural discourses.

Interestingly, Davis takes advantage of this ambiguity and confusion about intersectionality and turns it to a strength:

Intersectionality, by virtue of its vagueness and inherent open-endedness, initiates a process of discovery; alerting us to the fact that the world around us is always more complicated and contradictory than we ever could have anticipated... it does not provide written-in-stone guidelines...and does not produce a normative straitjacket for monitoring feminist inquiry in search of the 'correct line'. Instead, it stimulates our creativity in looking for new ways of doing feminist analysis; and getting new and more comprehensive and reflexively critical insights (p. 51).

According to Davis's discussions, intersectionality has the potential to be developed by researchers and applied to different fields of inquiry. That is why in the context of migration, many studies have focused on the importance of the intersectionality framework and its paradigms for understanding the immigrants' settlement experiences (however, the majority of them only focus on the women's lives). Kynsilehto (2011) states that crucial in understanding the life stories is the now well-established concept of intersectionality, which emanates from feminist theorizing on multiple identities, differences, and belonging. Stasiulis (2005) supports Kynsilehto and mentions that nowadays, in immigrant receiving countries such as Canada, the US, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, researchers use intersectionality theory to "demarginalize the lives and experiences of oppression" among racialized immigrants (p. 37).

In my study, in order to assess the integration experiences of young Iranian newcomer immigrants in Halifax and the impacts of their experiences on their identities and sense of home and belonging, intersectionality was chosen. While the theoretical weight has been placed on the intersections of gender, age, ethnicity/ race, class,

education/employment, and the location of respondents: Halifax/ Canada versus Iran, I tried to keep Bradley and Healy's (2008) notion in mind:

Intersectional approach is where none of the components, neither gender, nor ethnicity/race nor other variables are prioritized over another. Rather, the researcher situates the respondents in their context and thereby aims to understand how at a moment in time (for instance) age may be the dominant form of explanation, whereas at other times and in other contexts it might be gender (for example) (p. 43).

In my study, although all these aforementioned dimensions played important roles in the identity formation of my participants, age in particular became prominent in how they themselves defined their integration experience and sense of home and belonging. I believe that one of the unique contributions of this study is the significance of age, as reported by my participants, in conjunction with gender, in shaping integration experiences and identity formation in comparison with other groups of immigrants. Below, figure 1 shows the framework of this study in a diagrammatic format.

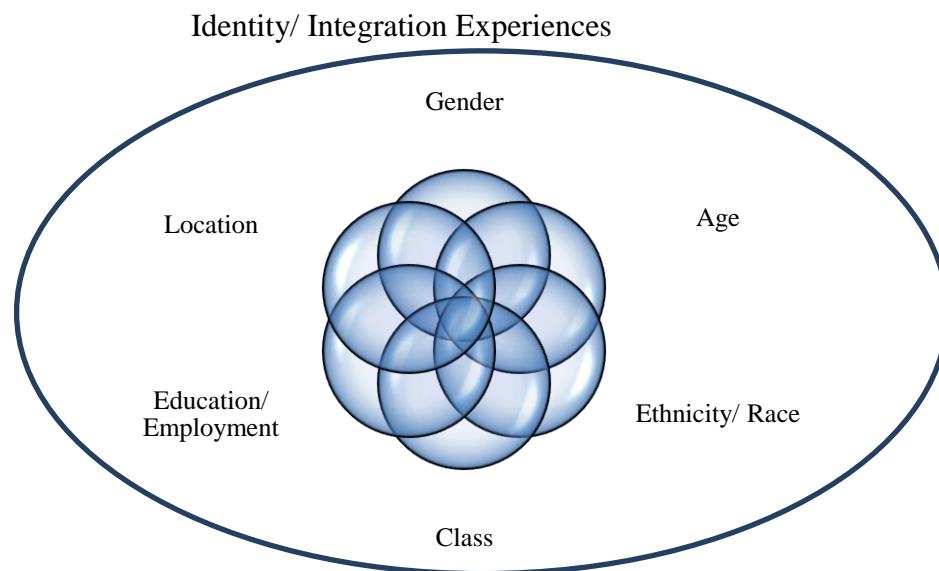


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the key themes and their intersections⁴

⁴ Bradley & Healy, 2008, 43 have a very similar diagram in their studies.

As the dimensions of class, age and ethnicity/race are constant in my research group (youth/Iranian), I do not use any of these three attributes to explain the variances (similarities or differences) in the integration and identity renegotiation experiences which I observed amongst the participants themselves. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the caveats of the qualitative study, gender was the single dimension where differences could be detected in the integration and identity renegotiation experiences of the Iranian immigrant youth. It was of great interest to note how different genders, for example, of similar class, age and ethnic backgrounds react to similar situations throughout the integration process, and as a result of those experiences, undergo identity transformations. More systematic comparisons with other Iranian immigrant groups would confirm the significance of age in integration and identity renegotiation, beyond the self-reporting of this study's group. However, such comparisons lie outside the scope of this study.

To sum up this chapter, in order to contextualize my research question within the existing body of work, the literature review brings together some of the main concepts of integration, the different aspects of identity, definition of transnational home and sense of belonging, youth and immigrant youth, as well as intersectionality as a theoretical framework for my research.

CHAPTER THREE: IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS/IRANIAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Having set out the general conceptual framework of my study, I will now consider its specific relevance in the literature on Iranian immigrants and Iranian immigrant youth.

A review of the existing literature reveals that empirical research on Iranian immigrants is more available on Iranian diasporas in the U.S and Sweden (these two countries were the main immigration destinations for Iranians after the 1979 revolution) than in Canada. However, in the past ten years, given the increasing numbers of Iranian immigrants and refugees, as well as the flight of Iranian students to Canada, research on this community has been on the rise. Nevertheless, studies on Iranian immigrants tends to be narrow in focus. For example, I came across a substantial body of work devoted to mental health issues of Iranian immigrants after migration more than any other issue (see e.g. Ebrahimian, 2005; Ghaffarian, 1998). Even so, studies on young Iranian immigrants are still limited. In this chapter, I review the main themes of the recent studies on the Iranians in diaspora in general, and more specifically in Canada.

3.1 IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS

Integration experiences and identity formation after migration to the new country are the most common themes in studies on Iranian immigrants. For instance, Mostofi (2003) in her study on the experiences of Iranian immigrants in the American society and the process of their “dual identity formation” mentions, “in the case of Iranians living in the United States, a melding has ensued between *Iranianness* and *Americanness*” (p. 681). She describes a combination of values that are adopted from both ethnicities:

“American notions of freedom and liberty” with “Iranian cultural traditions and concepts of the family” (Ibid). However, she adds that, although the process of identity formation in the new society is difficult and complex by itself, this “dualism” of moulding Iranian-American identities is not unfamiliar for Iranians. Since World War II, “Western, especially American-culture, political rhetoric, and lifestyles have been a part of the Iranian psyche” (p. 682). In fact, Mostofi notes how, historically, during the Pahlavi regime, “...the emergence of a westernized, middle to upper-middle professional class bred on American political theory, Parisian fashion, Italian cinema, and German friendship as resulted in a link between Iran and the west” (p. 681-2). She concludes:

For Iranian-Americans with a more Westernized background, an identity crisis is not necessarily a problem as much as it is an identity confusion. The question appears to be "Who are we?" and not "What are we?" Iranians do not ask where they come from, for they maintain close cultural ties to Iran either through frequent visits, nostalgia, or memories. Iranian immigrants have strong connections either to the Iran of the present or, in most cases, the Iran of the past (p. 683).

However, the case of one-an-a-half and second generation Iranians, and their identity formation is different from the first generation.

Darnell (2002) in his study on Iranian immigrants in the U.S supports Mostofis' perspective and asserts that identity formation is dependent on the immigrant's generation. He questions the “Iranian-ness” and cultural/ethnic identity of his participants. By using cultural tools such as language, cuisine, media, family and friends, and religion, he determines “to what degree do the first, one-and-a-half, and second generation Iranian Americans retain their cultural ties to Iran” (p. 1). He concludes that, as it was expected “...the later the generation, the fewer direct ties to their parents' or grandparents' culture was instilled” (p. 52). The first generation Iranian Americans

maintain many of the cultural practices and cultural identities, whereas, because of the background diversity and deeper socialization in to the American culture/ society, the one-and-a-half and the second generations display less “Iranian-ness” as they embrace more of an American identity.

McAuliffe (2008) specifically focuses on the process of identity formation among the second generation Iranians of Muslim and Baha’i background in the Canadian cities of Vancouver, Sydney and London. He challenges the concept of “internally coherent and homogeneous” identities among the national migrant communities, and mentions that Iranians in diaspora are an internally diverse community. He adds that identity formation among the Iranian second generation is dependent on various variables which are rooted in their past (“real or imagined”), which they receive from their parents. In particular, she focuses on ‘class’ as an important matter among Iranians in diaspora which comes from their past (Iran), and continues to the present (in Canada). For instance, those Iranians who have moved to Canada thirty years ago are affiliated to the Pahlavi regime and are considered upper class immigrants, while the newcomers do not have such an elevated class position. As a result, many of older residents do not like their children to associate with the Iranian newcomers. McAuliffe (2008, p. 68) writes, “amongst many of the first generation, according to their children, there was an explicit concern to maintain class demarcations between the established community and newer migrants who symbolized a challenge to existing order and class relations.” They even came up with a derisive term to describe the newcomers: “newer Iranian migrants were frequently called a derivative of the phrase ‘fresh off the boat’ (e.g. ‘FOBs’ or ‘fobes’) by informants. They were described as less wealthy, more religious and ‘speaking in a funny accent’” (p. 70).

McAuliffe also focuses on other elements of identity formation among this second generation and concludes that:

The children of Iranian migrants experience life as an intersection of multiple social fields, including, but not limited to, attachment to national homeland, class categories, religious communities, generational cohort and migrant cohort based on the time of arrival. The manifold relationships that the children of Iranian migrants find themselves negotiating on a daily basis reflect the real and imagined ties with the place in which they live and the place from where they have come (p. 77).

The participants of my study corroborate the findings of the aforementioned literature and emphasized the importance of ‘generation’ and ‘class’ in identity formation through the immigration process. Being members of young first generation immigrants who grew up in Iran, they had already shaped an identity in Iran, and had intimate, strong social ties with Iranian culture. Yet, coming from upper-middle class families, resulted in their familiarity with western culture, and therefore, by moving to Halifax, they were trying to dwell somewhere in between Iranian-ness and Canadian-ness and construct an Iranian-Canadian identity. These findings will be discussed in detail later.

Studies on the cultural identity formation of Iranian immigrant youth in Canada are few and far between, and here I focus on one, the work of Khanlou, Koh & Mill (2008). This study is part of a broader study: “the Immigrant Youth and Cultural Identity in a Global Context Project” (p. 495). In this paper, the authors focus on 17 young Iranian immigrants, and 9 young Afghans in Toronto. They examine their experiences of prejudice and discrimination in a multicultural and multiracial context, and how such experiences can impact their cultural identity and influence their psychosocial outcomes. The Iranian participants are between 17-20 years old; all are high school students and live with their families. Through questioning their personal experiences of discrimination at

school, their visible difference, and hearing jokes about their ethnic backgrounds, the authors conclude that although multiracial societies can promote a better integration of youth with marginalized identities, discrimination can negatively affect mental health and self-esteem, while also strengthening one's sense of belonging to one's ethnic/racial identity. My participants, however, stated that despite racism and discrimination they faced in Canadian society, they had a growing sense of belonging to Canada because of positive changes in their identities.

3.2 INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE AMONG IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS

Among studies on the integration experiences of Iranians in diaspora, across different generations, several common themes became apparent. For instance, Mobasher (2006) analyzes integration experiences and identity formation among Iranians in the U.S. and examines the traumas they have faced after migration. He contends that the negative portrayal of Iranians in the American media, especially after the September 11th attacks, and consequently the negative views among the American people, could have impeded Iranians' attempts to integrate in the American culture. Therefore, it can be said that the 'time-frame' plays a significant role in Iranian immigrants' integration process.

In addition, Chaichian (1997) refers to the significance of 'generation' and 'class' in the integration process. He focuses on the first generation Iranian immigrants in Iowa, and through his quantitative study, he states that these (mainly) highly educated, upper-middle class Iranian immigrants are very receptive of the host society's culture. However, because of their strong cultural ties with Iranian culture, "none of the American events or rituals have become internalized in terms of their social, historical and religious

significance” (p. 623). It can be said that, while the class membership of these Iranian immigrants opens a way to the Western and American culture, on the other side, their generation membership strengthens their ties to Iranian culture and consequently preventing them from internalizing American rituals.

Regarding gender as a significant element in forming immigrants’ experiences, many studies show that because of the patriarchal background of Iranian society, Iranian immigrant women view immigration as an opportunity, they adopt more positive attitudes toward the new society, and as a result they integrate better in the new culture than Iranian immigrant men (Dallalfar, 1994; Lewin, 2001; Moghissi, 1999). These results however are more evident among upper-middle class families.

Similarly, Lewin (2001) in her study on the Iranian immigrants in Sweden contends that Iranian women “have a better chance of adjusting to Western societies than Iranian men” (p. 121); and that is because of the improvement in their social/ professional position and work status in the new society, which results in greater possibility to overcome “the identity crisis which ordinarily makes ethnic groups and cultural minorities lose their sense of fitting into their new social reality” (Ibid).

Moghissi (1999) in her studies on Iranian immigrant women in Canada supports Lewin’s perspective and mentions that for “those home makers who previously only were involved in affairs of bedroom and kitchen, change has meant involvement in professions” (p. 210). As a result, living in Canada is perceived as an opportunity for women as they experience a new life and a new world, out of the home, somewhere with less traditional/ moral limitations, “which include the exercise of power, authority or autonomy- or simply more interaction with the outside world, independent of their men”

(Ibid). Even though many of these women are resigned to work in retail or low paying jobs, just to help the family finances, in so doing, they still make more connections and friendships with their non-Iranian co-workers, as well as public authorities, and try to integrate more easily into the new society.

Moreover, Dallalfar (1990) referring to the Iranian immigrant women entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, suggests that even those women who lack the specific language skills and training needed for employment in the larger, English-speaking community integrate more easily to the new American society than their husbands or male partners. These women, establish their own 'home-based businesses', and by doing so, not only they help their family economically, but also they build up their independent identity.

Interestingly, the more successful integration of female Iranian immigrants (than their male counterparts) could be seen even among the Iranian second generation. In a very recent study conducted by Bozorgmehr & Douglas (2011), the authors focus on the economic and educational success of the second generation Iranian-Americans, and argue that the second generation is still young and therefore, it is premature to assess the extent of intergenerational mobility. However, their economic and educational achievements are assessable. After looking at the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the second generation at the national level, and comparing them with those of the first generation (Iran- or foreign-born population), they conclude that:

The results indicate a preliminary continuation of economic and educational success from the first- to the second-generation Iranians. Moreover, this achievement has become more balanced across gender lines in the second generation. Specifically, in terms of educational attainment and labor force

participation, females have quickly closed the gap with their male counterparts (p. 3).

In sum, according to the literature, it can be said that, generally, Iranian immigrant women, mainly from upper- middle class backgrounds, have more successful integration experiences as compared to the men.

As mentioned before, although the importance of gender in Iranian immigrants' integration has been reviewed at length in literature, there has been a huge lack of literature regarding the significance of age in this process. In my literature review, I found only one study - Hojat et al. (2009) - on the Iranian immigrants in the U.S., in which, rather than integration experiences, they focus on the significance of age mainly in acculturation process and a reason for returning to Iran. Through statistical analysis, they assert, "older respondents were more likely than younger immigrants to return to Iran" (p. 168), and that could be explained "by the Western lifestyle in the contemporary American society including educational and professional opportunities that attract younger immigrants more than their older counterparts" (Ibid).

According to the aforementioned studies on Iranian immigrants, it can be concluded that, in line with other immigrant groups' experiences referred to in the previous chapter, generation, class, gender, and age play significant roles in the integration process. Moreover, because of the political issues, the 'time-frame' of immigration and integration in the host society may also prove to be important. In my study, as I mentioned before, and will discuss later in detail, through intersectionality framework and emphasis on the relations of gender, age, class, and generation, the participants affirm that the integration process is gendered, and strongly dependent on

age, class, and generation. However, looking at the significance of ‘time frame’ was beyond my study. I suggest more research on the importance of ongoing political issues on the integration of immigrants from specific regions such as the Middle East.

3.3 SENSE OF HOME AND BELONGING AMONG IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS

Home and sense of belonging among Iranians in diaspora was another issue I explore here. However, despite vast numbers of Iranians living outside Iran, especially in the U.S, only a few studies on Iranian immigrants’ understanding of home and sense of belonging are available; i.e. not many scholars have actually asked where ‘home’ is for Iranian immigrants or where do they feel they ‘belong’. In this section, first the definition of ‘home’ will be reviewed through a transnational lens, then the relations between the sense of home and the sense of belonging among Iranian immigrants in diaspora will be discussed.

- ***Sense of Home Among Iranians in Diaspora***

In Canada, Swanton’s (2005) qualitative study of Iranian immigrants focuses on transnational definition of home, as revealed by their choice to live in the ‘North Shore’ area of Vancouver. He mentions that the majority of North Shore area residents are Iranians, and many Iranian food shops, stores and restaurants are located there. Therefore, Iranian immigrants in this area do not feel isolated or far from Iran/ Iranian culture. Instead, North Shore is a “comfortable space” for them. They have transplanted and translated their everyday practices, habits and routines from their everyday lives in Iran to Vancouver – “...ranged from food, to home decoration, to maintaining rituals of hospitality and the kinds of music they listened to” (p. 33). They watch the Persian

programs, instead of Canadian ones on satellite television. They always speak Farsi, and they do not even *need* to learn English. Swanton says, “they are only *partially* uprooted from Iran – primarily through the possibilities of being together with other Iranians, and the familiarities of language, food, products and so forth” (Ibid). By “recreating” the “spaces of familiarity and a ‘homely’ ambience” in North Shore Vancouver, Iranian immigrants make ‘home’ and a ‘homely’ comfortable space for themselves.

Alinejad (2011) examines the concept of “nostalgic” home through transnationalism among the Iranian bloggers who post in English in the U.S and Canada by focusing on their online weblogs to investigate how they use digital media to negotiate their Italianness and their feelings toward ‘home’. By reading over 200 weblogs, as well as interviewing Iranians in diaspora who read and write these weblogs, she conducts a transnational analysis and asserts that, these bloggers “highlight important dimensions of the dynamic between ‘the Iranian diaspora’ and ‘the homeland’” (p. 44). By combining their memories from Iran, with their “glorious” imaginations about the homeland, which they make here in the U.S, or in Canada, the notion of ‘transnational embodiment’ has occurred. While their body is situated outside Iran, their minds are moving to Iran, walking in the streets, capturing the photos, smelling the food, and bringing back the senses of their gone, sweet, and nostalgic home, which they really miss. Nevertheless, they like to talk about these sweet memories only because they are part of their existence/ their identity. Otherwise, their present, and their future is absolutely here, in the U.S or Canada, and such representations of having a past, alongside with present, through the online weblogs, have resulted in self-identification as Iranian-American.

It is worth noting that through a transnational lens, although the participants of my study had a sense of nostalgia for their home in Iran, and metaphorically referred to the smell of streets in Iran, they named Halifax as their home and were open to having a brighter life in their new home in Halifax. I shall return to this in detail later.

- ***Interrelation Between Sense of Home and Sense of Belonging***

Regarding sense of belonging among Iranian immigrants, I found very few studies, and the majority of them directly or indirectly considered sense of home interrelated to sense of belonging. For instance, Nabavi (2011), which is the only available and up to date study I have found on Iranian first generation youth in Canada, examines the transnational conception of home and its relation with the sense of belonging. Through an ethnography methodology on twelve first-generation Iranians (ages of 19-30) in Vancouver, She examines these concepts within multicultural Canada, and starts her PhD dissertation with this very famous Iranian song:

“In khane ghashang ast, vali khaneye man nist. In khak faribaast, vali khake vatan nist.

(This home is beautiful, but my home it is not. This land takes my breath away, but my homeland it is not) –

[Sattar, Persian singer and songwriter]” (sentences were Italicized in the original format) (p. 1).

Through this short but meaningful lyric, she mentions that although her young Iranian participants appreciate the beauty of this new country, they still do not feel as if they fully belong to their new home. While they are negotiating their lives somewhere “in between ‘here’ (Canada) and ‘there’ (Iran), the concept of ‘home’ is a reminder of their nostalgic homeland, to which is “impossible or undesirable to return” (Ibid). As a result,

these immigrants experience the sense of “no longer fully belonging to the home they left behind, nor to the new homes they have adopted”. Instead, in many respects, “they inhabit a space in between” (Ibid).

Moreover, McAuliffe (2007), in his study on the second generation Iranian immigrants in Vancouver, discusses the importance of religion and religious identity in forming a sense of home and belonging. He focuses on Iranian second generation with Baha’i and Muslim background, and asserts that, class, gender, spatial relations, as well as any number of sub-cultural categorizations play important roles in forming the sense of national belonging. In this particular case, those with Muslim affiliation consider Iran more as a home and show more sense of belonging in this home, whereas, those of the Baha’i faith have a less ‘homely’ feeling and as a result, less sense of belonging. He concludes that:

For many of the second generation from a Muslim background their centrality in the discourses of national belonging, typified through the conflated ‘Muslim Iranian’ of media representations, feeds a desire for return. In contrast, for many second-generation Baha’is their positionality as a minority, in both the homeland and the diaspora, combines with an eschatological problematizing of national belonging, to lead them away from Iran (p. 307).

Similarly, Porter (2010) focuses on the settlement experiences and sense of belonging among Iranian immigrants in Halifax. He engages literature on “multiculturalism and transnationality” as a theoretical framework in order to explore what influences newcomers in developing a sense of belonging to Canada. He interviews eight Iranians: refugees, skilled workers, and family class immigrants, ranging in years of residence in Canada from 30 to one, and examines the importance of social capital,

discrimination, the place where education was obtained, and definition of ‘home’ in assessing the sense of belonging. He concludes that:

Iranian-Canadians in my case study who actively participate in organizations, such as cultural, political, and ethnic and immigrant organizations, or who do or have done volunteer work, take more pride in their sense of belonging than those who do not. Their involvement in public affairs gives them the sense that Halifax is a home they have helped build, and for that reason they have no intention of leaving Nova Scotia, regardless of their economic situation (p. 59).

In addition, Porter asserts that all of the participants “chose Canada for its civil and human rights record” (p. 74). Therefore, “it can be inferred that they have a predisposition to integrate and embrace the liberal democratic values that attracted them to the country in the first place” (Ibid). They comprehend multiculturalism as “demographic diversity” (Ibid), which helped them to build up their identities. All of them referred to themselves as —Canadian or —Iranian-Canadian, which “reflects a sense of belonging and commitment to Canada”. Finally, he concludes that, all participants in his study asserted, they feel like they belong to the Halifax community, and lack of employment is the main reason for them to leave the province.

In my study, I find, similar to the aforementioned literature, that there is a relation between sense of home and sense of belonging. My participants felt a strong sense of home in Halifax, and as a result, they had a growing sense of belonging to Halifax, as well as to Canada. In chapter of research findings, I will discuss this issue at length later.

The review above indicates there is a research gap, which exists on young Iranian immigrants living in small cities such as Halifax, and my study generates knowledge in this regard. The similarities and differences between the immigrants of my case study and

those of the studies mentioned above will be explored in greater length in my data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEACRCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that the province of qualitative research is “the world of lived experiences” (p. 2) and consists of a set of “interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). That means qualitative research studies the phenomena in their “natural settings” and attempts to “make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to these settings” (Ibid). As Esterberg (2002), mentions, “qualitative researchers try to understand social processes *in context*” (p. 2).

Moreover, Esterberg (2002, p. 3) refers to the notion of the “subjective nature of human life” in qualitative studies, which means qualitative researchers pay attention to the “subjective experiences” of their participants, as well as considering their own subjectivity toward the study. In other words, “qualitative researchers try to understand the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them” (p. 3). Therefore, it is very important for the researcher to explicitly define their place/role in the study. After doing so, the researchers begin examining the social world, and in that process, develop a theory consistent with what they are seeing. Esterberg calls this “inductive reasoning” (p. 7). Therefore, the qualitative researcher tries to leave out any pre-conceived assumptions and instead, looks for findings, which reveal the realities of experience. In the literature of immigration, Barber (2005) criticizes popular discourse, which tends to homogenize immigrants by assuming that immigrants from a particular country or ethnicity have similar experiences, whereas, “immigrants (regardless of their visa status) have distinctive personal histories” (p. 45). A qualitative methodology is a way to breach the

assumptions about them, while it can further reveal the truth about the “transnational complexity of immigration”, as well as discover the reality of immigrants’ personal experiences. Nourpanah (2010, p. 16) in her study of Afghan refugees supports Barber’s idea and asserts, “...if qualitative research is well-suited to documenting the experiences of immigrants, it can be very apt, for it has the potential to provide space for the “voices” of the immigrants”; and by “voices” she means “another viewpoint on human situations”.

Given the aforementioned strengths of qualitative research, this study was conducted with this research methodology. It was initiated based on my personal interest to discover the reality of subjective experiences of Iranian immigrant youth in Halifax and to critically examine the assumptions regarding their integration, identity formation and sense of home and belonging. As noted previously, although many Iranian immigrants live in Halifax, few studies have been done on this visible minority group, and thus, qualitative research methodology could contribute to making their voices heard. Indeed, the high interest and willingness of my interviewees to participate and speak out in this research project reassured me that I was on the right track. In the next section the *interview*, is discussed as a tool of qualitative methodology.

4.2 INTERVIEWS

This research had an “exploratory” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 3) nature and therefore, was conducted through semi-structured interviews; i.e. the goal of this research was “to allow the respondents to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Ibid).

Therefore, interviewing seemed to be the best method to adopt in this qualitative research.

Selection criteria and Recruitment of Respondents

Upon receiving approval from the Saint Mary's Research Ethics Board (REB) in the summer of 2011, and securing funding from the Atlantic Metropolis Centre, I turned my attention to the recruitment of respondents among youth in the Iranian community in Halifax. I set my age limit criteria by considering the definitions of youth in the broader literature (reviewed earlier in the thesis).

All of the recruited respondents were born and raised in Iran, and had completed their secondary education (high school) in that same country, which means that all of them were either 18 or older when they immigrated to Halifax. I chose 18 years old as a minimum age of the participants, because in Iran the “transitional stage” (**Tastsoglou, 2008, p. 1**), the age of graduating from high school, entering university, entering work, getting a driver's license and considered an adult by criminal law, is 18. In Iran, like many other countries, 18 years age is a turning point age at a teenager becomes a young adult with many more rights and responsibilities in life. Therefore, I reasoned that at 18 or older, these participants have formed an identity in Iran, and have understood the concept of ‘home’ and sense of belonging, and now, by moving to Halifax they are experiencing the process of molding a *new* identity.

Moreover, I considered 28 years age as the cut-off age for my interviewees, mainly because after 28 people have passed the transition age and, are considered as ‘grownups’ rather than ‘young adults’. (Although this is contingent on socioeconomic

and cultural context, for more information about the turning age from being a young adult to a grown up and their differences, see Kosidou et al., 2012; and psychological guides in Damour, 2012).

In addition, all of the participants had lived in Halifax less than 5 years, and thus, were still considered ‘newcomers’, but had had adequate time to integrate to the new society. However, having been in Canada for 5 years or less, they still remembered their *detailed* memories and experiences of their migration to Halifax.

More specifically, after completing the respondents’ profiles, it became apparent that all of the interviewees had lived in Halifax *at least* two and half years. Moreover, all of the respondents were between 22- 28 years old at the time of the interviews. As a result, all of the recruited participants met the age criteria I had set, had an adequate time (at least 2 years) to experience integration and the identity formation process as young Iranian newcomers, to Canada while still maintaining vivid and relatively ‘fresh’ memories from Iran.

I interviewed twelve young Iranians. Due to the limited numbers of participants, the qualitative nature of the research, and the context of a smaller Canadian city with a relatively low level of cultural diversity, the scope of this study is that of on a micro-level analysis. Therefore, there is no claim that this group of respondents is a representative of the Iranian youth community either in other Canadian cities or outside of Canada.

As I wanted to tease out gender differences and do gender-based analysis on the interviewees’ experiences, I chose to interview six females and six males. I have noticed that in some families, the girls believed that they had more freedom from their families and at some point from society, to do whatever they liked to do in Halifax, whereas, in

Iran, only their brothers had that leeway. Therefore, their integration experiences would definitely be different than their brothers' or their male partners', and as a result, those experiences would likely bring about differences in their identities and sense of belonging. Hence, having gender-based perspective, knowing about the experiences of both sexes, and comparing them with each other, is crucial to understanding this nascent immigrant group in Halifax.

In order to recruit the participants, I used my contacts and "credit" as a young member of the Iranian community in Halifax, as well as the snowball or chain sampling strategies. I approached young people in the community who I already knew, who were eligible to be the participants, and asked them whether they would like to participate in this research project and/ or if they know of others who might be interested. Having Iranian background and young Iranian close friends, as well as being in the same age group as the respondents, helped me to find the participants easily and quickly. For a short period, news about my thesis topic spread among the Iranian community in Halifax. Many tried to help me, were very interested to participate, and wanted to talk to me. In one instance, I was surprised when a young Iranian girl came to me and asked me, "why did you not interview me while I have had many things to say", and she seemed somewhat angry. I answered, "It was just 6 girls, and I am sorry that I have already done all 6 interviews". (I should confess that although I was happy about this interesting project and the interest it elicited, I also felt the pressure that all these people who I know, and who know me, would all be waiting to see how I will *report* their experiences and *what* I am going to write about them).

Interviews: Open- Ended Questions

All of the interviews took place during the spring academic year in May 2012. Out of twelve interviews, ten were conducted in Farsi (Persian), and two in English. I had permission to tape ten interviews, using my cell phone audio recorder and I took notes by hand for two other ones. Some of the interviews were done at the respondents' houses, while I did the rest of them at the Atlantic Metropolis Centre office at Saint Mary's University and one in a coffee shop. The interviews included open- ended questions and each of them lasted between 35 minutes to one hour. In the beginning of each interview, I explained the general research direction of my thesis and its objectives. Then, I explained the voluntary character of participation, and this was also stated on the information/ consent letter with which they were provided and asked to sign. Sometimes, I showed them the whole questionnaire sheet before proceeding with the interview in order to provide them some time for brainstorming, and then I started the actual interview. I found that this way of conducting the interviews was very useful, as it provided a structure/ framework to my participants. Mostly, however, I began my interviews by asking questions such as, "Tell me when you came to Halifax? How long did you wait to come to Canada? How, under which program, alone or with family, did you come to Canada? Are you currently living alone or with your family in Halifax?" Then, I turned to the main questions from the questionnaire. In some instances, depending on the respondents' answers, I worded the questions differently, or skipped some questions.

The first set of questions focused on their integration experiences in relation to the new life in Halifax. These experiences included experiences of: language barriers, social relations, school and employment, community participation, changes in dress code

and sexuality, family relations, and gender identity in the new setting in Canada⁵. Moreover, I was particularly interested in finding out how all of these experiences have influenced my participants' identities as *young* Iranian immigrants. I was fascinated by how the respondents felt about being young immigrants (as they compared themselves with their parents) and belonging to a specific gender (especially being female) in Halifax society. Since none of my respondents lived elsewhere in Canada before settling in Halifax, Halifax was their only experience of Canada.

The second set of my questions was about immigrants' definitions of home and sense of belonging. The intent here was to determine, after the integration experiences and identity changes that came with settling and starting a new life in Halifax, what do they call 'home', where do they feel they belong, and what are their future plans; i.e. staying in Halifax, or leaving it, returning to Iran, etc.

Finally, based on Esterbergs' (2002), suggestion I finished my interviews by asking the respondents whether they had any comments, or whether there was anything they wanted to add about their experiences.

4.3 RESEARCHER'S POSITION

As Esterberg (2002) states, the question of how much of oneself to present in an interview as a researcher, is an issue that is under debate. In this research, because of my status of an international student, my integration and settlement experiences in Halifax was different than my respondents'. However, my Iranian background, being a young 25

⁵ The open-ended questionnaire and the consent form are available in Appendices A, and B.

year old woman, being aware of the social situation in Iran, as well as Iranian customs, values and traditions, all contributed to my position as an insider. I tried my best to use this opportunity, to show my enthusiasm, create a friendly atmosphere, and better rapport with the interviewees, and I believe that I was successful in doing so. Moreover, in order to stave off potential misunderstandings or negative effects on my insider position, at the beginning of each interview, I emphasised the *voluntary* character of the interview, as well as my position as a *researcher* rather than being a friend. I tried my best not to interrupt or to mislead the respondents through the interviews. Sometimes when the interviewee shortened his/ her speech to “you know... you know what I mean... you understand what I am talking about as you were in the same situation...” I answered, “Yeah, I understand to some extent; but can you please explain it more as I want to make sure that I will be able to convey exactly what you mean”.

In general, I believe that having similar ethno-cultural background, being acquainted with the participants or those that referred me to the participants and the choice of open-ended questions did serve their purpose to pinpoint common themes, glean new information and generally, to allow the interviewees to better tell their stories.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS: NUD*IST + NARRATIVE APPROACH

Regarding the data analysis and how the researcher can “read sense” in to the answers that respondents give to open- ended interviews, Silverman (2005) contends that there are two ways to do so: “the realist approach”, and “the narrative approach” (p. 154).

In the realist approach, interview data is treated as an index to some “external reality” (e.g. facts, events), or “internal experience” (e.g. meanings, feelings), and the interviewer makes an “actual statement” out of the interviewees’ responses. Following this approach, the researcher needs to ensure the accuracy of his/ her interpretation by using other observations, for instance, coding the data and using computer- assisted qualitative programmes (Silverman, 2005, p. 154).

The alternative, narrative approach, “treats interview data as accessing various stories or narratives through which people describe their world” (Ibid). In this approach, the interviewer does not make any claim that the respondents’ accounts provide a “true” picture of “reality”, rather, they are “cultural stories” (Silverman, 2005, p. 156), which were constructed by the interviewee, through “using culturally available resources”(Ibid). In these stories, “interviewees deploy their narratives to make their actions explainable and understandable to those who otherwise may not understand” (Ibid). As a result, each individual narrates his/her own story from their own perspective and therefore, these narratives “challenge stereotypical cultural stories” (Ibid).

In my research, I positioned myself somewhere in between Silverman’s realist and narrative approaches, in that, I analyzed the interview data, using a qualitative software called Nud*ist 6, but I also assessed the respondents’ narrations and experiences by considering them in the context of their Iranian background. Because of the nature of this study, as a researcher, I make no claim that the respondents’ stories provide a complete picture of reality.

Based on Esterberg (2002) recommendation, during the interviews and after each interview, I noted down my personal observations of the interview in my notebook. I

wrote about the interviewee's intonation, facial expression, excitement, sadness, smile, tears in the eyes and the way he or she was looking or sitting, pauses, "hmm..."s, notable quotations, and anything I thought that would help me to understand their responses. .

After finishing all the interviews, I translated and transcribed the data from Farsi (Persian) to English, which was a lengthy process. Then, I coded the data, organized them thematically, and imputed them in to the Nud*ist 6 program. As the semi- structured questionnaire was already designed to explore specific themes, the coding process and creation of the 'thematic trees' (a designed tree with branches of similar themes) was not difficult. These trees helped me to analyze the intersectional data better, for instance, comparing the common issues mentioned by female versus male participants. In addition, I constructed a table of interview data using an Excel program, and added my notes (taken after each interview) under each interviewee's section. This greatly facilitated the development of my analysis. After identifying the common themes, I started to compare them with the existing literature and to build my research findings. It is worth noting that the interview, transcription and data analysis processes happened consecutively without any break in between. Therefore, while I was working on the data, I had the whole picture of interviews in my mind and they appeared to me like *live* information. This, I believe, helped with the reliability of my analysis.

4.5 SITUATING THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I conducted 12 interviews in Halifax with young Iranian immigrants, six women and six men. They were all between 22-28 years of age and had arrived in Canada within

the past five years. While four of the participants were siblings- two brothers and, a brother and a sister, all 12 interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. In order to keep the confidentiality of the interviews, each participant chose a pseudonym. All of the respondents had the status of permanent resident at the time of the interviews. In order to get a better sense of the current situation of my respondents in Halifax I asked each interviewee to fill out a background sheet⁶. A consideration of such variables, contributed to the reliability of the outcomes/themes of their narratives.

- ***Migration Experiences***

All of the participants were either 18 years or older when they left Iran. Three of them, Sogol, Sina and Nima had lived in other countries (England, Philippines, and Ukraine respectively) for 1.5- 6 years and then moved from these countries to Halifax. The rest of respondents came directly from Iran to Halifax. Four of them, Soodi, Sanaz, Mahsa, and Anoosh had lived in other cities than their place of birth in Iran, or other countries such as United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey and Pakistan for a maximum of two years.

- ***Marital Status***

Half of the respondents, three females and three males had a partner or common-law spouse from Iranian and non-Iranian ethno-cultural backgrounds, relationships that ranged between eight months to nine years. It is worth mentioning that three of them had long distance relationships. Six participants were single.

⁶ The background sheet is available in Appendix C.

- ***Economic Circumstances/ Educational Parents' Background***

In order to assess the participants' economic and educational background, I asked them about their parents' education and their financial situation. The parents' education ranged from high school diploma to PhD. While eight of the participants considered their family financial status to be middle class, the rest believed that they had wealthy families with significant financial resources. However, the former group of participants contend that their families were considered to have high socio-economic status in Iran, but because of the immigration process, lack of job opportunities in Halifax, and the economic sanctions on Iran, they had faced economic problems, and therefore, in Canada they were considered of a medium-socio economic level.

Yeah, we were rich in Iran; but now, in Canada, we have to be careful in how we spend our money; because my dad doesn't have a job here and therefore, it's been four years that all our money comes from Iran; me and my brother are both students and although we have loans for the courses, still my parents financially support us... you know, because of differences between currencies everything seems very expensive here; our currency in Iran is almost half of a dollar; and it becomes worse as the U.S puts more pressures through sanctions on Iran. Moreover, money transfers from Iran to Canada are almost impossible; so, we have to keep our eyes on spending our money... I guess we were rich before but not now in Canada... (Mitra).

In sum, all of the participants placed themselves in upper –middle class both in financial and educational backgrounds, although some experienced a decrease in their financial resources upon moving to Halifax.

- ***Education and Profession/ Entering Canada/ Financial Support***

Before moving to Halifax, all of the 12 respondents were in university, either in Iran or in the other aforementioned countries. Except Soodi, Anoosh, and Nima, who were students and had jobs, the rest were living with their families' financial support.

Eleven of the participants came to Canada with their families under the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) - 11 families came directly to Halifax, while one interviewee immigrated to Halifax under the Family Class Sponsorship Program.

At the time of interviews in Halifax, of 12 respondents, ten participants were students, and were supported by their families and/ or government student loans. Two (Sogol and Soodi) were employed and self-supported, and only Nima was self-supported while he was student and had a full-time job.

- ***Settling in Halifax***

Regarding settling home in Halifax, seven participants were living alone. Among the remaining five, three of them were thinking of moving out and having an independent place to live.

- ***Religion***

The participants answered the question about their religion only in the questionnaire. While I knew all of them had a Muslim background, some of them preferred not to answer, and left the response space blank, because they found this question too personal. Also some of them explained to me that because they were not practicing, so they were “not sure” if they had to *name* their religion. Also, based on my observations, I would say that none of them were particularly religious.

The following table provides a summary of information on the study group at the time of the interviews.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age/ Number of Years in Canada	Marital Status	Profession/ Job	Family Financial Resources
Hanif	M	24/ 1.5 years	In a relationship, 8 Months	Student, B. A.	Medium
Sogol	F	28/ 2.5 years	In a relationship/ 2 years	Graduated in B.S./ Part-time employer	High
Soodi	F	28/ 4 years	Single	Full-time employer	Medium
Bitā	F	25/ 2 years	Single	Student, B.A.	Medium
Sharif	M	22/ 2.5 years	Single	Student, B.A.	Medium
Sina	M	27/ 2.5 years	In a relationship/ 3.5 years	Student, B.Sc.	High
Sanaz	F	24/ 2.5 years	In a relationship / 9 years	Student, B.Sc.	Medium
Mitra	F	23/ 4 years	Single	Student, B.A.	High
Anoosh	M	27/ 2 years	Single	Student PhD.	High
Shervin	M	24/ 2 years	Single	Student, B.S.	Medium
Nima	M	28/ 4 years	In a relationship / 3 years	Student, & employee M.S. / full-time job	Medium
Mahsa	F	24/ 3 years	In a relationship/ 1.5 years	Student, B.A.	Medium

Table 1 Respondents' Profiles

Note: Pseudonyms are used throughout for reasons of confidentiality and anonymity.

Based on the interview data, I have organized the findings into two main sections: integration experiences, and their impacts of the participants' identities, and changes in the sense of home and belonging. In the next two chapters, utilizing a gender-based analysis, the main themes emerging in the majority of interviews, as well as the most interesting insights offered by a minority of participants are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES LEADING TO IDENTITY RE-CONSTRUCTION

[I]mmigration is a hard process, everyone who comes here changes. This change affects their identity so they cannot stay the same person they were in Iran (Mahsa).

The overarching research question of this study asks how the identity of young Iranian immigrants has changed through their experiences of immigration and integration and how this subsequent change in identity has affected their sense of home and belonging. This question is formulated within the framework of my hypothesis that immigration influences the identity of young Iranian immigrants in gendered ways, in which age, class, and nationality also intersect to shape diverse outcomes and experiences. The two chapters, which follow, will be devoted to analysing the interviews in an attempt to find an answer for the two parts of the research question.

In this first chapter, I focus specifically on various aspects of the respondents' integration experiences, such as language, social relations, education, employment, community participation, ethnic and cultural practices and beliefs, sexuality, family, and gender identity, and how these experiences have led to new identities. Based on the literature reviewed in chapter two, these are some of the most significant aspects of identity which undergo substantial changes in the immigration and integration process. When I asked the participants whether they felt any changes in their identity as *young Iranian immigrants*, they referred to the challenges and problems they faced upon their migration, and contended that since they had moved to Halifax, they had become different people, and their identity and sense of self had changed. The in-depth analysis of the research findings below will further elaborate this point. Although these findings

corroborate by those studies reviewed in the literature, and they reinforced them in many aspects, due to the low number of studies on young Iranian immigrants, these findings are unique in their own ways. Nevertheless, I do not claim that my study group are representative of all young Iranian immigrants everywhere

5.1 LANGUAGE

My language definitely helped me with my relations with others; but I must say language alone is not gonna get you there. You know, not knowing the culture, you become the fluent fool as they say (Soodi).

As mentioned in the literature review, many scholars contend that language plays an important role in immigrants' integration experiences (Ramkhalawansingh, 1981; Rublee and Shaw, 1991), and the findings of this study support the existing literature. Indeed my own experience corroborates the importance that language plays in the integration process, and I have observed first-hand the difficulty that immigrants may experience in regard to language barriers. Therefore, the first questions I asked the participants related to their experiences of knowing English as a second language in the new society, and whether they had encountered any linguistic barriers in their social environment, at school, and in their relationships and friendships. I also questioned them how such difficulties affected their identities.

Most of the male respondents were at an intermediate level, and the majority of female respondents were at a basic level of English proficiency when they came to Canada. At the time of interviews and after at least two years of living in Halifax, communicating with various people and their classmates, as well as taking English

classes at immigrant settlement organizations such as Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS), the majority of both groups have overcome their language problems to some extent, and they have made good progress. Some of the respondents, asserted that they were not satisfied enough with the classes at ISIS because the classes had no age limit and they had to be in the same class with older people. In this situation, they could not make friendship connections and interact socially with their classmates. In addition, because they were learning faster than the older people, the classes did not sustain their interest and failed to engage them.

Daily communication problems

Notably, the majority of male and female respondents experienced similar language barriers in their daily communications. For instance, Sina, (male), recalled his language barrier in the very first day when he and his family landed in Halifax and settled in a hotel and he was looking for a converter to charge his laptop:

When I came to Halifax, I could only have a very basic level of conversations with people. It was hard to convey my message to others but it was harder to understand what people were saying. For instance, I needed a converter to plug in my laptop and I asked the hotel receptionist for help and he told me that I need to go to The Source downtown to buy one. I thought converters were called “source” here. Although I doubted it would be called that but I thought it could be what they call it here. I went to all the stores, one by one and asked them if they had a “source”; and they looked at me as if I am a crazy person! [laughs]... after an hour of searching in different stores while I couldn’t find the “source”, I went back to the receptionist, tired and angry, and asked him again; then he clarified that The Source was the name of the store and what I was looking for is a convertor. Then he wrote it down for me and I finally found the convertor in the Source [bursts into laughter]. Now, after almost three years, my language skills are much better.

Similarly, Sanaz explained the problems she encountered when pronouncing her name and people did not understand it or mispronounced it. Mitra referred to her

language problems when she went shopping: “Once, I said to the seller that I’m looking for a ‘taller’ pants, instead of ‘longer pants’. Both Sanaz and Mitra mentioned that after two and a half in Halifax, they experienced less stress when conversing in English and they understood people better. However, they also disclosed that they still did not feel confident when talking on the phone and sometimes they could not make out a word they were hearing on the phone.

Language barriers at school/studying

Similar to the language challenges in daily communications, regarding the impacts of language barriers on the respondents’ studies, in both female and male groups, the majority of respondents found it difficult to be admitted to universities, because this required passing English language proficiencies tests. Therefore, it took one year for most of them to take public and private English classes, take the exam and gain admission to a university. Most of them insisted that waiting one year to get back on to their life track was very hard. However, they then realized that this was just a beginning for after entering university they had to study very hard, especially in the first year, to pass their courses in English. Sanaz described her story in learning math:

I had a lot of difficulty understanding what my lecturer was saying at the university, especially when it came to understanding abstract words or concepts. For example, I heard the word “trigonometry” as “trickonometry”. The whole time I thought I should come up with some sort of a “trick” to solve that particular problem (laughs).

She continued by saying that such instances happened to her a lot and in most cases after spending two hours to understand the topic she realized that she had already studied these topics in her undergraduate classes in Iran.

Mitra felt that she was being exploited in her classes because of her low English

proficiency.

I had a difficult time choosing courses and registering at the university. I also found it hard giving presentations for school work. I felt like I was being exploited because of my language problems. Like when we had to do group projects at school, the group members made me make all the models by myself and do all the monkey work while all they did was to present what I made to the class. I felt I was being treated unfairly but I still couldn't speak up about it.

On the other hand, those participants (both females and males) with higher English language proficiency, like Anoosh and Soodi stated that knowing English helped them significantly in making progress in terms of their majors (at university) and in their lives in Canada. However, in terms of finding friends, the significance of language barriers was different for male and female respondents.

Language Barriers in Friendships/ Relationships

The majority of male participants suggested that having language difficulties did not affect their relations with others. In fact, it even had the opposite effect, as they noted that they had made easier connections through body language and facial expressions.

Sina said:

My language has not stopped me from finding friends and I also think people here find having a foreign accent to be quite sexy actually [laughs]. My friends from other nationalities also mentioned they find it cute or interesting when someone speaks their language or uses their expressions. This by itself makes people's relationships more interesting and brings them closer to each other. Just like I find it cute when a non-Farsi speaker speaks Farsi with an accent.

By contrast, the majority of female respondents insisted on the importance of language skills in the new society and stated that knowing English was a basic step to making connections and building relations with others. Without knowing English, it was not possible to start relations:

I think knowing English is one of the basics. If you don't know it, you cannot express yourself; for instance, me as a dentist, when I can't speak English, how am I going to communicate with my patients, or how am I going to find friends outside or study. Of course it's a must (Sogol, female).

Sanaz described her difficulties in building relationships with her roommates because of her lack of proficiency in English:

I used to live in a dorm and I was always invited to parties in the dorm but because I couldn't interact with them well in English, I never used to go. My Canadian friends are interested in knowing more about me and my life but I'm just not confident enough to start a conversation with them.

Having said that, Soodi referred to her positive experiences in forging relationships in Canada by knowing English:

I would say knowing the language was a big, big step and I thought if I had that language barrier, I don't think I would have had the same positive experience I have. My language definitely helped with my relations with others. Like it helped me to get a job, communicate in the workplace, and be able to build relationships.

Interestingly, while many of the male respondents discussed the importance of cultural barriers, age, and personal preferences to build relationships, such issues were mentioned by only a few women. For instance, regarding cultural differences Sharif mentioned:

For finding friends, I think it was more of a cultural barrier rather than a language one. I personally like to have many friends but there's always this fear in the back of my head that non-Iranians may not accept or want certain things in their culture. I worry that I may do something wrong or unintentionally offend them and they might think of me as a bad person. So it was not about language but about cultural differences.

Similarly, Anoosh, even though he had an advanced level of English proficiency referred to the lack of having the same cultural background and the issues he encountered in his conversations with his Canadian-born friends in which he had no clue:

When I came to Halifax I had no language difficulties when it came to my professional jargon but social interactions were a bit difficult for me. For instance, there were a couple of times when I was invited to my professor's home along with other university professors and staff, I didn't really get involved in their conversations because I could not relate to the things they were talking about such as hockey which is not a common sport in Iran and I didn't know what I should say.

In sum, language proved to be an important aspect of the participants' integration experiences and strongly affected their identity formation and sense of belonging. This impact is gendered, as I received very different points of views from male and female participants. On one side, the majority of male respondents were not certain whether language barriers affected their identities. Rather, they saw that their identity had changed as a result of cultural barriers which hindered their ability. On the other side, for young immigrant women, language played a significant role in different aspects of their lives, from daily communication to establishing relationships and consequently, on their identities. This could be attributed to the fact that Iranian women in this study, like women in many of other parts of the world (especially in patriarchal societies), are socialized to pay more attention to other people's feelings upon whom their livelihood or very survival may depend. Mahsa spoke for half of the participants:

Basically you make connections with people through language; when you don't know their language, your self-confidence decreases and it makes you sit aside and not participate in social interactions. I personally am the kind of person, who doesn't have any problems interacting with others, but I was depressed after having moved to Canada and my low language skills made me become more reserved, super silent and unable to communicate. I preferred even not to talk... therefore, it definitely affected building my identity.

In addition, although women place greater emphasis than men on language in their social interactions, this is not to say that they do not rate culture highly. The

importance placed by women on culture becomes clear when we consider their friendships and relationships, in the next section. Overall, we can conclude that both men and women value culture highly, however, women place a greater significance on the language spoken in their relations and daily lives in comparison to the men. These findings strongly corroborate by the existing literature relevant to the significance of language in immigrant women's lives.

5.2 FRIENDSHIPS/ SEXUALITY

The question of language proved to segue nicely into issues surrounding friendships, and social relationships and their impact on identity. The existing literature on integration confirms that social connections and networks play a vital role in shaping immigrant experiences and identities (Boyd, 1990; Korac, 2001; Krissman, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Valenta, 2008) and the young Iranians of my study, all of whom enjoyed a vibrant social life, are no exception. They all placed great importance on their social networks and the role that their friends and connection played in relation to integration and identity. They also showed sensitivity and awareness of the national identities of their circle of friends and acquaintances, though again, this sensitivity was exhibited in gendered ways.

The majority of the male group of participants reported that people's ethnicities were not an issue for them:

I don't care about where they are from. I don't really approach or not approach anyone because of their nationality. Right now, there are a few Iranians that I'm close to because they are *good friends* and also I have a close Canadian-born friend and an Ecuadorian who are my roommates (Hanif).

Unlike the male respondents, the views among the female participants were more heterogeneous. While a minority of them did not have any preferences, some of them wanted to have non-Iranian friendships to learn their culture, and the rest of the participants preferred to socialize only with Iranians. The latter group had language difficulties.

Notably, both male and female respondents reported a common experience: when they first came to Halifax, all of them tended to befriend Canadian-born people in order to learn and integrate into their new culture, as well as improve their English proficiency. But after about two years living in Halifax, their closest friends were Iranians. When they elaborated on the reasons for this shift, they mentioned “cultural differences”:

I have both Iranian and non- Iranian friends; however, it’s easier to party with the Iranians [laughs]... we have more fun, because we share the same [cultural] background...the same humor...the same history of music...(Soodi).

Moreover, many participants felt unwelcome by Canadian-born individuals:

I preferred not to hang out with Iranians and to have more English speaking friends to improve my language skills; but I found it hard to become friends with Canadian-born because they already have their own circle of friends from their childhood, and they share similar background. Therefore, it was difficult to keep up with them (Sanaz).

Additionally, Sharif referred to his psychological fear of unknown and unfamiliar “others” he encountered in Canada, which forced him to stay more with his Iranian friends: “I guess you initially create some sort of a phobia when you first arrive in a different country. I felt like, I was not as modern as the people here when I first arrived...you know, like I come from a third-world country and *others* may naturally judge me that way too”. However, he asserted that as time goes by and he became more familiar with his new life, he was getting to a point where he was overcoming those

phobias, and became more comfortable with non-Iranian friends around him. He contended that being young has helped him to overcome those fears.

Comparing the respondents' 'old' and 'new' friends, almost all of participants noted that the nature and "the *kind* of friendships" (Sina) they have here are different from what they had in Iran. In Iran, their friends were their childhood friends from school, or family friends with whom they grew up. All they did was "to have fun and nothing serious" (Anoosh), as well as sharing "similar frustrations" (Hanif) and a "similar history" (Bita) in "similar socio-cultural backgrounds" (Mahsa). Therefore, they were closer and more comfortable sharing personal issues, which made their friendships stronger and deeper. But, here in Halifax, everything changed. They had to "choose" (Nima) their friends based on limited available options, and "start from scratch" (Ibid). By moving to Halifax, they were not children anymore. Now as adults, they were more attracted to mature people who accepted them with their new perspectives and identities. Shervin spoke for about half of the male participants:

The friends I have here are mostly five or six years older than me so it feels kind of better. I think they are more mature and experienced than me and I can learn things from them and I like it this way.

Similarly, Mitra spoke for majority of female respondents:

My friends in Canada, especially those who have lived here for years, have broader perspectives through life. They are more experienced in everything and so they are not narrow-minded. This feature makes me feel more comfortable... [I] can act in the way I like to and they wouldn't judge me at all. This feeling gives me sense of peace and security among my friends.

It can be concluded that my participants, regardless of their gender, were looking for maturity more than anything else in their new friendships. They wanted to socialize with mature people in order to enter the realm of adulthood.

- *Sexuality*

When I asked my participants about changes in their attitudes with respect to sexuality and toward sexual relations after immigration, all female and male participants referred to the cultural context. They all believed that in Iran, cultural views toward sexual relations were conservative and sex was taboo in society.

The majority of male respondents stated that because sex is considered a taboo in Iran, there was neither an open atmosphere, nor a proper education about this issue. Hanif mentioned that in Iran people look at sex “with a magnifying glass”, and this perspective “makes it sick”. Consequently, this created confusion in their minds. Also, Sina mentioned:

Sexual matters were never discussed openly or taught in schools. For me childbirth and bearing a child was always a big question. My dad would always answer my questions by saying, “if you’re a good person, we will pray for you and God will give you a baby.” I guess it was in our culture- sex was such a taboo. I was misinformed about sexual relations and practices and everything was vague. So I didn’t learn about sex through proper educational methods; I eventually learned about it through pornography.

Moreover, Hanif and Nima referred to their age as another factor in their confusion about sexual relations alongside with problems in the educational system:

“... [we] were all confused about sexual things we wanted to do and we were kids and there wasn’t anyone around to educate us on this matter. There were no proper emotional or sexual outlets for you.”

After immigrating to Canada, the majority of them liked the openness of the society about sexual issues. As Hanif said, “to some point the society defines some of the sexual aspects for you, but with fewer restrictions”. Such openness informed their views about sexual relations in a positive way. Sina talked for the majority of male respondents:

When I came to Canada, because of the openness there is in sexual issues and matters, I started learning about sex through education. This helped me open my views towards sex and leave behind taboos. I learned that women and men physically need each other to be complete, and it's not a big deal after all.

Similarly, the majority of female respondents suggested that in Iran, there is a strict view toward sexual issues. They mentioned another aspect of this taboo having sex before marriage. Some of the respondents who were brought up in more religious families believed that coming to Canada helped them to see the sexual relations in a multicultural society, and openness around this issue helped them shape new points of view toward sexuality in general. However, they still kept their basic beliefs personally.

According to Mitra:

[Through] hanging out with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, I learned many things: I learned that sex is not a taboo; it's something necessary for life; and I'm fine if anybody has sex before marriage. However, I still personally believe that I should lose my virginity by marriage.

Therefore, it can be said that, in general, the participants of this study, regardless of their gender, liked Canadian diversity, and were satisfied with seeing and experiencing various perspectives about sexual relations in different cultures. These patterns coincide with the findings from Iranian immigrants in Halifax (Porter, 2010) who had a positive experience of multiculturalism in Canada by defining it as "demographic diversity" (p. 75), rather than multiculturalism as stated in Canadian policies.

- ***Identity Changes***

Regarding the impacts of new friendships, and new points of view toward sexual issues on the participants' identities, gradual variations of age within the "youth" range of the study appeared to be a significant factor. Younger respondents (for example, between 22-25) received more influences from their new friends in comparison to the older

interviewees (25-28). The majority of younger participants, both men and women, believed that their friends had a positive impact on their identities. They described that their friends helped them to experience everything differently; look from different point of views; “think more” (Hanif); “become aware and careful about certain cultural sensitivities” (Sharif); and “become much more easy going” (Mahsa). Mitra (23) described her friends’ influences on her identity:

besides the matter of age, by having friends with different ethnical backgrounds, I have experienced a new life... they taught me to deal with problems and changes and to become more easy going... the value of everything has changed for me .. I learned that I can be multidimensional and have everything at the same time... like having fun, drinking and boyfriend, along with school, studying and having a job ... I became more goal-oriented and motivated [smiles].

The older respondents underscored their already-molded identities, and rather than influences, they mentioned that they felt comfortable with their friends, and “these (new friends) are the ones who they “really want to be with” (Nima).

In sum, my findings support the existing literature in that the participants acknowledged how friendships and socialization had influenced their integration experiences and identity formation. Although, some of the female respondents preferred to spend time with Iranians because of their language difficulties, the rest of the participants, regardless of their gender, were satisfied in experiencing new friendships in Canadian multicultural society and acknowledging its positive impact on their identities. Nevertheless, younger respondents felt more influences from their new friends than the older ones.

5.3 DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM IN UNIVERSITY/ EMPLOYMENT

The literature on immigration emphasizes the importance of nationality and ethno-cultural background in school environments and in the labour market, and the aspirations of immigrants for 'better' life is also well-documented (e.g. Tastsoglou and Byers, 2008; Tastsoglou and Petrinioti, 2011).

In this study, as regards integration experiences in universities and education, many of the respondents referred to the challenges they faced upon arrival, regarding their admission to universities in Halifax. The long process of immigration (in which they had to wait for several years to obtain permanent residency) resulted in changes in their personal and social status, which in turn affected their identity formation. Sharif, Bitra, Mahsa and, Shervin mentioned that when their documents were ready, after about five years of waiting, they were in second or third year in their universities in Iran, and by coming to Halifax, they had to start their studies from the beginning. In the new educational system, not only were their credits not recognized, but also it was very difficult to gain admission in their prior field of studies. Therefore, they had to change their field of interests and start a new path in their lives. They mentioned that when they compared themselves with their friends in Iran, they saw that their friends had graduated while they were still in their first or second year of undergraduate studies. While a few of the respondents were still thinking of their past educational paths, many of them were happy in their new fields. Similar to Nourpanah's (2010) study group who were from a "developing" country, Sina, Sanaz and Anoosh, mentioned "their satisfaction and joy they had at the opportunity to learn", going to top-rated universities and reach their educational goals, "to develop their potential while availing themselves of the opportunities of Canada" (p. 92).

As regards to the challenges the participants faced because of their ethno-cultural background in universities, the answers were influenced by gender. All of the male respondents reported that because of “diverse environments” at universities, they had never felt discriminated against. Among female students, however, a few had experienced discrimination. Mitra (23) described her experiences while she was in her second year of university:

I was faced with a significant feeling of discrimination when I was in my second year of university and all of my classmates were Canadian-born. Everyone in the class had to make a model building for a school project. My Canadian-born university lecturer walked around the classroom and looked at everyone’s models and gave them feedback but he didn’t even look at my work as if I didn’t exist in the class, he just walked pass me. He was always mean and rude to me in the class and I felt he was very racist towards me. I couldn’t complain or say anything because I was afraid he would fail me in the course.

The feelings of discrimination felt by some of the female participants of this study may be attributed to greater social sensitivity, vulnerability, and lack of self-confidence, because of growing up in a patriarchal society. However, further in-depth research is required to better illuminate the reasons behind the gendered response to perceived discrimination.

Similar to the afore-mentioned results at universities, the challenges my participants faced because of their ethno-cultural background in their workplaces were gendered. There was also a gendered difference in the process of getting a job: male respondents experienced more racism than female participants. At the time of interviews, only a few of the respondents were employed (as well as being student). While all of them indicated that they work in a ‘multicultural’ and ‘diverse’ environment and therefore, they did not experience discrimination because of their ethno-cultural

background, some of the male respondents (but none of the female respondents) mentioned that they had experienced racism in job interviews. For instance, Nima described one of his job interviews in which he directly was offended by the way the interviewer treated him, pronounced his name and questioned him about his religion and wanted to know whether he was Muslim or not. Indirectly, Sina also once experienced discrimination for being an Iranian, while he applied for a job at the airport. He explained:

I feel like I was not offered a job because of my ethnic background but they have never overtly expressed it... I felt like they didn't trust me to work in such a high-security place because of my ethnicity or that I posed a higher risk because I was an Iranian. It is a reality these days that people are afraid of or suspect Iranians.

The reason male respondents felt more discriminated against in getting jobs can be reasonably attributed to (as mentioned by Sina) the negative portrayal and stereotyping of Muslim-Iranian men in Western societies such as Canada, which was reinforced after the 9/11 attacks in the US.

Interestingly, a similar sense of “discrimination, racism and stereotyping” (Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011, p.190) at the “predominant ‘white’ environment” of “social institutions” (Ibid) of Halifax (universities and labour market) were reported by the Lebanese second-generation youth in Halifax. It is noticeable that these Lebanese youth's families have immigrated to Canada (Halifax) a long time ago, and their ethnic group has a very long immigration history. Nevertheless, similar to my participants, they reported experiences of racism, and sense of “otherness” in their encounters with social institutions of Halifax. These similar experiences can be explained with reference to the similar cultural background of the two immigrant groups, (both are rooted in the Middle

East), but, above all, the prevailing systemic racism. Similar results can be found in other studies mentioned in literature review.

This minimal discrimination may not be the case in my participants' everyday life outside of the university environment. Many of the participants, regardless of their age, referred to the sense of racism they experienced in their everyday life, which mainly came from their *different* appearance in relation to the white-majority and dominant ethno-cultural background in Halifax. Hanif who had black hair and beard told his story laughing:

I felt discriminated against in the society many times because my appearance is not "Western". For instance, once while I was making a short film here, in Halifax, my actor and I had long beards...two long-bearded black heads...[laughs] and we were in a street where we asked the cops to block the street because we were filming. There were many people in the scene we wanted to film and there was a dead bird as well which we got from an animal hospital. A Canadian senior citizen passed us by and asked us what we were doing. We explained what was happening but she started making comments like "Go back to your own country" and my actor got mad but I was trying to calm the situation. These things don't really bother me.

He continued,

[W]henever I take the bus, no one ever sits next to me. [Laughs] You see the bus is full of people and everyone is standing while there are empty seats next to me. [Laughs]

Soodi also referred to "systemic racism" (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000; Bolaria and Li, 1988; Calliste, 1989; Henry, 1994; James 1995) she faced and described that she felt discrimination many times, from a "certain group of people" just because she is a visible minority woman in Halifax:

[I] can't deny the fact that discrimination does exist. Not just because of my cultural background but even here because I'm a woman, I have noticed some

things. For example, when I have movers come to my place to move stuff, I don't like the way they talk to me...you know as if they say stuff like, "you don't know what you're talking about." So I guess it's from a certain group of people...I don't want to say from a certain class in the society.

Despite these reported cases of discrimination, some of the respondents mentioned that in many cases when they said they were "Persian", they received a "social credit" from people, and that reduced the sense of discrimination. For instance, Bitá mentioned that:

I could have access to free tutor programs because I was an immigrant. The tutors were aware of the current situation in Iran and seemed to know a little bit about my background which made it comfortable for me to work with the tutor for three months. Because of the tutor's awareness, I didn't feel I was being discriminated or looked down on...not at all.

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents considered their experiences of racism as "learning opportunities" (Soodi); which opened their eyes "to become more aware of the [existence of] discrimination or any kinds of mistreatment" (Mahsa) within society. As a result, they learned to "become more careful and cautious not to offend anyone [from other cultures]" (Sogol); and consequently become a "more diverse person" (Nima). Moreover, Hanif mentioned that "[discrimination] comes from lack of awareness from ignorant people", and he emphasized on his own sense of prejudices against certain people. He believed that knowing such facts help you not to be bothered by the discrimination he faced, and instead as Mahsa said, "become prepared and stronger". It can be said that confronting racism and take it as a 'learning opportunity', and as a way to become stronger and diverse, is something that can be explained by the participants' youth; i.e. if they were older, may be they would not perceive such situations positively.

It can be concluded that, the participants of this study experienced, became aware of, and became sensitized to the racism in social institutions, and in their daily life in Halifax, and that these experiences were gendered. Nevertheless, they preferred to dismiss the racism they had faced, avoided racist assumptions themselves, and focused on the positive side of their lives. Their responses showed clearly the impact of these experiences on their identities. It can be said that, because of the optimism of their youth they spoke of hopefully transcending these experiences, and not allowing them to create obstacles in their settlement.

5.4 ETHNO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS

In this section, I discuss the participants' ethno-cultural beliefs and practices after migration. Then, I explore how these beliefs influence the participants' integration experiences, ethno-cultural identities and sense of personal development throughout their immigration to Halifax (see e.g. Nourpanah, 2010; Dossa, 2004; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011).

- ***Community Participation***

The various cultural community activities that my young Iranian immigrants (both females and males) respondents participated in were very similar: Iranian traditional/cultural ceremonies such as Nowrooz (New Year), Chaharshanbe Soori (Festival of Fire) as well as Iranian parties, soccer games, and fundraisings, as well as concerts, poetry nights and business trade shows. Many also described regular socializing with Iranian family friends as part of their community involvement.

Despite the consistency of events and activities in the Iranian community, the diversity of individual cultural practices was noteworthy; even in my small group, a significant amount of change in practice and beliefs was observed. When I asked the participants about the changes in their ethnic identities and practices after immigration, male respondents reported various answers. While Hanif said, “I am from the earth... I’m neither Iranian, nor Canadian”, Nima was the only one who called himself Iranian-Canadian, and felt that he could immerse himself in Canadian culture, as well as preserving his Persian identity. Unlike Nima, Anoosh referred to strengthening his ethnic identity and his cultural resistance because of detachment from Iranian culture after moving out of Iran and mentioned that:

When you’re in Iran, you don’t really think about certain events or don’t even listen to local news but when you come here, you start watching the news about Iran to know what’s going on there. That’s why I can say you become more of an Iranian... Or like I never celebrated Yalda night in Iran [an Iranian cultural celebration] but here I participate in such events.

The rest of the male participants called themselves ‘Iranian’, but they contended that after immigration, they put less emphasizing on their ‘Iranian-ness’, or as Shervin said “I don’t make a big deal of my being an Iranian anymore. I’m neither proud, nor ashamed of being an Iranian...it is a reality”.

Among the female respondents, I received two groups of answers. Half of the respondents reported “no changes” in their ethnic identities, whereas, the other half called themselves ‘Iranian-Canadian’ and believed that while they kept their Iranian identity, they added a Canadian identity. For instance, Sanaz mentioned that after immigration she started liking Canada and Canadian culture, and now she emphasizes less her Iranian-ness, and she feels a sense of belonging to Canadian culture.

It is worth mentioning that generally, those participants with dual identities, who called themselves Iranian-Canadian, regardless of their gender, had stayed longer in Canada than the rest of the interviewees, or had full-time jobs. Therefore, the intersection of job (money earning) and the length of living in Canada had impacts on the participants' ethnic identities.

Moreover, the majority of participants (both male and females) felt that sometimes among non-Iranians, being an Iranian had negative perceptions. Therefore, their ethnic beliefs became "more prominent" in the sense that, as Sharif said, they tried to "educate people about Iranian culture and show them what Iran really is in a positive light, not what they see through media and politics". In such a situation, the young participants of this study used Iranian community in Halifax as a "frame reference" (Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Mahsa mentioned that:

Many ignorant people back off when they find out I'm Iranian because all they know of Iran is terrorists and negativity. So I need to prove that I'm not a terrorist and just another person like you or everyone else. An Iranian has the same human rights as anyone else. So I try to show, involve and inform our non-Iranian friends about our background through our cultural festivals such as New Year. We even put together a traditional Iranian dance group to perform on Canada Day this year to show people what Iranian dance and art is like. I'm proud to be an Iranian.

- *Changes in Dress Code*

The dress code of Iranian women has received significant attention in both scholarly literature and public media narratives (see e.g. cbcnews⁷, abcnews⁸, dailyherald⁹, etc.). A woman's identity, more than male identity, is inextricably bound with the way she dresses and presents herself in public: whether she comes from a

⁷ http://www.cbcnews.com/2100-202_162-2722122.html

⁸ <http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/story?id=6200937&page=1#.UZufBbWmglo>

⁹ <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20110731/news/707319947/>

religious or non-religious background, how observant and devout she is and so on (see, e.g. Crossley, 1996; Duits & Zoonen, 2006; Parkins, 2000). Thus, the changing dress code from Iran to Canada signifies an important shift in the way women are able to shape their identities.

In Iran, based on Islamic rules, women have to abide by a certain dress code while they are in public, out of their private houses. They have to cover their hair with hijab-head scarf, and their body by wearing mantaue- a knee-length thin coat (Nourpanah, 2010). The color of the outfits is optional. On the other side, the only restriction for Iranian men is not to wear shorts in public places.

When I asked my participants about changes in their dress code, I could see their answers in their appearances. Considering the summer-hot weather, women mostly wore tank tops with shorts, skirts, pants, without headscarf. While males wore casual pants/ shorts and T-shirts. Accordingly, the majority of male respondents mentioned that immigration had no significant impact on their dress code. They were wearing the same clothes in Halifax as they wore in Iran to some extent. However, changes in their age and professional life had influenced their choices. As they grew up and started to work in professional environments, they wore more formal/ professional outfits. Nevertheless, Nima was the only respondent who mentioned that in Iranian culture people care a lot about their appearance and they always dress formally, even in casual situations; i.e. people are obsessed with the dress code. He believed that such obsession was reduced in Canada, especially in Halifax, because people in Halifax are not into fashion as Iranians. So, he enjoyed freedom of choice in regard to clothing in Canada.

In contrast, the majority of female respondents mentioned Nima's perspective. They mentioned that the way they dressed in Canada is different than their attire in Iran. However, such changes were not only because of differences in that they have to abide by a formal dress code in Iran, but also because of cultural changes. They all mentioned that in Iran, among families, it is not very acceptable to wear mini-skirts or very revealing dresses, and they mostly cover up their bodies in order to show respect of others. Such considerations shaped their preferences about what to wear and not to wear. They asserted that they still have such considerations in Halifax, and they still wore "... [not] too revealing or too covered cloths", but as Mahsa said, she became more easy-going and feels less obsessed with covering her whole body. Mitra said that, "I think I have my own choice now to wear what I want." The ability of women to abide by a different dress code which is more in line with their personal preferences rather than cultural and societal dictates is a highly significant aspect of cultural identity change. In their new society, where the dress of women is not politicized and scrutinized to the same degree that it is in their former home country, the freedom to express their religious and political beliefs through their choice of clothing is a new experience, which is greatly appreciated by the young women of this study.

This section highlighted the importance of ethno-cultural beliefs and practices in identity formation amongst Iranian youth. Respondents bore witness to how their diverse beliefs and practices have played a large role in their integration and settlement, and also how the different socio-cultural landscape of their new Canadian society has influenced their cultural identity.

5.5 PARENT- CHILDREN RELATIONS

Parent-children and family relationships change significantly through the immigration and integration process, as documented by several scholars (see e.g. Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Tastsoglou & Petriniot, 2011; Zhou, 1997). This section explores how the changes in parent-child relations, experienced by the study group, contribute to their developing sense of identity.

In this context, the majority of the participants, regardless of their gender, referred to their age and they compared their experiences with those of their parents. For instance, Sharif mentioned that, “in Canada, both children and parents change, but I think we as kids change more easily because we are out there in the society more and they are not”. Therefore, it takes some time for parents to adjust to new lifestyle in Canada and this brings forth conflict between children and parents. For instance, in Iran, it is very common for children to live with parents until they get married, whereas, here in Canada, the majority of the participants referred to their willingness to live separately as one of the main argument or topics of contention among family members. Hanif who was living alone at the time of interview mentioned that:

[Living alone] is not what my parents want ideally but it’s my choice now [laughs and continues]. Other Iranian family friends have said that I brought about a revolution and that I am an anarchist [laughs].

Moreover, some of the respondents stated that they had more arguments with their parents when first settling in Halifax. For instance, Bita (female, 25) explained that in Iran, she did not interact much with her family because they were all busy and came home at different hours from work or school and that they did not have many arguments. But in Halifax, because of the new situation, they were constantly in close quarters,

which led to many arguments. However, Sina who had similar problems, contended that such challenges “brought the family closer together”, they “tried to support each other” and in the meantime “they learned to adjust”. Therefore, the majority of the respondents agreed that, after a while, their relations with their parents in Canada improved.

Furthermore, Mitra mentioned that both her age and immigration to Canada positively affected her relationships with her parents. She said that she is not a teenager anymore and now she is considered an adult. The fact that she was now a mature young woman in a more secure situation in Halifax in comparison with Tehran, helped her convince her parents to agree to have her own apartment and consequently experience independence. This, in turn, helped her in her relations with her parents. Similarly, Mahsa noted that as a result of moving to Canada and improved communication skills, she could even talk about taboo subjects with her family.

These patterns of parental/ “generational conflicts” rooted in cultural differences in Canada, coincide with the findings mentioned by the Lebanese second generations in Halifax (Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011), where they were trying to accept Lebanese “core values”, as well as helping their parents to “be like Canadians”, and teach them how to be “parents in Halifax” (p. 193). As mentioned before, having similar (traditional/ Middle Eastern) cultural background could be the reason of these similarities between my Iranian participants and the Lebanese participants. More studies needed to be done in this matter. Yet, my study also shows how respondents (regardless of their gender) grew stronger and developed better relations with their parents. It can be therefore appreciated how the participants felt their identities had been influenced positively by the changes in their

relations with their parents, which in turn had been affected by the experience of integration and immigration. Age, in particular, is prominent in regards to family relationships, and shapes the family experiences of the participants.

5.6 GENDER IDENTITY

I've changed a lot as the woman in my head, the woman in my heart, the woman in my personal life, whereas I had to kill a lot of the woman inside me when I was in Iran but here I don't have to (Soodi).

Evolving gender identities, in particular for immigrants from Muslim or more 'traditional' families have received a great amount of scholarly and public attention (see e.g. Cha, 2009; Dossa, 2004; Nourpanah, 2010; Nyemah, 2007; Moghissi, 1991).

Accordingly, I approached this topic differently from the other aspects of integration discussed in the previous sections. Instead of asking participants how they experienced a particular issue (such as language) and how this affected their identity, I asked them directly how they perceived their gender identity had changed through their integration process in Halifax.

My participants gave a diverse range of responses. In the case of the female respondents, I could see passion and sparkles in their eyes as they were waiting for me to finish my question so that they could start to talk about how they had changed as women. How they felt good to be a "woman" in Canada, and how they felt free and secure. Whereas the male participants had difficulties in understanding the question. In fact, they were slightly confused by what I meant by changes in their "gender identity". It can be said that in a male-dominated society such as Iran, the male respondents were already considered to be in the mainstream to some extent, and by moving to Canada they did not

experience many changes regarding gender issues. Even so, a few of them brought up interesting points about changes in their attitudes toward women. More precisely, they claimed that they had already believed in equality between men and women to some extent, but the male-dominated environment of the Iranian society would not let them act in the way in which they wanted. By moving to Canada, the existence of such equality in society “became tangible” (Shervin) for them, and therefore, it influenced their ideas.

Nima explained:

Iran is a male-dominated society, and although I didn't want to, I was kinda the same... But here, because of the rules for equalities between men and women, I feel like my beliefs are match with the real life; so, as a man, I feel better and more satisfied.

In a similar vein, Hanif, brought the example of his assumption of women's weakness. In Canada, he learned not to make assumptions based on a gender:

Here, I realized that being a man was just a label; it was wrong and makes no difference. I mean, there's no difference between being a man or woman... there shouldn't be gender differences... for instance, in Iran, it's considered polite to ask a woman if she needs help carrying heavier items. Once I asked a girl at the university if she wanted me to carry the heavy tripod for her and she just looked at me looking like she was offended by my offer. When I thought about it, I realized that it was my mistake and that she would have asked for help if she wanted it. I didn't mean anything but to help her.

Sina also referred to his institutionalized sense of possessiveness toward women in Iran. Once in Canada, he learned how to control such feelings and let go of traditions:

In Iran, it is in the male culture to be somewhat domineering and possessive of females in your family and your partner or wife. I was also the same and I was so possessive towards my girlfriend that I couldn't stand it if another man was talking with her. Through my getting older and coming here to Canada, I learned that this whole idea of possessiveness is wrong. I learned that if men and women chat with each other, it is not 'cheating' on their partners. It is a part of life to communicate in the society.

As it can be seen in the aforementioned quotations, among male respondents, the older participants (Nima, Sina, and Hanif, all in the age range 24-28years old) contended that their attitudes had changed, while the younger respondents (22-24) were slightly confused. Therefore, it can be said that the intersection of gender and variations in age range (according to the participants' own reports) played an important role in forming gender identity amongst male respondents. The older male participants reported more changes in their attitudes than the younger ones. Apparently, because of their age, they could distinguish more easily who they had been in Iran, and what their ideas were, and who they became after migration to Canada.

By contrast to the male respondents, the majority of female participants, regardless of their age, asserted that their identity as a 'woman' had been changed drastically after moving to Canada, and now they know "what it means to be a woman" (Soodi). Sanaz mentioned that here in Canada, as a woman she felt she had "more freedom, safety and respect" than she had in Iran. Similarly, Mitra mentioned that she obtained freedom and independence in Halifax as a woman. Mahsa also explained that not being judged based on socially ascribed gender roles increased her self-confidence. The words of Soodi captured the feelings of the rest of the participants:

It's been a HUGE change...HUGE... In Iran and in the society, I was the ultimate independent woman but at home I wasn't. I wasn't the woman the society saw... but when I came here, I was that woman the society saw and I wanted to see... here I had the opportunity to have access to certain education, talking to different people, learning more about what it really means to be a woman and embracing that and valuing it, and trying to pull out those rooted ideas or cultural lessons that we learn about men being superior. . So through this way I've changed a lot as a woman. I learned a lot about the values of being a woman ... Now, here, I just feel more confident as a woman; because now I know better what it means to be a woman, in my own terms and what I would want to see.

In a nutshell, while male respondents were not clear about significant changes in their gender identities, the female respondents were able to see positive changes in their identity as women after moving to Canada. Because of the existence of gender equality in Canada more so than Iran, they could differentiate between who they were before, as young women in Iran, and who they had become in Canada. As Helen Ralston mentioned in her study on South Asian women in Canada and Australia (2006, 185), “immigrant women are agents, rather than passive victims, in the situations and social spaces they enter”. These findings had been mirrored among other studies existing in literature, for instance, those female participants of Tastsoglou (2006) who had come from “developing countries” (p. 212) to Canada, and appreciate “peace, safety, and security of Canada” which gave them sense of “growth” (Ibid).

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS ON IDENTITY CHANGES

All my participants stated that since moving to Halifax, they became different people, and their identity and sense of self had changed as a result of their integration experiences. The dimensions discussed above, such as education, social connections, employment, language and so forth all played their role in this evolving sense of identity. This confirms my initial hypothesis, which assumes that deep gendered changes take place in immigrants’ identities through the process of immigration and integration in a new society. The participants have risen to the challenges presented by living in a society which has very different socio-cultural norms and processes by adapting, not just through

the specific aspects analysed above, but also going through a holistic and internal psychological process of change. For instance, Sharif mentioned that:

Immigration was very hard and a big deal in my life which brought a lot of changes and challenges; changes such as leaving your home, your city, the people you know, your friends, life style... everything... handling all these changes and challenges affected my personality... my perspectives and views towards life have completely changed[after coming to Canada].”

Nima described how the process of aging influenced his identity. He was 23 years old when he moved to Halifax with his family, and spent the major years of his twenties dealing with the challenges of immigration. He looked at Halifax as a place where his mind “grew up” and so, his “perspective and view of many different things” have been changed.

Similar to literature, for instance, Tastsoglou’s participants (2006), who felt positive about their “eye-opening” experiences and their identity growth after migration to Canada, the participants of this study were also satisfied and had positive reactions to their identity changes. They all believed that the challenges they faced were the opportunities to become “stronger”, “independent” and “positive” (Mahsa), and learn to “trust people” (Sanaz). Hanif contended that from an “aggressive and confrontational” person in Iran, he became “more calm, relaxed and braver”. Although Sogol said that, [now] she is more “cautious and realistic”, [and] “have less trust in people”, she now believed that she had cultivated these characteristics in order to deal with the reality of life in Halifax. Shervin and Mitra mentioned that diversity in everything, people, culture, religion and, food helped them to experience everything differently, and Mitra saw herself “[more] open-minded” after two years living in Canada with a diversity of cultures. Shervin also referred to his experiences in learning about different religions:

Now in Canada, I read and ask people about different religions. I feel good about learning and gaining different perspectives and my desire for learning continues.

In sum, Soodi spoke for about all of the respondents:

When I came here, there was the option of me being accepted as whoever I was so that's where I asked myself "Who am I?" The first thing that struck me in communication was how well my Canadian-born colleagues knew themselves. I learned to express myself after coming to Canada because before that I didn't know myself that well. Now that I look back, I've come a long way from not being able to express my feelings to myself, let alone other people, to now being able to observe situations and being able to comment on them; you know...like "I think this is what's happening". So I can say, here in Canada, for the first time if someone asks me about my identity...my sense of self, I will be able to describe some things.

When all the changes outlined above are taken together, it appears that, women are more able to identify and account for deeper transformations in their identities than men. Coming from a patriarchal country to a more liberal, culturally more diverse Canadian society, has helped them to differentiate between their identities here and there, appreciate the sense of peace and security, and embrace their new identities. This confirms the gendered experience of integration and resulting identity changes that I had when starting this study. Having said that, all of my participants, regardless of their gender, consistently refer to their age in comparison to other immigrant groups as an important element in determining their experiences. This shows how the intersectionality framework operates in this study, and how gender, class, location, and ethnicity combine in unique ways to forge identities through integration experiences.

CHAPTER SIX: TRANSNATIONAL HOME AND SENSE OF BELONGING

In line with my framing research hypothesis that young Iranian immigrants' identity is changed by their immigration and integration experiences, and my exploration of how and why these changes take place, in this chapter I will discuss how their sense of home and belonging are interrelated, and has developed as the consequence of their identity reconstruction. In the literature review, I mentioned that different factors, such as conceptions of home, age, gender, class, etc, play important roles in immigrants' sense of belonging. Here I explore how these factors shape my participants' sense of home in Halifax, and consequently what is their sense of belonging.

The question may arise that why I (and my research participants) approached the issue of sense of home and belonging as a distinct and separate question. Although it is generally considered as being part and parcel of the integration experiences, I assert that a sense of home and belonging can be seen as the overarching result of integration experiences rather than one of several dimensions such as language. This is in line with the temporal flow of settlement and integration, which immigrants experience when they enter a new society, and strive toward making their 'home'.

6.1 HALIFAX AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOME AND BELONGING

I compared the participants' integration experiences nationally within Canada, and transnationally with other Iranian immigrant youth living in Iran or other countries to evaluate their sense of belonging to Canada, as well as to Halifax, as a smaller city in Canada. To this end, I asked them how their experiences of place compared to those of

young Iranian immigrants living in larger cities of Canada (such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal). It is worth noticing that my participants' perception of how they think other young Iranians living in Toronto, Vancouver, etc., were their first hand experience of these Canadian cities.

Among the male respondents, I heard different perspectives about landing and living in Halifax. In general, the majority of them were satisfied with their integration experiences in Halifax. For instance, Anoosh explained his experiences in Halifax's academic setting, and referred to its student-centred atmosphere. He believed that Halifax has good universities with reputable professors and better financial aid than other cities in Canada. However, he noted, "Iranians in larger cities have more fun and entertainment".

The remainder of the male respondents explained their settlement experiences in Halifax by referring to the size of the Iranian community, and its importance in shaping integration experiences. For instance, Shervin and Nima were satisfied with the small size of the Iranian community: a large community may had resulted in different integration experiences but not necessarily more positive ones. They explained that they moved out of Iran in order to change; in order **not** to live exactly the same way they used to live in Iran. Halifax, with its small Iranian community, gave them this opportunity: to simultaneously integrate into Canadian society but to also keep their traditions. Nima's words caught my attention:

When I go there (Toronto) I don't feel that I'm in Toronto, I feel like I'm back home... It's not a bad thing necessarily, but it doesn't make sense to me... that's the reason I moved out [of Iran]... but in smaller communities, you have to start from scratch, you have to start communicating with local people so you are more involved with the society here. So I found immigrants, including myself, that

when they go to smaller cities, the way that they live is much closer to the local community and society...Here you are more integrated.

“Cut- Paste Immigrants”¹⁰

Similarly, Hanif referred to the same feature of Iranians who come from Iran and start living in Canada the way they exactly did in Iran, and named them “*cut- paste*” immigrants. And, unlike Nima, Hanif believed that Iranians in Halifax display this feature, the same as Iranians in Toronto, and the fact that in this small community, everybody knows each other made it difficult for him to disassociate from other Iranians.

On the other hand, all of the female participants reported positive integration experiences in Halifax in comparison with young Iranians living in bigger cities of Canada. Although Sanaz mentioned, “because of diversity in bigger cities, it’s easier to find and make friends”, she and the rest of the female respondents were happy about being in Halifax and satisfied with their integration experiences here. They asserted that in Halifax, the smaller size and population, made “people warmer and kinder” (Mahsa), as well as “friendlier” (Sanaz) and there were “fewer tensions and headaches”(Mitra), and this “makes people to be connected to each other in some ways” (Mahsa). While in bigger cities such as Toronto, “everything is more serious and therefore makes life harder” (Sogol), and as Mitra said, people are more ambitious in terms of making money and entering job markets, and there are “less connections among people in the streets” (Mahsa). Therefore, as newcomers, they all asserted that these “small town” characteristics of Halifax helped them to be involved with the new society more easily

¹⁰ In computer software lingo, cut and paste is a way to transfer the data. By cutting the data, the user moves the information from a source, and pastes it (without any alteration) to a different destination file.

and to settle better¹¹. Mahsa made simple and interesting comparison between people living in Halifax and in Toronto:

People here care enough to hold the door open for you, but in Toronto they don't. Even the ways people look at you and treat you are different; such treatment makes it even harder to cope for those who have gone through the hard process of immigration.

Soodi also explained her positive experiences of landing and living in Halifax:

I think if I had landed in Toronto and lived there first, I don't think I would have had a smooth transition like I did here... I'm really glad I landed in Halifax first because my foundations were shaky when I first arrived and I made friends here who were always there to help me. If I were living in Toronto and needed my friends to be there for me, they would have had to drive two or three hours... and so the support and availability wouldn't have been the same.

When I asked the participants to compare their experiences to those they felt Iranian youth in other parts of the world had, the majority of male respondents could not identify any similarities or differences with Iranian youth out of Canada. This can be attributed to the importance of gender in forming immigrants' integration experiences, and that is why, I received very clear answers from the female respondents. Having a sense of security specifically in Halifax, as well as freedom of choice and less racism in Canada, were the main themes in their responses. Sanaz, spoke for almost all of the female participants:

When I compare myself with my Iranian friend in Sweden, I see that I'm faced with less racist issues than she is. When I compare myself with my friends in Iran, I have built a new life here from scratch. Although it might seem that I'm left

¹¹ It should be noted that there is a distinction between the attachment of my participants to "Halifax", and "location": The participants of this study asserted their attachment to Halifax, because they *happened* to live in this city with their families, while, more likely, they were attached to a "smaller city", outside of main migration routes and destinations (such as Toronto or Vancouver), not Halifax specifically. I am not certain that they had "a sense of place" in the way that social geographers and anthropologist use the term. In any case exploring place specific feelings and attachments would necessitate far more detailed research than was possible for this thesis.

behind in some cases, I have more peace and comfort here. I have also more and different concerns and experiences compared to my friends in Iran. For example, my concerns are finding ways to achieve my goals while my friends in Iran are concerned about what to wear.

In addition, Mahsa pointed to her gender and age as two important factors in her positive integration experiences in Canada:

If we went back in time, I would still choose to immigrate to Canada. I think there is gender equality between women and men here and as a woman I have my rights. While I think in other countries, women are not considered as equal and they don't have the same rights as women do in Canada. I also feel there are more acceptances for younger people in the workplace because Canada has a growing population of senior citizens. While I think in other countries, they think the older you are, the more experienced and qualified you are.

It can be concluded that the majority of participants, especially female respondents, compared themselves nationally and internationally with other Iranian youth. These comparisons affected their integration experiences in Halifax, as a smaller city, positively. They found starting their lives as newcomers in Halifax, their integration experiences and, their development of their Iranian-Canadian identity, more enjoyable in Halifax. Moreover, the small size of Halifax helped them to immerse in the Canadian culture more easily and, they appreciated the sense of security and stability of Canadian lifestyle in general.

6.2 WHERE IS HOME

Although my nationality is Iranian, Iran is now a memory of my childhood. Now home is Halifax. Now I see myself as an Iranian-Haligonian. When I went to Toronto and was asked where I was from, I identified myself as a Haligonian (Sanaz).

In the matter of defining 'where is home', my findings in this study reiterate those in relevant literature (for e.g. Rapport & Dawson, 1998; Naficy, 1999; Al-Ali & Koser,

2002; Abdelhady, 2008), and my participants reported inclusive images of home. While the majority of respondents defined 'home' through a transnational lens, some others described 'home' as a consecutive, moveable and socially constructed one in Canada.

Those respondents, who defined home through transnationalism, have lived in Canada less than others and emphasized their emotional and social (to some extent) ties to Iran. They described their love for Iran, and how much they missed its streets, their friends, and good memories of Iran, which they will never forget. However, instead of focusing on the nostalgic memories, they were trying to transfer their memories and rebuild a "second" (Mahsa) 'home' in Halifax. Whereas Sina asserted that, "now I have two homes, Iran and Halifax", Bita mentioned that, "Now I call Halifax home because my life is here: my family, and my school. Still, my love for Iran will never go away although I don't think I'll ever go back to live there".

On the other side, those respondents who had lived out of Iran longer than others (Soodi, and Sogol), or had more settled life, and full-time job (Nima, and Soodi) in Halifax, or were unsatisfied of social situation in Iran (Shervin), had no/less social ties with Iran. They found "comfort" (Soodi) and "peace and safety" (Sogol) in Halifax and defined it as their "new" home. In this regard, Soodi asserted that,

I really like Halifax and after going to Iran after about five years of being out or Iran, I had a hard time there because I realized that despite all this time, the people of Iran hadn't changed...when I came back to Halifax, and when the plane landed in Halifax airport, I was smiling from ear to ear because I was happy to be back [laughs excitedly and her eyes sparkle as she describes her feelings towards Halifax]. I told myself, "This is home". Halifax is really home for me. I was so excited to be back because home is where you feel at peace and safe I think...that's your home.

Interestingly, Mitra and Sharif were the only respondents who could not define a specific home for themselves. The reason of this, Sharif contended that, “I guess because I haven’t been here (in Halifax) long enough, I haven’t felt a sense of belonging to Halifax yet to call it home. However, I may not even go back to live in Iran now because all my friends and my immediate family have left Iran”. Moreover, Mitra hesitated a great deal before answering my question and finally she said,

Home? [hesitates] ... I don’t know.... While I can’t live in Iran anymore, Halifax doesn’t satisfy my ambitions for me to call it home ... so ... [shrugs her shoulders suggesting uncertainty].

Having said that, a week after my interview she left Halifax to visit her relatives in Iran for the first time after about three years. When she returned to Halifax after two months, she asked whether I could interview her again. Unfortunately, I could not, but she disclosed to me that at the beginning of her trip, she was excited about returning to Iran. However, after a month, she started craving Halifax, and she truly wanted to go back “home” (meaning Halifax). She believed that her life style was very different than that of her close friends, and she could not keep up with them. She said, “When I was landing in Halifax airport, I was happy that I am at home and Iran had turned to be my childhood memories”. Apparently, as Alinejad (2011) mentions, Mitra had a “glorious imagination” (p. 57) of home while she was away and by travelling there, she faced the reality and in result, she has embraced Halifax as her home.

It can be concluded that, the majority of Iranian immigrant youth define ‘home’ through a transnational lens; while they have emotional and social ties with Iran and their “childhood home”, they call Halifax their “second home”. Moreover, for a few

respondents, length of living out of Iran, job affiliation, as well as social situation in Iran, have resulted in building a new and consecutive home in Halifax.

6.3 HALIFAX AND SENSE OF BELONGING

In order to examine the participants' sense of belonging to Halifax and Canada, I analysed the importance of integration experiences and their definition of home in shaping their sense of belonging. As I mentioned above, despite many ups and downs, the participants reported having positive integration experiences in Halifax and noted that Halifax helped them to integrate more easily to Canadian culture and settle in their new life. Moreover, the majority of them defined Halifax as their home, a place with peace, security and life. Therefore, it can be said that having such positive feelings, support the participants' sense of belonging to this city and to Canada.

Additionally, through data analysis, I noticed that some of the respondents in their stories referred to their sense of love of and affection for the beauty of Halifax and its good weather in comparison to other Canadian cities, as the other reasons behind their sense of attachment to this city. For instance, Sina said:

When I arrived in Halifax, I felt like I had been here all my life... I loved the structure of the houses, buildings, and the streets... I felt like I had arrived somewhere where I feel safe and at home... somewhere I belong to.., it was like a city in the middle of nature... Even the weather and the sky were familiar to me.

Mahsa and Sanaz had similar ideas: "I love Halifax... putting aside its wind, it's just beautiful."

Therefore, it can be concluded that young Iranian immigrants of this study had a sense of belonging to Canada, and to Halifax. My findings in this section support Porter's (2010) study on Iranian immigrants in Halifax. In his research, he mentions that Iranians in Halifax do have a sense of belonging to Canada and Halifax per se. However, those Iranians with job affiliations had an even stronger sense of attachment to Halifax. In my study, although the majority of respondents showed their sense of belonging to Canada, the intersection of gender and belonging was revealing, because the female respondents emphasized a sense of freedom and equality and they depicted stronger affiliations toward Halifax than the male respondents.

It is worth mentioning that in the last section of the interviews, I asked the participants if they have any other comments, which were not covered in the interview, and half of the respondents did so. Interestingly, their answers supported my findings regarding belonging. They emphasized that, despite the hardships of immigration from Iran to Canada, and the challenges they faced in integrating in Canadian society, they were happy to have the opportunity to live in Halifax (Sanaz), meet new people and learn diversity (Soodi), taking advantage of experiencing different cultures (Nima) and, have the choices of forming their identities in the way they liked to. Hanif spoke for about all of the respondents:

I reached a conclusion that there are no such things as an "ideal life" and no ideal place unless you find yourself and change. I may still have the same views but my options are more and have the freedom to choose... but I learned all this because I moved here and I hope everyone will have a chance to experience it. When I compare myself with someone who's born and has lived here all his or her life, I feel like I come with more life experiences. I sometimes find the people here too conservative or cautious.

However, in the matter of future aspirations and staying in Halifax, as Porter's respondents mentioned, the participants of this study did not have a positive outlook as will be discussed in the following section.

6.4 FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

At the beginning, Halifax was a frozen hell, but now it is part of paradise. I really like Halifax but my staying here depends on my job (Sanaz).

All of the respondents, regardless of gender, mentioned that although beautiful and safe, "Halifax is a boring city" (Mitra) for young people, and "it is not suitable for someone filled with ambition and energy" (Sharif). Moreover, "there aren't enough available jobs" (Anoosh). Therefore, in order to "continue their career and access more technology" (Hanif), they have plans to leave Halifax and move to bigger cities with more opportunities in "working, studying, and finding friends" (Sogol). Soodi's words captured this feeling:

Well, I think wherever I go in Canada, I will call Halifax home. This city, the people, they took me in the same way I took this city in and I made it *my* city. However, I don't think I'll be living here forever, but I know I'll be coming back here. Knowing the ambitious person that I am and my greed or thirst for success, not that I can't have it here in Halifax but it would take significantly longer if I were to pursue that here, so I think I will be pursuing career and financial goals elsewhere but if I want to go someplace where I think I *belong, it's just here, Halifax.*

As Porter (2010) mentions, the economic situation of Halifax, acts as a discouragement for immigrants to stay in this city. Despite developing a sense of home and belonging, the young Iranian immigrants felt that they will be forced to leave Halifax in order to pursue career opportunities.

It can be seen from the testimony of the participants that their sense of belonging is closely intertwined with their identity, and they display a healthy and strong feeling of being at home in Halifax. This raises an interesting question as to why should this be so- why should these young people, who have come from a middle-eastern, theocratic society feel so at home in a small city which has such different socio-cultural norms from their homeland?

Some of their sense of belonging can be attributed to the fact that they come from upper-middle class social backgrounds, and thus have a certain amount of financial security, which facilitates their integration, and feeling of comfort in their new homes. However, class cannot provide a full explanation, because, for example, recent research on provincial nominee migrants who are also from wealthy income groups in Halifax uncovered a great amount of tension and dissatisfaction with the immigration and integration experience (Dobrowolsky, Bryan, & Barber, 2011). Dossa (2004) also discusses findings of melancholy and homesickness of Iranian immigrant females she studied in Vancouver.

In the intersectionality framework, it would seem that the age of my study participants particularly dominated other factors such as gender and class, etc., and it gives a sense of optimism and hope for their future aspirations, in comparison to the other immigrant groups mentioned above. Their enthusiasm for community involvement, networking and social engagement which was discussed in previous chapters can also explain how they are able to create a sense of belonging and home in Halifax, and avoid the melancholia and homesickness documented by Dossa (2004). Tastsoglou (2006) also comments on the multi-faceted process of integration of immigrant women in the

Maritimes, noting that there are varieties of means, which immigrants use to enhance their settlement experiences, such as through faith-based organizations, social networking, etc. A further point to consider is that coming from a younger generation, my study group displayed a greater desire to distance themselves from the more traditional and conservative social norms of their homelands and are more willing to adopt the open, “liberal” lifestyles associated with Canada. That is, they believe that living in Canada can provide them with some freedoms, which are not available to them in Iran, and this gives them a greater willingness to adapt to life in Canada, and consequently call Halifax their home. As they develop a new identity of more “open”, more “diverse” and more tolerant, so they feel a greater sense of belonging to Canadian society, which for them is associated with more freedom from parental and societal control and restraints. This is of course a gendered process, that is, men and women experience this openness and freedom in different ways, yet the general idea seems to hold for both sexes, and they all agree that Halifax can be home, and that their identities have evolved in significant ways. This can also be seen in the disdain they have for what they called “copy-paste” immigrants.

To sum up, the previous two chapters have analysed my interview data through intersectionality theory with particular emphasis on age and gender, to uncover important themes which show how the identity of Iranian young immigrants have changed through immigration and integration, and how these changes contributed toward a sense of belonging and home in Halifax.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

I embarked on this study in order to answer the following questions: how has the identity of young, Iranian immigrants changed through their experiences of immigration and integration in Halifax and how this change has affected their sense of home and belonging. The choice of research topic was rooted in my personal experiences. As a young Iranian woman who was born and raised in Iran, I have experienced the already defined gender roles in Iranian culture and society for more than twenty years, and have seen the growing enthusiasm of Iranians, especially young adults, vis-à-vis moving to Canada. Therefore, by moving to Halifax, noticing the growing number of young Iranian immigrants to this city, and the gap in literature about Iranians in general, and young Iranians in particular, I decided to conduct my study on this nascent group. In my view, the accounts of the young Iranian immigrant participants in the Iranian community in Halifax were very unique, and they were not being addressed or portrayed in scholarly literature, or in the media.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed twelve young first-generation immigrants in Halifax, consisting of six female and six males, between 22-28 years old, belonged to upper-middle socio-class, educated, and non-practicing religious families, who had lived in Halifax between two to five years. Interviews were analyzed through a gender-based analysis, and the intersectionality theory, which provided the framework for analyzing inquiry about the intersections of gender, age, class, ethnicity/ race, education/employment, and the location of respondents, Halifax/ Canada versus Iran

Moreover, through a transnational analysis of home, my participants' sense of home and belonging were examined.

In this regard, the works of Tastsoglou and Petrinioti (2011) on the experiences of Lebanese second generation youth in Halifax, Nabavi (2011) on the experiences of citizenship and belonging among young first-generation Iranian immigrants in Vancouver, and Porter (2010) on Iranians' settlement experiences in Halifax were particularly relevant to my research. Indeed, I could identify many similar themes in relation to the integration experiences of my respondents such as language barriers, relationship changes, community participation and, cultural differences, as well as the identity formation and the concept of home and sense of belonging, between their study groups and the participants of this study. It should be noted however, that despite sharing common concerns and interests my study is not identical to these and comparison of findings should keep this qualifier in mind.

- ***Integration Experiences Leading To Identity Re-construction***

To map out the participants' integration experiences and their impacts on their identities, I questioned the most common aspects of integration processes mentioned in the literature, and asked the participants about language, social relations, education, employment, community participation, ethnic and cultural practices and beliefs, sexuality, family, and gender identity.

My research findings supported some of the findings of relevant literature. Through a gender-based analysis, and intersectionality theory, I confirmed the importance of gender, age and social-class in shaping the participants' integration

experiences. Although the participants had a fairly homogenous background, according to their perceptions of their experiences, they asserted that the element of age in relation to gender was the main explanatory factor in the formation of their heterogeneous identities and integration experiences. In this way, my study makes a contribution to the understanding of scholarly work on integration processes, because while the role of gender in integration and immigrant identity has already been established and discussed, the role of age, and being young, with the particular needs and impressions of specific age-groups have not yet been so well-documented. My study thus addresses this research gap by highlighting the unique experiences and needs of this specific demographic.

Regarding language barriers, it was shown that language played an important role in forming the participants' integration experiences. Both male and female respondents had similar problems in understanding and speaking English. The majority of them had to take English classes under the aegis of ISIS. Most were not satisfied with the available facilities and they quit the classes after a couple of sessions. They mentioned that classes had no age limit and therefore they were in the same class with older immigrants, which decreased their speed of learning, and consequently delayed their integration process.

Moreover, similar to existing literature (Ruble and Shaw, 1991) I found that the impacts of language barriers on the respondents' identities were gendered. Female participants, more so than men, disclosed that language was not only a significant factor in identity formation, but also in finding friends. While it was difficult for women to start a relationship with non-Iranians without being fluent in English, for male respondents, other factors such as age, and cultural similarities were more important in their

relationships. This could be attributed to the reason that generally, women are socialized to pay more attention to other people's feelings upon whom their livelihood or very survival may depend.

In the matter of social networks, similar to other researchers' findings, the respondents, regardless of their gender, confirmed the importance of social connections in shaping their integration experiences and identities. All of them mentioned that they liked to spend their leisure time with non-Iranians shortly after they entered Canada in order to merge into the Canadian culture. Yet over time, they noticed that Canadians had their own circle of friends and getting into that circle was difficult. In addition, similar to the existing literature and other researchers' findings, "cultural differences" (Tastsoglou, 2006) and fear of unfamiliar others were the main problems the participants faced in their social relations in Halifax, which, over time made them feel shut-out and decide to socialize with Iranians more than the Canadian-born.

All of the respondents referred to their age variance as a significant element in choosing new friends. For example, they preferred to have older, mature and more open-minded friends, and they did not want to socialize with teenagers or immature people. Through their friendships and social connections, they liked to discuss their attitudes and elaborate their identities. As a result, their new friends in Halifax had positive impacts on the respondents' identities.

In addition, the respondents perceived multiculturalism in Canada as "demographic diversity", and were satisfied that their friends from different cultures helped them to experience diversities and new cultures. For instance, regarding sexual

relations, seeing and experiencing this issue in different cultures opened their eyes, and helped them to place sexual relations in a comparative perspective, and see them as part of life, neither a big deal nor an unimportant issue. It is worth noting that the respondents emphasized the importance of their age as a significant factor in the development of these attitudes. The younger participants, regardless of their gender, felt their friend influenced them more than others.

As regards to integration experiences in school and education, many of the respondents referred to the challenges they faced with respect to their admission to universities in Canada. The long process of immigration from Iran changed their social status and affected their identities, while they were in their second-third year of bachelor degree in Iran, by moving to Halifax, they had to start school from scratch. Lack of English proficiency, non-recognition of the university credits earned in Iran or other countries, and different educational systems were the main reasons that forced them to change their fields of studies and/ interests, and stalled their progress. Such challenges took at least a year to resolve and to be able to get back on their life tracks.

Regarding the challenges that my participants faced because of their ethno-cultural background at social institutions, the experiences were gendered. While the majority of respondents found university settings, “diverse” and “multicultural”, a few female students, experienced racism. Their social vulnerability and lack of self-confidence due to growing up in a patriarchal society could be the reason for such feelings. Interestingly, in the workplaces, male respondents asserted that they experienced racism in the process of getting job and interviews. Negative portrayal and stereotype of Muslim- Middle Eastern men in Western societies such as Canada could be

attributed to this feeling. In addition, because of visible characteristics (having black hair, black eyes, and darker skin than the white majority), all of the respondents, regardless of their gender, experienced discrimination at least once within society. Some of the female participants also experienced “systemic racism” (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000; Bolaria and Li, 1988; Calliste, 1989; Henry, 1994; James 1995) because they were visible minority women.

Interestingly, while the respondents became aware of, and were sensitized to, the racism of daily life, and do note the impact of these experiences on their identity formation, nevertheless, they preferred to dismiss the discrimination they faced and did not want to dwell on it. Because of their age and being young, they still hoped to transcend these sentiments and not allow them to create obstacles in their settlement. They learned to emphasize less people’s ethnicity, transcend racism and embrace diversity.

In the matter of changes in ethno-cultural practices, beliefs and identities, while the participants used the Iranian community in Halifax as a “frame of reference”, by participating in different ceremonies and parties, they attempted to dwell somewhere in between two cultures and construct a hybrid Iranian-Canadian identity. In this regard, women were more passionate about adopting a hybrid identity. For instance, regarding the changes in dress code, female respondents were happy to have the ability to abide by a different dress code, which is more in line with their personal preferences rather than by cultural and societal dictates. Furthermore, those participants who had stayed longer in Halifax, and had jobs, valued their Iranian-Canadian identity more than the other respondents.

As other scholars suggest, changes in family relations through the immigration were key to the integration process. Through changes in parent-children relationships, again the majority of respondents emphasized the importance of their age in shaping their relations with their parents in Halifax. They compared themselves and their integration process to that of their parents, and mentioned the fact that they had many arguments with their parents upon their arrival to Halifax, but because they were young, they could adjust themselves more easily than their parents to the new situation, and the Canadian culture. However, with time, as they got older and their parents became more familiar with the new life style, they learned how to communicate better with each other. The feelings of peace and security in Halifax had also helped them to build a good relationship with their parents and get along better, over time.

Regarding changes in gender roles and gender identities among the participants in their integration experiences, similar to the literature (Tastsoglou, 2006), the female respondents from Iran explained that having a sense of personal growth, and more freedom and equality in Canada, have helped them to define themselves as the woman they aspired to be. In contrast, the male participants did not see significant changes regarding being a man in Iran or being a man in Canada. However, some of them suggested that women's equality in Canada led them to work on improving their attitudes toward women and to start dismissing their sexist point of views.

In sum, it can be said that the changes and challenges my participants faced through their integration experiences, were manifested as changes in their identities, and this outcome supports my hypothesis. The intersection of gender with age and class was

significant in forming my respondents' integration experiences and their identities.

Despite the hardships and discrimination they faced, they believed that being young has helped them to integrate easier (than their parents) in Canada, become stronger and more resilient, and to develop a life-path. These positive changes have also manifested themselves in their developing a sense of home and belonging to Canada.

- ***Home and Sense of Belonging***

Regarding a sense of home and belonging, my findings support those found in the literature (Porter, 2010; Tastsoglou & Byers, 2008; Tastsoglou, 2006). The majority of participants defined Halifax through transnational lens, and despite having love and affection (emotional ties) for Iran, they called Halifax their home and had a growing sense of attachment and belonging for Halifax and Canada. Similar to the female respondents in Tastsoglou's (2006) study, many of the female participants in this study mentioned that despite the hardships that they had experienced, they would take the same decision and immigrate to Canada.

Nevertheless, because of the economic climate in Halifax, lack of jobs, economic opportunities and, the small size of the city, they indicated that they expected to leave Halifax because they wanted to pursue a career. They might come back here to visit their parents or the city, but they wanted to experience bigger cities with more opportunities. As a matter of fact, within the last eight months after completion of the interviews, two of the respondents left Halifax for Calgary and Toronto. Therefore, as Porter (2010) and many other scholars believe, only being satisfied with Halifax and having a sense of attachment, is not enough for immigrants to stay in Halifax.

In a nutshell, the participants of this study experienced various psychological, ethno-cultural and institutional challenges in the process of integration and identity formation in the new society with a different environment. Nevertheless, they called Halifax their home and they had developed a sense of belonging and attachment to Canada. Although being members of upper-middle class, educated families no doubt influenced their experiences, and their experiences were gendered, their age, i.e. being young, was the most significant reported factor in dealing with the challenges, hardships and nurturing hope and ambition for a better future. Whether in comparison to other immigration groups, or whether in considering the effect of variations within the study group, age emerges as a vital explanatory factor. There is a need for having further studies on the young first generation immigrants in general, and young Iranian first generation immigrants in particular, to fully know their needs and think of ways to keep these sources of labour, talents and energy in the province, and in Canada.

7.2 RECOMENDATIONS

This study leads to several recommendations for stakeholders in immigration and settlement domains, from non-government organizations providing settlement services to immigrants, to government agencies, dealing with multiculturalism, Canadian identity, citizenship, integration, and belonging.

For a start, the study suggests that, with regards to language services, it is recommended to conduct classes streamed by age, in order to make the classes more attractive and effective for learners of different age groups. As the literature on foreign

credential recognition suggests (Friesen, 2011; Zaman, 2008) immigrants face great challenges in having their prior learning recognized, and my participants were no exception. Facilitating the transfer of credits from Iranian universities to the Canadian institutions is strongly recommended. The delays which participants experience in gaining admission and completing their education at Canadian universities affect them both psychologically and also in terms of their resources. In sum, it affects their integration negatively.

The participants were weary of delays in general, and the lengthy formal process of immigration also affected them in different ways. For instance, the marital status, social status and psychological changes as they grew up could happen while the immigrants were waiting for their documents to be processed. Therefore, there is a great necessity from government, at both provincial and federal levels, to accelerate the process of immigration; and decrease the negative side effects of a lengthy immigration process.

Another suggestion worth exploring is to have settlement specialists or certain non-profit settlement organizations with experience in the issues faced by the young immigrant population in general, and young first-generation migrants in particular work with them in Halifax.

As mentioned in the literature, out-migration and especially the exodus of educated, trained youth are worrying trends in Nova Scotia. While immigration is seen as a solution to this problem, there is little point in attracting immigrants if no efforts are made to retain them. The provincial government needs to work more actively in promoting immigrant retention, by improving settlement services in Halifax, and

developing economic opportunities for the immigrants it attracts. Young immigrants are considered as sources of labour and entrepreneurship vital for the future of the province and its capital. In this regard, Porter (2010) found similar problems voiced by his study group and he suggests that:

The provincial government (of Nova Scotia) is continuously working on attracting new immigrants and increasing Nova Scotia's immigrant retention rate. However, negative perceptions of the province's economic potential, lack of government involvement with ethnic organizations, and unfavourable opinions of the settlement assistance available to newcomers hint that different measures might be needed. The provincial government needs to become more visibly involved in ensuring that newcomers' human capital is put to adequate use and their needs are met (p. 79).

7.3 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study was designed to address certain gaps in the literature regarding young first-generation immigrants, and specifically young Iranian immigrants. My research has contributed to understanding qualitatively, the integration experiences of this group, and has generated new knowledge on the processes of identity formation. However, the study points to the need for further research in this direction. The impact of age and social networks (such as friendships) on integration experiences and identity formation requires more in-depth study, as these are an often overlooked aspects of migration studies. The intersection of age, class, ethno-cultural background, gender and the length of residency also affect the way in which integration is experienced. My study shows how identity is constantly evolving, as the participants develop their experiences and are exposed to more and different challenges and issues in their new society. Comparative and family-based studies, which concurrently research the experiences of parents, children and other

family members could be extremely beneficial in developing a holistic portrayal of integration and identity formation. Moreover, a study comparing the integration experiences and identity changes between young international students, and young immigrants from the same ethnic group (especially from developing countries) could be interesting and helpful to see which group faces more changes and challenges, what are their integration needs, and who needs more facilities to integrate more easily. By doing so, governments could differentiate and fine tune immigration policies to assure that they are more successful in achieving their goals.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Experiences of Newcomer Youth

➤ **Language**

As English is your second language, did you encounter any linguistic barriers in your social environment and school? If so, how did you resolve them?

Have you ever felt that you could not express yourself? Could you tell me more about such instances? How did you feel as a result of not being able to express yourself? What did you do? How did this inability to express yourself affect your relationships with others, your studies, your identity?

➤ **Social Relations/ Friendships/ Relationships**

Are your new friends primarily from the same ethnic community as you are? Do you prefer to have more *international* friends? Or do you prefer to have more native-born friends? Why is this the case?

Are your friendships in Halifax different from those in Iran? If so, how and why?

Can you tell me how you have been affected by your new friendships in Canada?

Have your views of sexual relations and sexual practices changed since you moved to Canada?

➤ **School/ University/ Employment**

Are there any special challenges, discrimination, disadvantages, and / or opportunities and advantages that you have encountered in your school / university/ employment because of your ethno-cultural background?

How have you coped with these challenges/opportunities?

How have these challenges/opportunities influenced your sense of self and identity?

➤ **Community Participation/ Ethnic Beliefs**

Do you participate in your ethnic community? In which ways and how often? (e.g. festivals, camps, dances, clubs, youth activities, other)

Do you feel that your ethnic beliefs and practices have changed due to immigration to Canada and if so, how?

Have you changed your dress code since you moved out of Iran?

➤ **Family**

How your new situation in Canada has affected your relations with your family?

Do your parents understand what you are going through? Can you speak openly to your parents about your problems and dreams/ or your relationships, including sexual ones?

Do you think that your parents want different things for you than you want for yourself?

Are there any conflicts between you and your parents, and, if so, of what kind?

2. Youth Identity Renegotiation

Do you feel you have changed as an individual since you migrated to Canada? If so, how? Can you provide me specific examples of before and now?

How do you feel you have changed in particular as a man or a woman since you moved to Canada?

How do you understand / explain such changes?

3. Sense of Belonging

➤ **Comparing Self and Other Iranian Youth**

Do you keep in touch with Iranian youth in other cities in Canada, in Iran, or globally? As a young Iranian immigrant, do you think your experiences in Halifax, (as a small city) have been different than other young Iranian immigrants in larger cities of Canada (like Toronto/ Montreal/ Vancouver)?

How do you think you are similar or different from Iranian youth in other parts of the world or in Iran?

➤ **Settling / Home**

Where is “home” for you? Why?

Do you think that you would like to settle in Halifax? Why/ Why not?

4. Other Comments

Is there anything you would like to add to this discussion that you feel we have overlooked?

APPENDIX B

REB file # 11-136

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Evangelia Tastsoglou
Department of Women and Gender Studies
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As faculty at Saint Mary's University, I would like to invite you to participate in this study examining the experiences of Iranian newcomer youth in Halifax. More specifically, this study focuses on ethno-cultural identity issues (e.g. language; social relations and communications; challenges and opportunities in school/employment; community participation/ ethnic beliefs; family relations). The project is funded by the *Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence (AMC)*. Ms. Golsa Kafili, my research assistant will interview you, as a young newcomer in Halifax, for approximately one hour. She will audio-tape you (but you can also opt not to be recorded) and will provide you with a \$30 honorarium, meant to cover transportation or care replacement costs. She will ask you about issues relating to your experiences of living in Halifax. Although no risk to participants is anticipated, it is possible that you might experience some discomfort in discussing feelings and potentially sensitive experiences. You can opt not to answer any question you are uncomfortable answering. After we have collected approximately 12 interviews, we will transcribe them and we will use a qualitative analysis software program to organize the information. After the analysis is complete we will write up the data and make a summary report available to you.

We hope that participating in this study will allow you to have the opportunity to speak about your experiences and to have your voices heard. **Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time (before July 2013 when the study will be completed) without penalty.**

All identifying information obtained in this study will be kept strictly **confidential and anonymous**. Before we begin the interview process, you will choose a pseudonym and it is by this name that you will be known throughout this process. No information that identifies you as a specific individual will be used in this study. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed

in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, no individual participants will ever be identified in any writing from this study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Evangelia Tastsoglou, (either with your pseudonym, or your real identity) at 420 – 5884. Alternatively, you may call the Research Assistant (Golsa Kafili) at 449-2290.

If you wish to receive a summary report at the end of this study, please provide your name and postal address on a separate piece of paper to the interviewer.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Veronica Stinson at veronica.stinson@smu.ca, Chair, Research Ethics Board.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

You may have already answered some of these questions during the interview, but we would like to have confirmation on these points:

CHOSEN PSEYDONYM _____

1. Year of birth _____

2. Male _____ Female _____

3. How do you identify yourself in terms of ethno-cultural/religious background?

4. Where were you born? Rural area _____ Small town _____ City _____

5. For how long have you been living in Halifax? _____

6. Have you lived elsewhere (besides Halifax & your place of birth) and for how long? _____

7. Are you married? _____ Since: _____

8. How many members in your household (including siblings)? _____

How are they related? _____

9. Are you currently in a relationship _____ For how long? _____

10. What is the ethno-cultural background of your partner? _____

11. Do you attend University _____ Other (explain) _____

12. What is the level of education of your Mother _____ Father _____

13. Are you working for pay outside your home? __ yes (full time) _ yes (part time) ____ No ____ If yes, what do you do? _____

14. Are you self-supporting _____ Or Supported by your family? _____

15. How would you characterize the financial resources of your family?

Low _____ Medium _____ High _____

16. How did you and/or your family come to Canada? _____

If you would like to receive a copy of the findings from this project, please write your mailing address on a separate piece of paper and give this to the interviewer.

THANK YOU.



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