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Canada

**Bridging the Gap Between Ethnically/Culturally Diverse “Others”:
A Contribution to the Understanding of How Women Work Together**

By

Kristi D. Kemp

Bachelor of Arts (Honours), University of Manitoba, 1998

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree
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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the ways in which ethnically and culturally diverse women work together to bridge their differences. Using a critical, feminist, reflexive and post-colonialist approach, I conducted eight in-person, semi-structured interviews with women who were staff and board members, volunteers, or participants in programmes offered by an organization serving immigrant women. Women were asked to name their cultural or ethnic identities, to share their views on multiculturalism, tolerance, and the “welcoming” of newcomers to Canada, the uniting and divisive issues they faced in their work, as well as appropriate roles for Canadian-born and immigrant women in the organization at which they worked.

According to my interviews with women and the organizational data, one of the main features of women’s work together has been their attempt to “fit in.” In the context of this particular organization, “fitting in” meant that women emphasized commonalities and swerved away from critical and political analyses, particularly around notions of colour, power and privilege. In addition, women within this organization adopted mainstream society’s “liberal” view of multiculturalism, which celebrated women’s diversity, but did not make room for a deeper understanding of the differences between individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. As such, ethnically and culturally diverse women tended to work together as “Canadians,” and swept aside their differences or challenges.

Women’s responses to the questions regarding the “how” of their work together were impacted by their skin colour (visible minority vs. white) and experience with immigration (Canadian-born vs. immigrant to Canada). Colour was a salient predictor of

women's experiences, as visible minority women (regardless of their country of birth) were more forthcoming about their views on multiculturalism, tolerance, and the roles women should play within the organization.

Generally, all participants were quite uncomfortable with critical language around colour, power and privilege, which was understandable given the organization's downplaying of "political" issues, and our larger society's avoidance of issues of power and privilege. To account for some of the "gaps" in communication between ethnically and culturally diverse women, I discuss the utility of an anti-oppressive framework and the abandonment of critical language (without a rejection of the underlying critical approach) in order to "build bridges" between diverse women working together in Canada.

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Big high-fives to my peers and friends in the Community Psychology programme, as well as to Paul Davock for facilitating our thesis support meetings. We made it! To my parents, Carol and Clay, for their hours of phone support, their constant interest in what I was doing, and their confidence that I would turn out something worthy (which I often doubted).

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without my inspiring partner, Meghan Kenny, who was always there to ground me, bolster my confidence throughout this thesis journey, and whose support and vision of the excellence of my “final product” never wavered.

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D) Introduction

A few years ago, I travelled to India to do some volunteer work, and learned a great deal about myself, my whiteness, and working across cultural differences. Since returning to Canada, I have a desire to continue to “build bridges” across differences with women from other cultural and ethnic groups. For my thesis, I hoped to develop an understanding of how women can work together with people who are culturally/ ethnically “other” than they are, while addressing some of the procedural or “process” challenges for researchers wanting to carry out such work (see Alcoff, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; hooks, 1989; Jaggar, 2000; Narayan, 1997; Schutte, 2000).

In order to be clear, I need to assert that there is not a singular strain of feminism that exists for all “practicing” feminists. Though the resistance of patriarchy is the common thread that binds the varieties of feminism, the ways in which women choose to resist and recreate their communities are numerous and distinct (Gill, 1998). For instance, liberal feminists strive to reach equality between men and women, while radical feminists have been known to assert that a just society would be one where women’s value would exceed that of men (or where women would rule the world!). I consider myself to be closest to the definition of a socialist feminist, which means that I do not want to be considered equal to, or the same as men, but that I will continue to demand equitable (i.e., fair) treatment. According to Adamson, Briskin and McPhail (1988), being a socialist feminist also entails that we challenge the power relations inherent in social systems, and “argue that equality of opportunity can never be attained in Canadian society as long as there are fundamental differences in wealth, privilege, and power based on class, gender, sexual orientation, and race” (p. 11).

For me, being a feminist studying women's work together across cultural, ethnic, and racial differences means that I will address issues of power and privilege, both in personal interactions with others and in perceiving interactions of women with each other. Further, my commitment to feminism means that I am interested in the idea of voice, whereby I will present women's standpoints and views as they were presented to me, rather than interpreting, adjusting, or editing the voices of my participants to suit my purposes. Finally, as a feminist, I believe in women's agency and wisdom, and attempt to honour women's identities, voices, and perceptions both through the process of my research and in the way I present the findings of this study.

As a white, queer, feminist student of community psychology conducting this thesis work, I believe that my commitment to an anti-racist and anti-oppressive approach to this research will be valuable both to feminists and to community psychologists. Further, through my interviews with eight diversely-identified women associated with a local organization serving immigrant women, I will attempt to answer questions like "How can we – whether we identify with the dominant culture of Canada or with another one – work together with those who are culturally or ethnically "other" than ourselves?" and "Are there roles better suited for Canadian-born or immigrant women in an organization serving immigrant women?" Finally, I hope to lend some insight to the struggles of the researcher that accompany this kind of work to assist my colleagues conducting feminist and/or community psychology research.

II) Background

The History of me and “the thesis”

Writing this thesis has been one of the most difficult things I have ever done. If I am to tell the story of how this thesis was born, I need to acknowledge the roots of my “cultural” interests, and why it has been so simultaneously appalling, challenging and rewarding to do the kind of work I am describing here.

In my third year at the University of Manitoba, I became pretty disenchanted with how isolated I felt within a university setting, and decided that pursuing a graduate degree following my undergraduate degree would stunt me, rather than contribute to my growth. I yearned for real, lived experience, and for a chance to tear myself away from the world of books, theories, and suppositions. I wanted to be challenged, I wanted to get away, and like so many students before me, strapping on a backpack and sating my wanderlust had an appeal too strong to ignore.

To my parents’ disquiet, I did not want to pack up and go to urban centres in Europe or Australia, rather, I dreamed of volunteering in rural Africa, Asia or Latin America. What I knew about these far-off countries convinced me that they would surely be different than Canada – which is what I wanted! Relying largely on the internet, I researched all kinds of small Canadian and American organizations (some affiliated with government; some non-profit), as well as other larger and more established ones. As I had no overseas experience, I was at a disadvantage, and began fearing that my starry-eyed dreams of adventure and travel would end even before they began.

Before I got discouraged enough to abandon my search entirely, I stumbled upon the website of Action for Autism (AFA), an NGO located in New Delhi, India. All of my

work had been in not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations to that point, and I also had some experience with autism, so I began e-corresponding with a staff member, and then with the Executive Director, who invited me to come and participate in their teacher-training programme. To make a very long story short, in February 1999, I packed up and left – alone – for New Delhi, India, with the intention of remaining there for two years to complete my training in Open Door School, AFA's small centre for children with autism.

I could spend a great deal of time describing my initial three months of intense homesickness, and the agonizing and unfamiliar experiences of alienation in India as a result of my own cultural and ethnic "otherness" – but that's a whole other piece of literature! Though my experiences certainly influenced and informed some of my ideas about working across cultures, so have the fierce bonds I built with the people I met in India. As a feminist, I have often wondered at the story of our connections, and I want to know if I can have those connections and working relationships with other cultural and ethnic communities in Canada.

I know that writing anything with a "critical" orientation throws open the door and invites people to *themselves* become critical about what they encounter. I anticipate that some readers will see this attempt at feminist "cross-cultural" research as self-serving and perhaps even trivial. I know that my intentions, however good and pure they may be, may not be understood, and I am very aware of how my own cultural affiliations and my own power are inherent in the way I write, speak, and analyze information. In retrospect, though, my biggest fear was to name my research process as being as personal as it is. As

a defence, I worried that I would regress back to the language, structure and approaches of empiricism to keep the process objective and removed from myself as a researcher.

In undertaking such a personal project, I had many reasons to want to protect myself (e.g., to prevent people from saying I was selfish; to enable me to distance myself from my work so that when it was criticized, it would not be a criticism of me) but some of the nagging seemed to be coming from inside – a hangover of sorts from my empirical undergraduate upbringing. These pesky voices whispered, “Could something you hold so dearly be important to other academics or community members? Does anyone else think or care about this like you do?”

One of the gifts given to me through this thesis process, though, is that I have learned about being gentler with myself. I know that this thesis represents my very first, in-depth foray into the pedagogical study of culture and ethnicity. The focus has shifted from that of simple experience, to one of *writing, describing, analyzing, and expanding upon* this experience. For me, this thesis is one way for me to understand where – or if! – I may fit into cultural, ethnic and racial communities to which I do not belong. Throughout this process, I made mistakes and thus contributed to richer understandings for myself and for others. Though I am only scratching the surface of an issue that is even more complex than I originally anticipated, I learned a great deal about the “how” of women working across culture, and I am proud of the way our voices are represented in this work.

Working definitions

I had a really difficult time pinning down appropriate language for this thesis. So many of the terms I used are politically and emotionally loaded, and at times, the

reactions evoked by some of the terms often got in the way of the research questions.

Therefore, I include this section on language to try and make explicit the meanings of the words, vocabulary, and discourse I used throughout my thesis, as they may differ from common or popular definitions.

I am aware of the many other existing descriptions of the terminology I used, but for the purposes of analysis and for description, I had to make some tough decisions. As Giroux (1993) reminded me, being critical about language "...means understanding the limits of our own language as well as the implications of the social practices we construct on the basis of language we use to exercise authority and power" (p. 28). In later sections, I will detail how agonizing some of these decisions were, and will discuss the limitations of the current language we have in speaking about the complexities of our identities.

a) Culture

Similar to Williams (1983) and Day (2000), I think culture is one of the most difficult words in the English language, due to its historical development, but also because it is used to represent several concepts in many academic disciplines, some of which clash completely. In Maiter's (2003) chapter in Al-Krewani and Graham's Multicultural Social Work in Canada, Falicov (1995) offers a multidimensional view of culture, which includes "those sets of shared world views, meanings and adaptive behaviours derived from simultaneous membership and participation in a multiplicity of contexts" (p. 367). These contexts include geographical setting (rural, urban, or sub-urban), language, age, gender, family configuration, religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, employment, occupation, sexual orientation, political ideology, state of acculturation, and education (Falicov, 1995, as cited in Maiter, 2003). These parameters

are not static in nature, as the construction of culture changes with what occurs in a given environment (Chang, Muckelroy, & Pulido-Tobiassen, 1996). I appreciate and use this particular definition of culture for its explicit flexibility and also for its acknowledgment of fluidity.

Further, I often refer to “mainstream Canadian culture” in this thesis. I recognize how inherently problematic this concept is, particularly in a multicultural country comprised of people whose origins lie scattered about the world. I am still no closer to being comfortable with describing “Canadian culture” than I was when I began. However, for the sake of this thesis and in accordance with researchers like Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees (1995), I cite mainstream (or dominant) Canadian culture as being “the group in Canadian society that maintains the power to define itself and its culture as the norm” (p. 3).

Sometimes, mainstream white Canadians see themselves as without culture, ethnicity, or race – instead, they are simply Canadian (Henry et al., 1995; James, 1999; Rosaldo, 1993). Culture is considered to be a thing that is possessed by other people whose physical looks (including skin colour or other features), dress, food, or other such “visible” markers separate them from being Canadian (James, 1999). Another of the ways that white Canadians wield their power, and sometimes, their oppressiveness is by being “cultureless,” and by having the privilege of naming others who possess culture. On the whole, I also assert that people identifying closely with mainstream Canadian culture tend to be less tolerant and accepting of difference, diversity, and variation from what they feel is their “normative” life (Henry et al., 1995; James, 1999).

b) Ethnicity/“ethnic identity”

Chang, Muckelroy, and Pulido-Tobiassen (1996) describe ethnicity as “...a group identity defined by a common political, historical and social experience...” (p. 19). In addition, they articulate that ethnicity is shaped by race, language, and culture, but the impacts of each depend on individual groups. Other researchers define ethnicity as “all the groups of society characterized by a distinctive sense of difference owing to culture and descent” (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975, as cited in Henry et al., 1995).

Ethnic groups may also encompass a number of different cultural groups, who may share characteristics such as a common language (Chang, Muckelroy, & Pulido-Tobiassen, 1996; Phinney, 1990). What seems to be common among all of the definitions of ethnicity are the notions of shared social origins or identities, as well as a sense of belonging (Phinney, 1990). I adopted these definitions of ethnicity and ethnic identity throughout my thesis, and often used them alongside (but not interchangeably with) the word “culture.”

In addition, I will be speaking about “whiteness” throughout this thesis, in accordance with Giroux (1993), who asserts that we must all work to construct whiteness as an actual ethnic category. Informed by theorists like him, as well as many other researchers steeped in feminist and/or post-colonialist work (e.g., Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; hooks, 1992; Ferguson, 2000; James, 1999, Yee & Dumbrill, 2003), I situate whiteness not just as a skin colour, but also as a marker of a great many privileges, particularly in Canada.

c) "Working together"

For the purposes of this thesis, when I use the term *working together*, I am referring to a definition that is similar but broader than that of partnership, which is defined as "...a formal understanding in which two groups of people or organizations participate together in solving problems related to a common goal; partners also share responsibilities and tasks" (DeJaeghere, 2000, p. 7). In the case of women working together at this organization, there are often more than two "partners," and the work often involves much more than problem-solving. I append to this idea of working together that each individual or group feel that they have something equally valid and important to offer, and that there is some sense of reciprocity in the relationship (see Hawley, Banks, Padilla, Pope-Davis & Schofield, 1995).

d) Identity

Identity is another word that has multiple connotations, and often refers to things that we can *see* about a person. For example, when a crime has occurred, the perpetrator is identified based on things such as the colour of their skin, their height, what they are wearing, and often their perceived ethnic or cultural group. For this thesis, I focus more on the cultural and ethnic identities of my participants based on *what they told me*. However, these identities are not singular or fixed, but are complex, and change among situations, periods of time, and in relation to other people (James, 1999; Phinney, 1990). Indeed, as Caws (1994) asserts, "each person's identity is built up on a wholly idiosyncratic basis; the number of dimensions of individual variability and of possibilities within each dimension...are large enough to make it quite conceivable that nobody has any really near neighbours" (p. 381).

When speaking about identity at a conference, renowned Canadian novelist Joy Kogawa (1990) commented, “I don’t want to be defined by and limited by any singular identity. I would like to be able to move as fluidly as possible, and the more I move, the greater the sense of freedom and flight in the sense of being able to fly” (p. 123). Conversely, some people may identify with a particular ethnic or cultural group but may not feel a sense of belonging to them (Phinney, 1990). Later, you will hear about the identities of the participants in this study, and how they shifted and adjusted to particular questions, situations, and for certain reasons.

e) Visible minority

As this term is used widely within the language of the organization and was used frequently among my participants, I use “visible minority” to recognize individuals who, “because of their physical characteristics are subjected to differential and unequal treatment in Canada...in relation to the [w]hite majority group” (Henry et al., 1995, p. 4). Though I do recognize that there are substantial differences between various groups of people that would be considered “visible minorities,” I chose to use this term to acknowledge the shared history of discrimination and bias of people in Canada whose skin colour deviates from the mainstream white norm.

f) Immigrant

When I use the term *immigrant* in this thesis, I am using it demographically, as a way to recognize an individual who was born in a country other than Canada. I realize the liberty I have as a native-born Canadian who has lived in Canada my entire life to simplify this word to such a basic definition. Perhaps if I too uprooted myself and bore an immigrant identity, I might not so easily it as a simple demographic distinction.

Although I do not feel that an individual coming “to settle in Canada as a resident” (Agger-Gupta, 1997) is somehow less Canadian than someone who was born here, becoming an immigrant is a heavy identity to shoulder for some individuals. For instance, even Roget’s 21st Century Thesaurus (1999) lists immigrant as being synonymous with terms like foreigner, migrant, newcomer, outsider, alien, and colonist, each of which bear their own detrimental implications and associations. As a British immigrant to Canada, Brian Johnson (2002) acknowledged that “we associate immigrants with the colonized and dispossessed...by definition, [we are] on the outside looking in...” (p. 139, p. 156), and a few of the participants in this research referred similarly to the oppressiveness of an immigrant identity.

However, to draw attention to the fact that Canada is populated almost entirely by immigrants or descendents of immigrants (save for First Nations people), I chose to use the term immigrant as a reminder that being an immigrant does not exclude anyone from “being Canadian.” In fact, as Griffiths (2002) comments, “at the most basic level, what it means to be Canadian will be an extension of what it means to be an immigrant” (p. viii).

Ultimately, language is an important theme that weaves through most of my thesis, and will be discussed many times beyond this section. In some cases, I turned to my participants to help me construct or reconstruct meaningful language, while in other cases I discuss my own struggles with our existing vocabulary and language. In addition, I speak a great deal about the seeming lack of fit of the existing terminology with the phenomena I was studying, and the ability of certain words to “push the buttons” of the women involved in this project. As a reader, I hope you are sympathetic to these

struggles, and understand them to be an unavoidable consequence of respectful, ethically-sound research.

The role of the researcher upon the research

As you read this thesis, you will note how I continue to situate myself both within the research and as a researcher. In the case of this work particularly, it is most important that I share my own cultural and ethnic identifications, which include being a young, queer, middle-class, English-speaking woman born in Canada. Not only do repeated assertions of this nature honour the feminist values of *transparency* and *reflexivity* (Ristock & Pennell, 1996), they also give people the opportunity to know the context from which I approach each situation. Some of these identities are discussed in greater depth at different parts of the thesis.

I consider my ethnicity to be primarily Canadian, and as I'll mention throughout this thesis, my white skin certainly has played a part in my experience of Canadian-ness. As with most other Canadians, I am also partly something else – in my case, Ukrainian (third-generation, on my mother's side) and status Métis (on my father's side). Of these two additional cultural and ethnic affiliations, I definitely know more about "being Ukrainian," as I have been surrounded by Ukrainian music, language, customs, and food since I was born.

Unfortunately, I have a disquieting relationship with my Métis heritage. My dad grew up in a family where his mother's identification with her First Nations culture was suppressed. In turn, the invisibility of our Aboriginal roots was passed on to me and my brother – we do not know any of our Salteaux elders, and I have not experienced the systemic racism and prejudice that many people identifying as Aboriginal have. If I am

privity to derogatory comments about First Nations or Aboriginal people, I oppose them vehemently, although it is more because I disagree with prejudice on principle than because it feels like they are speaking about me personally.

I have said before that I have “grown up white,” with all the associated privileges and endorsements white skin provides. My awkwardness in referring to my Métis heritage, then, has nothing to do with finding the identity shameful, but everything to do with the fact that I feel unworthy of owning it. I feel like I should know more about what it means to be Métis, especially given the historical significance of Aboriginal identities in Canada. This lack of connection both troubles me and impels me to learn more about this aspect of my self.

The community psychology/feminism connection

As a student of community psychology, I work to translate into action the purported values of creating a sense of community, respect for diversity, and social justice. Over the years, I have learned how to do these “translations” within research, but I feel I have been honouring these values in various ways throughout my life. Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman (2001) describe in some detail the rationale for these values, though their suggestions for how we may “do” them in real-life terms are not quite as meticulous as their descriptions. As a feminist, the aforementioned ideals are also of utmost importance to me, and led me to look to the feminist literature for further instruction on how I may leap from *thinking* about these issues to *acting* upon them.

I like to think that my feminist orientation supplements my commitment to some of the supposed values of community psychology. In many ways, though, the bridge between community psychology and feminist pedagogy is one that is tread infrequently,

particularly by community psychologists (Bond, Hill, Mulvey, & Terenzio, 2000; Bond & Mulvey, 2000). My commitment to feminist practices and ways of being certainly preclude my identification with those of community psychology, though I am not alone in noticing that many of the principles guiding the former run in parallel to those informing the latter (see Bond & Mulvey, 2000; Bond et al., 2000; Mulvey, 1988; Swift, Bond, & Serrano-García, 2000).

However, community psychology has a long history of avoidance when it comes to addressing issues of diversity. Although a respect for diversity has been considered central to community psychology, and is considered one of its core values (Banyard & Miller, 1998; Dalton et al., 2001; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Rappaport, 1977; Trickett, 1996; Watts, 1992), it is only within the past few years that community psychology has begun to address the issues of women (Bond & Mulvey, 2000; Bond et al., 2000; Swift et al., 2000), lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people (D'Augelli, 1989, 2003; Harper & Schneider, 2003), and challenges faced by various cultural, ethnic, and racial groups, particularly those whose skin is not white (Bond, 1997; Snowden, Martinez, & Morris, 2000; Swift et al., 2000). By not considering these communities, community psychology has been ignorant, rather than respectful, of diversity.

Given the relative lack of research on diversity issues within community psychology, this research will make a significant contribution to the literature of this subdiscipline, and will hopefully provide a template for other community psychologists to do accountable, respectful research across cultures. Also, I hope that this research will add to the body of existing feminist literature addressing cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, particularly in the area of post-colonialist, anti-racist, anti-oppression research

orientations. However, in the midst of this research I began to feel a pressing need to address non-academic women also, namely, those who have done work with culturally/ethnically “other” women in the past, women currently working with immigrants and women “other” to them, and most importantly, the women who *will* be doing such work in the future.

In that the issue of power is also central to my feminist view of the world, I believe that situating myself as completely as I can within my research impacts the way it is heard, understood, and disseminated. My experiences of feminism and within feminist thought inform my consciousness of power, its potential for alienation and oppression, and how we may distribute power so we do not hold it “over” others. Although my personal, everyday *modus operandi* does come equipped with a power analysis, I have really had to struggle against the tendency to write in a very polished, formal, objective sort of way.

According to community psychology and feminist literature, a sharing of power in and among communities builds respect for the differences of others, promotes a “just” social world, and develops a sense of belonging among all members of society (Dalton et al., 2001; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Reinhartz, 1992; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). For many, the women’s movement, which has been traced back by some historians to the 19th century (DuBois, as cited in Steuter, 1992; Spender, 1982; Steuter, 1992), has been instrumental in its analyses of power relations among women, and has also given women a means and framework to work against the inequality we face (see Adamson et al., 1988; Luxton, 1983; Nelson & Robinson, 1995; Ristock & Pennell, 1996).¹ From fighting for

¹ Throughout this document, when I refer to “the women’s movement,” I am referring to the American women’s movement.

the vote to the creation of services catering to women's unique needs, the waves of the women's movement have crashed against the patriarchal status quo in order to improve our status and raise issues relevant to our lives.

Women have often organized together as a way of objecting to their oppression and to create alternate realities and spaces in which to live (Adamson et al., 1988; Das Gupta, 1986; de Beauvoir, 1952; Friedan, 1963; Kitzinger, 2000; Mansbridge, 1986, as cited in Steuter, 1992; Marilley, 1996; Spender, 1982). Today, we have the women who have gone before us to thank for our current right to vote, the accessibility of higher education and employment opportunities (Friedan, 1963; Spender, 1982), the creation of battered women's shelters, sexual assault centres, and women's centres (Kitzinger, 2000; Ristock & Pennell, 1996), our progress in reproductive rights and health care (Bullock, 1990; Harding, 1987), and services for immigrant women (Ng, 1996).

As the women's movement (which I will use interchangeably with "feminism" throughout this thesis) has evolved, its focus, too, has undergone transformations. At its inception, women were fighting to achieve status and respect accorded to them as women. Woman was a "totalizing" category, and the diversity and difference among women was not considered (Adamson et al., 1988; Crosby & Wyche, 1996; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Hamilton, 1993; Kaplan, 1997; Ng, 1996; Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Stasiulis, 1990; Walker, 1990; Yeatman, 1993) in struggling for an egalitarian role in society.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, women in the feminist movement have a wider *consciousness* about the ways in which women differ, and how those differences impact their social standing in society (Adamson et al., 1988; Bannerji, 1991;

Bishop, 1994; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1990; Jordan, 1997; Lucas, Persad, Morton, Albuquerque, & El Yassir, 1995; Nelson & Robinson, 1995; Ng, 1996; Reinharz, 1992; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Amid this surge in consciousness, feminists have begun to document some ways in which women can work with and alongside women who are “other” than themselves in terms of race/ethnicity/culture, class, sexuality, ability, and age (Alcoff, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Kitzinger, Bola, Campos, Carabine, Doherty, Frith, et al., 1996; Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1995; Mullaly, 2002; Schutte, 2000).

III) Literature Review

The Tides of Feminism

In terms of social progression and historical significance, the women’s movement has been quite successful (Adamson et al., 1988; Millman & Kanter, 1987), and will be considered in terms of its various “waves,” as many feminist theorists and historians have (Adamson et al., 1988; Spender, 1990). According to some authors, the first wave of the women’s movement, also called the “suffrage” movement, was thought by some historians to have originated in the 19th century (DuBois, as cited in Steuter, 1992; Marilley, 1996; Steuter, 1992), though there is other evidence that women have been fighting the status quo even earlier than that (see Agonito, 1977; Rogers & McCarthy, 1987; Spender, 1990). In particular, early suffragists like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Matilda Joslyn Gage fought long and hard for “women’s liberty” as well as for the abolition of slavery, women’s rights to their own body, and the right to vote (see Dorr, 1970; Marilley, 1996; Wheeler, 1995).

The goal of the suffrage movement was to promote parity among women and men, and focused mostly on issues of education, opportunities for meaningful employment, and equal rights to civic participation. In the middle of the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir first published her famous book, *The second sex*, where she critiqued the androcentric arguments men have used to maintain women at the margins. Through her adoption of the pedagogical language of the men of the day, she contextualized the historical conditions of women's lives through exposing the various levels of oppression, opposition, and subjugation they have experienced (de Beauvoir, 1952).

Although the first wave of the "women's liberation" movement seemed somewhat radical in its day, in some ways, its values often supported the status quo and strengthened forces against immigrants with suspect politics, religion, and family structures. In fact, in the early phase of women's movement, the roles of women from diverse cultural and ethnic groups and those of immigrant women are only beginning to be documented (Adamson et al., 1988; Burnet, 1986; Marilley, 1996).

The second wave of the women's movement made an attempt to address issues of "different" women, although its first rumblings were more focused on expanding women's life spheres outside of the home. In the 1960s, women were beginning to challenge the notion of their supposed inclination towards housework and childrearing as their primary contributions to society (Friedan, 1963; Luxton, 1983). The sexual division of labour was another big focus in the second wave, in particular the notion of the "double-day" of labour, where many women participated in the paid workforce, but were also expected to be responsible for the chores, childcare, and cooking within the homes to

which they returned each evening (Ghalam, 1992; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Luxton, 1983; Marshall, 1993).

For Canadians, the 1960s was a decade of upheaval and revolution, in which mass protests were beginning against nuclear war, the U.S./Vietnam war, and civil rights (Adamson et al., 1988). A mantra for the second wave of the women's movement (which began to be known more often as "feminism") was "the personal is political." Mansbridge (1986, as cited in Steuter, 1992) felt that for many women, the personal became political and then was translated into action when their roles in relation to family, children, and sexual behaviour became subject to public debate and comment.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the second wave of the women's movement had inspired millions of women to organize for social change. This change occurred through consciousness-raising activities, political activism, and the formation of organizations, agencies and collectives, which addressed outdated laws, women's health care (see Bullock, 1990), reproductive rights, and the stereotyping of girls and women within the education system (see Frazier & Sadker, 1972; Spender, 1982). There was also a large movement to end violence against women in all its forms, including rape, incest, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment (Adamson et al., 1988; Hanmer & Maynard, 1987).

The inadequacy of social services being provided to women was recognized in the second wave, and specialized services and supports, such as battered women's shelters, sexual assault centres, and women's resource centres began to emerge (Ristock & Pennell, 1996) to address the perceived needs of all women. Services for immigrant women also began to be developed (Adamson et al., 1988; Ng, 1996). Adamson and

others (1988) noted that exclusive services and supports were being created for women "...because of the commonality of their experience as women, as second-class citizens, as second-class workers, as sex objects, as bearers (and rearers) of children, and so on" (p. 8).

However, with the advent of women-focused organizations, it became apparent that unity did not exist among all the women who worked within them, nor did it exist for women who accessed their services. There were still territories of misunderstanding, fraught with assumptions and stereotypes that strained the relations between women trying to work and organize together for change. On the basis of many feminists' neglect of the existence of heterosexism, ableism, ageism, racism, classism, and other assorted "isms" among their "sisters," many organizations began to splinter, and these marginalized women struck up their own, more homogeneous "communities" (Adamson et al., 1988; Ng, 1993; Stasiulis, 1990; Hurtado, 1997; Walker, 1990).

Immigrant women were one of these marginalized groups that began organizing their own associations, services, and resources in the 1970s, though by no means were their communities any more homogeneous than other communities (Adamson et al., 1988; Das Gupta, 1986; Stasiulis, 1990). The source of unity for immigrant women was their shared journey of relocation, and the fact that many of them felt excluded by a white and middle-class women's movement (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Hurtado, 1997; Lucas, Persad, Morton, Albuquerque, & El Yassir, 1995; Ng, 1993). However, these organizations, too, were plagued by the same sources of conflict and tension, due mostly to the fact that gender, race, and class relations were still considered as separate entities, rather than overlapping constructs of a variety of social worlds (Ng, 1996). As a result,

there can sometimes exist a game of what Bishop (1994) termed “competitive oppressions,” that is, in the dominant culture/society, who experiences the most discrimination? A lesbian woman? A disabled, poor woman? A Black, disabled, lesbian woman?

Ristock and Pennell (1996) argue that the ideology of the third wave, within which the concept of “postmodern feminism” emerged, relates not only to the social conditions of women’s lives, but the numerous ways in which discursive conditions affect them. Nelson and Robinson’s (1995) wide-ranging list of current issues, such as lesbian motherhood (Arnup, 1991), infertility (Achilles, 1995), women’s systemic poverty (Harman, 1992), disability (Wendell, 1989), racism (Bishop, 1994; Gerber, 1995), and immigration (Arat-Koc, 1993; Ng, 1996; Stasiulis, 1990) *seems* to demonstrate the comparative success of the dynamics of inclusion for women deviating from the status quo in terms of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability. However, the mere presence of, or attention to these issues does not mean that we always succeed at inclusion, or that women are necessarily working together in respectful ways.

One of the challenges for women cresting the third (and fourth) waves of feminism, then, is to learn how to work together while acknowledging the different levels of oppression women face, and to “incorporate many voices, coming from a diversity of perspectives, yet united by certain common themes” (E. D. Nelson & Robinson, 1995, p. ix). This means that feminists need to turn their critical gaze upon themselves as potential oppressors to other women, and that the mainstream women’s movement must also examine its assumptions, means of inclusion, and practices of bias (Edwards, 1996; Ng, 1996; Yeatman, 1993). The feminist theory that I read and use to frame my own life

forces me to subject myself to endless, exhaustive self-questioning. Similar to Luhmann (2001), “call[ing] myself a feminist no longer affords me the safety of being ‘innocent,’ but asks me instead to consider how I too am implicated in the histories and present states of inequalities” (p. 36).

The history of working with ethnic and cultural “others”

Since the early 1990s, feminist researchers and theorists have paid a great deal of attention to the interrelated issues of race, ethnicity and gender, as well as the ugly infliction of colonialist practices by some individuals upon others (Bishop, 1994; Jordan, 1997; Kitzinger et al., 1996; Mullaly, 2002; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1993). As aforementioned, oppression is multi-layered, based on the perception (and actuality) of the degree of “otherness” from the norm (Bishop, 1994; Henderson, 1997; Mullaly, 2002; Ng, 1996; Serrano-García, 1994; Yeatman, 1993).

In Canada specifically, the normative colour of “true” Canadian faces is still considered to be white (Driedger, 1996; Henry et al., 1995; James, 1999; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). As a result, many theorists have revealed the struggles of white people to (1) see their colour at all, and (2) acknowledge its associated privilege and power (hooks, 1992; Weis & Fine, 1997). Despite their good intentions, feminist women were not immune to this “colour-blindness” (Bishop, 1994; hooks, 1990, 1992).

Given my age and the time period in which my feminist consciousness “clicked” (a term coined by second-wave feminist Gloria Steinem to describe the moment of epiphany in which women connect themselves to feminism, see Crosbie, 1997), many of my convictions in working with “difference” or with those who are “other” than I come from the literature of the third wave, in particular, post-modern, post-colonialist feminist

writings. As Luhmann (2001) asserts, this work “destabilizes earlier feminist truth claims and pushes up against limits, ignorance and refusal – not only in mainstream thought but in feminist thought” (p. 36) which is what it makes the subject matter of this thesis so personally as well as academically challenging.

However, some of my convictions in working across difference also come from experience, as I struggled with writing my queer identification into this work. Even today, despite Canada’s acknowledgements of gay marriage in some provinces, living “out” as a woman-loving woman can be dangerous (see Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002; Comstock, 1991; Garnets & D’Augelli, 1994; Savin-Williams, 1998; Sullivan & Wodarski, 2002, for academic support of this claim). At the same time, if I did not speak about this important part of “my core” (Herringer, 1990) within my writing, I would not be acknowledging my personal understanding of being a cultural “other.”

Though I do not wish to offend the queer community or ethnic communities who are identifiable solely by their skin colour, my experiences as a queer woman with the subtleties and pain of discrimination have instilled a greater empathy of what racism and ethnocentrism must be like. I am not saying our experiences are the same, and I am certainly not getting in an argument about who is more oppressed. Though my face enables my privilege within mainstream society, and my source of oppression is *invisible* (unless I choose to assert otherwise), my experiences as a queer woman are very significant to my identity and lend powerful insights into what “otherness” feels like.

My increasing awareness of the markers of colonialism through the ethnocentric “othering” methodologies endemic to most psychological research further contribute to my discomfort with wanting to work across culture and ethnicity (Bond et al., 2000;

Bond & Mulvey, 2000; Henry et al., 1995; Jones, 1991). As was mentioned earlier, although community psychology purports to idealize methodologies of empowerment and liberation over those of scientific rigour, investigators in this subdiscipline have not really been any more skilled at addressing cultural diversity in respectful ways (Bond & Mulvey, 2000; Jones, 1991; Landrine et al., 1995; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Rappaport, 1984; Trickett et al., 1993; Watts, 1992).

More often than not, students of psychology are presented a “single-best” version of “the truth” about human development (GreyWolf, 1998). Rather than embracing a global psychological perspective, where we learn that the methodologies and theories we utilize may not apply to most of the world (i.e., because not everyone is white and embodies “western” values), most psychologists present theories about individuals as universally applicable, transcending time, place, persons, and cultures (Caplan & Caplan, 1994; Gill, 1998; Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990; Sherif, 1987).

My experiences in India as a white woman helped to further dispel the myths about the universality of culture. Given that Indian people are accustomed to having white outsiders/researchers come and gawk at their everyday life, toting video and still cameras to expose the most “other” aspects of their culture (e.g., bride burning, child marriages), my white skin first served as a barrier to being accepted as a friend (let alone “equal”) in India. This made perfect sense to me, as I knew a fair bit about the repeated rape of India by colonialist (and usually white) forces, and the regular invasion of foreign researchers who exoticize and decontextualize aspects of India’s many religions. Why would the person behind this particular white face be different?

As I alluded to before, although the first few months of my time in AFA were spent as a markedly different “other” among an all-Indian staff, I was later accepted as one of their own. I certainly did not become any less white, or any less Canadian while I was in India, nor did they become any less Indian – but we all managed to negotiate relationships across our “otherness.”

I would like to think that I was eventually accepted by my Indian friends because they could see my sincere desire to understand Indian culture, to make connections, and to be respectful of the people around me. For the friends I made at AFA, I did not claim I was an expert on autism (it was pretty obvious that everyone there knew more than I did) and I asked lots of (ignorant) questions, which not only provided people with opportunities to roll their eyes or laugh at me, but hopefully illustrated that I did not presume to know everything about the way things worked in their country.

Through my adoration and passion for Indian food, my attempts to learn one of India’s (fifteen) national languages so I could better communicate with the kids who were not fluent in my mother-tongue (i.e., English), and my willingness to adopt the accepted dress code for Indian women, I think people stopped seeing the “other” colour of my skin (and my nationality, or ethnic affiliations) as a *barrier* to a relationship; in fact, I was told that I must be brown on the inside, or that I must have been Indian in a previous life. I have not seen my insides, nor do I subscribe wholeheartedly to reincarnation, but I do know that I genuinely loved a lot of things about India, valued the people I met, and enjoyed the time I spent there.

At the same time, my multiple identities in India also illustrated to me how difficult it was to ignore my privilege as a white person. Although I know I became more

than my skin colour and nationality, my Indian friends were sometimes able to use the whiteness of my skin to obtain quicker service, to have their complaints heard, or to gain entry to places in which they would not be recognized normally. This “double-edged sword” was bittersweet and showed me how obviously my privilege came into play, whether or not I chose it.

At other times, I was an impediment to the daily tasks of my friends. When we went to the market, for example, the mango prices became exorbitant (“Kristi, go sit over *there!*” “Don’t let him see you’re with us!”), or the vegetable vendor would mete out the least bruised tomatoes to me, while my friends were left with the mushy, pock-marked ones. Although I never felt they were angry at me in particular, the situations certainly did evoke anger, and we were all painfully aware of the fact that everyone in the greater community did not see my “inner brown-ness” or my “past Indian life.” Most people saw me for what the colour of my skin represented, and none of us could control the preferential treatment I often received.

Given all of these personal experiences, as well as the challenges I have read about in the feminist and community psychology literature, my concerns with finding an appropriate role for myself as a community psychologist wanting to do work with those who are culturally “other” than myself are multitudinous, and raise many questions that beg to be answered.

The study of “otherness”

“Speaking of Representing the Other,” by Kitzinger and others (1996) is an intriguing exploration (via informal discussion) of who constitutes the other, how they are constructed, how they are represented in research, and how “studying” the other can

be both problematic and beneficial. In this discussion, Manjit Bola noted, “it’s not so much that white women *shouldn’t* research black women. It’s that they must take account of the historical processes through which black women have been excluded and misrepresented, and not perpetuate that” (p. 227).

Ferguson (2000) furthers this sentiment with her assertion that “most researchers and social service providers from the North, even when they are anti-imperialists and advocates of social justice, have a horizon of ignorance around their own ‘othering’ practices and privileges that distorts their investigative and service-offering practices” (p. 190). Stated in another way, people for whom the system works are unlikely to need or want to critique colonial (i.e., intolerant) power relations (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Waterfall, 2003). For me, a commitment to anti-colonialism means that the very design of my thesis needed to be self-critical and that I should be very aware of how my own ethnic and cultural identities play into my work.

Although many of these critiques and studies of “otherness” come from dominant culture-identified individuals, there is a growing body of literature by people “from the margins” who identify themselves as different or other than the dominant culture (e.g., hooks, 1992; Hurtado, 1997; Narayan, 1997; Spivak, 1990). I sometimes get lost in the concept of otherness, because it is so very subjective, and always seems to centre one experience so that it may refer to the “other.” For example, to be white is *not* to be black, and to be other is to be “not us.” I suppose this is the point – we are all other in some way. Our level of comfort with our “othernesses,” though, is in constant stasis, depending on which standpoint and dimension we are situated, and with whom we are surrounded.

I find it troubling that “otherness” is often imbued with moral judgements – for instance, that any conceived difference is *bad*, rather than just different. In a country like Canada, where it is not too difficult to find other individuals who look like me, share my customs, foods, and way of dressing, I have a choice in acknowledging the fact that I am “other” to people (in terms of culture and ethnicity, at least). Though the time I spent in India impacted my understanding of what it meant to be a cultural and ethnic “other,” this piece of research took place in Canada, and I really worry that people could see my exploration of otherness as a purely academic enterprise. For individuals in Canada who are not white-skinned or who wear clothing that is different from those of mainstream Canadian culture, the assumption of their otherness is made whether they wish to think about it or not.

Ferguson (2000) offers some insight into locating oneself within research, and notes that each deviation from, and conformity to societal norms has different and important impacts. In her work, she speaks about how she is “...not just a woman, but a white, Euro-American, middle-class academic woman, and reconstituting that contextual identity requires a traitorous relation not merely to the cultural norms of womanhood but also to the assumption of white, U.S. class and academic privilege” (p. 200). In addition, Weenie (2000) indicates that acknowledging interrelationships of racism, oppression, race, class, and gender is a way of “decolonizing the mind.”

Where Ferguson (2000) situates herself primarily within her privilege, other feminist scholars point out that “western” or “white” women are not the only ones who can produce colonialist knowledge. This kind of literature, in addition to the assertions of some of the women I interviewed, often comforted me during those times when I was

sure that I was making a horrible mistake in conducting research with communities of which I was not a part. In Canada, many non-dominant culture-identified women researchers can maintain their communities at the margins through "...replicat[ing] problematic aspects of [dominant culture's] representations of [their] nations and communities, aspects that have their roots in colonization" (Narayan, 1997, p. 45).

Similarly, Jaggar (2000) discusses the numerous challenges and risks of researchers working across cultures, but feels that *not* working with cultural or ethnic "others" can be read as an act of disregard, and only serves to perpetuate ignorance.

Spivak (1990) said,

I call [the act of white people claiming a lack of right to speak about others], somewhat derisively, chromatism: basing everything on skin colour – 'I am white, I can't speak' ...this is a much more pernicious position. [Later...] I say that you have to take a certain risk: to say 'I won't criticize' is salving your conscience... (pp. 62-63).

What I took away from this type of thinking about post-colonialist knowledge production was that my intentions, transparency, and respect for women *do* count in the bigger picture and, according to Spivak (1990), are valued. As Weenie (2000) remarked, "we are all implicated [in colonialism]." Where I had been feeling like I should *never* do cross-cultural work, theorists like Narayan simply suggested that I do an intentional mental reframe. The act of "othering" is reciprocal – after all, I am "the other" to individuals who identify with the non-dominant Canadian culture (and how dominant-culture-ish of me it was not to have had that perspective in the first place?). Therefore, contrary to research in which a white, Canadian experience is central, I attempted to work so that my thesis brings a variety of women's experiences to the fore, rather than composing an account *about* such experiences.

A short lesson on the history of multiculturalism and immigration in Canada

Although multiculturalism did not emerge as a formal “act” until 1988, there were many precursors to its development and fulfillment in Canadian society. In the mid-1960s, Prime Minister Lester Pearson created a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (also known as “the B & B Commission”) to address the challenges between descendents from Canada’s two “founding nations,” England and France (Jakubowski, 1997; Naidoo & Edwards, 1991; Oliver, 2001). The recommendations of the B & B commission spurred the passage of the Official Languages Act in 1969, which declared Canada a bilingual country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2000; Naidoo & Edwards, 1991). In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau further built upon the B & B commission’s recommendations by announcing that within newly-bilingual Canada, his government would replace biculturalism with a policy on multiculturalism (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2000).

In 1988, Trudeau’s vision for a unified Canada finally came to fruition through the Multiculturalism Act. According to the Government of Canada’s Heritage department, this Act “...ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging” (on-line, http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm). Multiculturalism has also been preserved in the Constitution (1982) as part of Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Naidoo & Edwards, 1991).

However, the immigration policies reflected during the development of the Multiculturalism Act led the Economic Council of Canada (1991) to allude to multiculturalism as an “integrationist strategy” which only aimed to preserve as much

ethnic culture as is compatible with our own. Similarly, Kalbach and Kalbach (1999) noted that “to become a Canadian one does not have to give up all one’s distinctive characteristics, only those which are not consistent with being Canadian” (p. 13).

The legislation on Canadian immigration policy went through several frightening cycles as well. Until the 1960s, for example, Canada restricted immigration to include only those individuals from countries that had cultural, political, and socio-economic systems similar to Canada (Bissoondath, 1994; Kalbach & Kalbach, 1999; Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). Therefore, people from countries populated with white citizens were preferred over countries whose citizens were not white.

In 1966, the Canadian government lauded its attempt to address the blatant racism of the preceding immigration policies by introducing “the points system” (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2000). Each potential immigrant was assessed by immigration officers, who assigned them points based on their proficiency in English/French, job skills, age, personal characteristics, and level of education. This newer policy was more veiled in its racism, which was framed as Canada’s call for “desirable workers” (Basran, 1983). Further, I think what B. Singh Bolaria asserted in 1983 remains true to this day: Canadian immigration policy’s main objective is to import foreign labour to meet *our* own labour force needs, with the added note that the emphasized “our” represents white, mainstream Canadians (see also Naidoo & Edwards, 1991). Further, we can see that “the oppression of racial groups is by no means a historical accident, but is rooted in the social and economic development of Canadian society” (Bolaria & Li, 1988, p. 14)

As a result of the aforementioned “advances” in Canadian immigration and multiculturalism, most of the individuals that moved to Canada in the 1980s were not

white (Jakubowski, 1997; Naidoo & Edwards, 1991; Bolaria & Li, 1988). Criticisms about the labour laws existing up to this point of “non-white” immigration contributed in part to the creation of the Employment Equity Act of 1986. This Act, which addressed the under-representation of certain groups of individuals within the Canadian labour force (Naidoo & Edwards, 1991), was designed to ensure that women, Aboriginal peoples, individuals with disabilities, and “visible minority” individuals had an “equal opportunity” to participate in the paid workforce. However, given that 1980s “visible minority” people were easily distinguishable as “different,” and mostly originated from “Third World” countries, the racism they continued to experience became more subtle, but no less pervasive and painful than its previous incarnations (Bolaria & Li, 1988; Jakubowski, 1997; Naidoo & Edwards, 1991).

The riddle of multiculturalism and the face(s) of immigration

A basic tenet of multiculturalism seems to be tolerance of cultural diversity; in other words, that persons born in countries other than Canada may live here freely and as equal citizens, so long as they follow the norms, rules and laws, of our governments and courts (Department of Justice, 1988). A post-colonialist and anti-oppressive approach to research requires a lot of thought in the Canadian context, a country in which a variety of cultures coexist (Bissoondath, 1994; Henry et al., 1995; James, 1999).

However, given the aforementioned history of Canada’s colonialist attitudes and practices preceding the Multiculturalism Act, as well as my accumulated life experience, I am not quite convinced that this Act’s intent translates into non-judgmental “action” among Canadians. I cannot argue against the fact that we have many cultures sharing a geographical space in Canada – yes, we are certainly multi-cultural in that “cosmetic”

sort of way. But to me, multiculturalism should mean something beyond the claim that culturally and ethnically diverse people live in proximity (see also Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Naidoo & Edwards, 1991). We need to take a critical look at our attitudes about people who are racially, ethnically, and culturally different than we are.

Apart from the racism rife in our immigration policies and the ways in which we interpret multiculturalism in Canada, we do not have to turn back very far in our history books to find blatant and horrifying examples of our propensity for imperialism (Bissoondath, 1994; Henry et al., 1995). Often-cited examples are the continued subjugation of Aboriginal peoples through their isolation on reserves, and in the not-so-distant past, the forced attendance of their children at residential schools (see Battiste & Henderson, 2000, as cited in Waterfall, 2003; Henry et al., 1995; Maracle, 1996; McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003; Waterfall, 2003; Weenie, 2000). Let us also not forget the inhumane treatment of the internment of Japanese-Canadian citizens during World War II, or the thousands of Chinese individuals who slaved on the Canadian Pacific Railway (Henry et al., 1995).

Further, if we were as multicultural as we would like to think, I would not be able to cite the many stories I have heard from law-abiding citizens of a different colour, linguistic accent, or culture who experience discrimination in their workplaces and schools. If Canadians were as multicultural as we say we are, I also doubt that it would be so easy to find research on racial, ethnic, or cultural discrimination in our country (see, for example Codjoe, 2001; Gerrard, 1991; Henry et al., 1995; Lund, 2002; Singh, 1993; Smith & Lalonde, 2003) and legal cases where racial, ethnic, or cultural discrimination were determined to have broken the law (see <http://80-www.travel-net.com.libproxy.wlu>).

[ca/~blochfd/equality.html](#)). If we respected and accepted people who were not born here, who were not white, or who spoke a different language than we did, we would appreciate them as neighbours, and not just eat their food, watch their dances, and admire their “costumes” at multicultural festivals.

In this country comprised of many different cultural groups, a single, clear Canadian identity is further confounded by issues of colour. Though the faces of the majority of earlier immigrants were white, in recent years, nearly 80% of Canada’s immigrants come from Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America (Statistics Canada, 2001, as reported online at www.canadaimmigrants.com/statistics.asp). As such, we know that “being Canadian” should no longer be determined by how we look – yet overwhelmingly, whiteness is still associated with mainstream Canadian-ness.

Some visible minority individuals, who are Canadian citizens and have lived in Canada their entire lives, are often seen by the dominant, white Canadian culture as being foreign and “other” (David & Lin, 1997). Other individuals are often penalized for holding on to their own cultural traditions and language, religions, and foods, and encounter various degrees of hostility for doing so (Hawley et al., 1995; Henry et al., 1995). Hawley and others (1995) also make the point that “most people recognize that racism is inconsistent with democratic values [and thus] it is often the case that prejudiced persons have developed what they think are reasonable justifications for prejudices and discriminatory behaviour...” (p. 433). Similarly, Henry and others (1995) note that racism is challenged and denied by Canadians who use the arguments of democratic liberalism:

Canadians have a deep attachment to the assumptions that in a democratic society individuals are rewarded solely on the basis

of their individual merit and that no one group is singled out for discrimination. Consistent with these liberal, democratic values is the assumption that physical differences such as skin colour are irrelevant in determining one's status... (p. 2)

Barbara Waterfall, an insightful Aboriginal writer and theorist, claims that there are *no* grounds for colonial policies, regardless of the humanistic or compassionate intentions of those who created them. I too have a difficult time hearing justifications of actions informed by discrimination, and would assert that prejudice and racism do not arise from a place of reason.

"Dominant Canadian culture" and Canadian identity

As citizens of Canada, every one of us necessarily lives, works, and interacts with people who we feel are culturally alike, as well as those we consider culturally "other." Canada is a young country, comprised of people identifying with multiple cultures and ethnicities (Bissoondath, 1994; Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998; Warren, 1986). Many of us have come from elsewhere, and along the way, some of us have chosen to identify ourselves primarily as Canadians, some of us hyphenate our identities (e.g., Japanese-Canadian) to honour our multiple cultural/ethnic backgrounds, and some of us identify most closely to the culture/country in which we grew up (Warren, 1986). In such a Canadian "multicultural" climate, where does one's identity as "Canadian" begin, and her or his identity as an "immigrant" end? How do they blend together? Who decides? What does an "average" Canadian look like, and what is a Canadian culture? I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions, but later I will share the opinions of some of the women with whom I spoke.

At a meta-level, the latter part of this literature review demonstrates that oppressive laws, policies, and everyday practices do appear to "play favourites" with

some cultural groups. At a micro-level, if we examine ethnically- and culturally-diverse individuals attempting to work together, there are also staggering potentials for continuing to perpetuate the colonialist, intolerant, and alienating practices embedded within our culture.

Adler (1977) sketches a prototype of a person with a multicultural identity, which is of particular interest and relevance in Canadian society. He asserts that someone who is multicultural “is intellectually and emotionally committed to the basic unity of all human beings while at the same time recognizing, legitimizing, accepting, and appreciating the differences that exist between people of different cultures” (p. 227). This person does not speak any particular language, practice any specific profession, or live in a certain country. Instead, a person who is multicultural focuses upon our commonalities as human beings “...while paradoxically maintaining an equally strong commitment to differences” (p. 228). Further, a person who is multicultural does not belong to any particular culture in full, but exists on the boundaries, and therefore, according to Tillich (1966) lives with constant tension and movement.

Adler (1977) also imparts three characteristics of a multicultural person that are of specific interest to how women may work together in Canada. Firstly, an individual who is multicultural is considered situational or in relation to others, and their worldviews, beliefs, and values vary among different contexts. Secondly, a multicultural person constantly undergoes personal transitions, and is always “becoming” or “un-becoming” different things, with their image of self in a state of perpetual reformation through experiencing the world. Finally, the multicultural person sustains open boundaries of the self, and does not totally accept the demands of any single culture, though they are not

free from the conditioning of their cultures. In line with Adler's idea of a multicultural person, the way in which Bissoondath (1994) represents himself seem to affirm the existence of such an individual:

My own roots are portable, adaptable, the source of a personal freedom that allows me to feel "at home" in a variety of places and languages without ever forgetting who I am or what brought me here. My roots travel with me, in my pocket...there to guide me or succour me as need be...They are, in the end, my sense of self (p. 26).

A discussion of cultural and ethnic identity in Canada would be incomplete without recognizing that colour, in particular whiteness, is an important marker of power within mainstream Canadian society. Too often, whiteness is neglected as a feature of identity, and is thus considered the colourless "norm" or the basis from which we may speak about other people who are "coloured" (Frankenburg, 1993; hooks, 1990; James, 1999; Weis & Fine, 1996). As such, "'real' Canadians come to think of themselves as culturally neutral and without 'visible' signifiers" that would constitute their culture and identity (James, 1999, p. 27).

So how can we – whether we identify with the dominant culture of Canada or with another one – work together with those who are culturally or ethnically "other" than ourselves? What roles can Canadian-identified individuals play in working on issues relating to individuals of different cultural groups? What roles are better left for people with the experience of being a member of that other group? These types of questions are woven throughout my research, and responses will be reflected in later sections.

IV) Research Questions

I feel like I had two purposes for this thesis, or that I wrestled with two separate (but intertwined) intentions. I designed my questions to explore how women's various

cultural and ethnic identities came into play when they work with “other” women. Because of the vast body of literature to which I referred above, I did come into this thesis with the assumption that cultural or ethnic identities did affect their work – particularly in an immigrant women’s organization. My reason, however, for choosing this topic and for speaking with women associated with this organization was to create a space to hear a plethora of ideas on “who should do what” at the same time as I myself struggled to carry out my research with different culturally- and ethnically-identified women.

In actually doing this work, however, I feel that my thesis was just as much about the research process itself as it was about my research questions. More so than I originally imagined, it has become a story of “the researcher” and my struggle to do this work with a feminist, anti-racist, post-colonialist approach. Because I am a white, Canadian-identified woman in a culture which values and attaches privilege to both my whiteness and Canadian-ness, I felt that communicating my respect and desire to work with cultural and ethnic “others” meant I could not write this thesis without being conscious about my own “dominant” perspective and experiences. I hope that this component of my thesis will be read by a variety of people, as I think it has wide appeal to many audiences and applicability to many different situations.

My actual research questions came out of reading the literature and thinking about how women’s experiences of working together could be elicited through a semi-structured interview. They were not taken from an existing questionnaire, and were not based on any particular study. I simply wanted to know how women were able to work together, and whether they attributed the challenges they experienced to cultural issues.

Further, I was interested in how women's own cultural and ethnic self-identifications impacted their experiences, and whether any "othernesses" they cited addressed differences in race, culture, colour or ethnicity. I also asked women to think about the uniting and divisive issues along cultural lines, and to reflect on which women should work with whom and in what context, and who should *not* do particular jobs or play certain roles because of their cultural or ethnic affiliation.

I was very aware of the sensitive nature of my questions, and indeed, a few participants related to the first few questions as though I were trying to "catch" them in acts of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. Although I adopted the most neutral language I felt was possible, I sometimes reframed questions according to what I learned about participants' associations to certain words. For instance, when I asked about roles that were appropriate for Canadian-born or immigrant women, many participants were reluctant to share responses, and would preface their answers with "This is only my opinion" or "I'm not speaking on behalf of anyone" or "I can only answer this from my point of view." Consequently, I began to ask the question with the added claim that I was, in fact, asking them to "make a judgment-call" and that their thoughts were the very things that I was wanting to hear.

The questions further changed throughout the data collection period, in response to clarifications sought by the women I interviewed, and by my increasing awareness of the language that best captured the phenomena I was exploring. Overall, the questions remained somewhat challenging for people to answer, which I understand as people's reluctance to discuss cultural or ethnic "difference" at all, especially in an age where the

backlash of the anti-racist movement permeates all of our lives. Later, I will elaborate on how this backlash has affected our interactions with “others.”

The overarching research question I am asking is: How do culturally- and ethnically-diverse women work together? Within this broader question, my research will be guided by the following queries:

- ① What motivated the women in this study to become involved with [the organization]?
- ② What did participants consider appropriate roles for (a) dominant Canadian culture-identified women, and (b) immigrant women in an organization serving immigrant women? Did participants’ own identities impact their responses? How?
- ③ What challenges, if any, did women in the study experience in their work with women from “other” cultures?
- ④ Have there been divisive issues within the organization? If so, how were they addressed?
- ⑤ Were there uniting issues? Why were they uniting?
- ⑥ What meaning did women associate with multiculturalism? Tolerance? How did my participants think newcomers should be welcomed to Canada?

Although this thesis generates answers to the questions I asked my participants, it also addresses some of my “questions behind the questions,” or the intentions from which the questions arose. For instance, what are appropriate roles for “people like me” (i.e., white, Canadian dominant culture-identified) when working with newcomer communities? How can I work respectfully and equitably with individuals culturally other than myself? How can other individuals identifying Canada as their primary cultural affiliation adopt these practices, so not to perpetuate the tradition of repressive (i.e., colonialist) thought and action? What do respectful, mutually beneficial partnerships across cultures look like?

V) Research Context

To examine partnerships between culturally diverse individuals, I worked with a local organization that provides immigrant women employment and life skills training in

order to assist them to overcome some of the barriers they face in a new country. The organization employs a core staff of white and visible minority women, who identify in various degrees with dominant Canadian culture. Some of these women have come to Canada from elsewhere as adults, others came at a young age and grew up here, while still others were born here.

For the purposes of this research project, I have adopted the way in which Henry and others (1995) describe organizations. According to this group of authors, organizations are social systems within which people do particular jobs. Further, individuals working in organizations act through networks of social interactions, and are influenced not only by the values of the organization, but of their own personal values, their practical tasks, and societal ideologies. This framing of organizations as systems that both influence individuals and are influenced by society will be of particular importance in subsequent sections.

The particular organization on which I focused my research is headed by an executive director, who in turn is informed by a Board of Directors of 15 women, who also represent a mix of cultural and ethnic groups. In addition, the organization draws on the experience and skills of volunteers from a wide variety of countries, many of whom arrive via practicum requirements for their college and university courses in social work, psychology, or social services.

With such a multi-ethnic/cultural staff, this organization lent itself well to exploring the notion of “working together” across difference. In this case, the work was toward a common goal of providing services and support to women who are immigrants to Canada. I selected this organization purposefully, as its environment is multi-cultural

both in terms of its various affiliates' countries of origin, as well as their degrees of identification with Canadian culture.

In addition, this organization has persevered in Kitchener-Waterloo since the 1980s while holding on to several members of its original staff. My advisor and I agreed that, in our experience, this type of longevity is a bit of an anomaly in terms of women's organizations, which can often be rife with disagreements about how things should operate, the infrastructure of power, and decisions about how a women's organization should represent itself and secure funding within a largely patriarchal society. Somehow, regardless of the various degrees of diversity (racial, cultural, ethnic), the women at this organization have located the "centrality and continuity of relationships" (see Turner's [1997] description of the Stone Center's theoretical approach to working with minority women) and they have found a way to work respectfully *with* each other. This ability to work together through various differences is of great interest to me, and the "how" of this occurrence is even more exciting.

Setting

This grassroots organization was started by a core group of immigrant women in response to the fact that immigrant men's needs were being addressed through programmes and services in the community, while immigrant women remained isolated and untrained in the home. At the time, there were no other programmes in the K-W area offering employment-training services for immigrant women, which made the organization fairly revolutionary in its time. Though its values, missions, and goals do not use the dreaded "F" word in relation to the support and programmes they provide, I would

assert that their work, practices, and approaches are akin to those of overtly feminist organizations within which I have worked or volunteered previously.

Since its inception, this organization has grown from operating a small sewing training programme to serving close to 200 women from 34 countries in 2002/2003 (2003 Annual Report of the organization). This organization's central programme provides employment assistance to groups of women in a classroom setting, and then helps link them to an appropriate employer. Another programme is also a thriving community training and manufacturing business, where industrial sewing machine operation is still taught.

On an ongoing basis, the organization offers "lifestyle" workshops to women participating in its employment programmes. These workshops are designed to meet the differing needs of each group, and in the past, have centred on the topics of nutrition, parenting in a new society, dealing with family violence, women's health, and volunteering. Further, the organization also hosts a busy resource centre, with a library and a computer laboratory which are used by programme participants and women in the greater community to search for jobs, practice typing skills, or create resumes and cover letters.

A new programme delivered out of community centres as well as out of the organization's office helps women move from dependence to independence via intensive individual employment assistance. A grant has enabled the organization to add some innovative services, such as computer and additional sewing skills training, as well as life skills training.

The process of "gaining entry"

My advisor, Anne Westhues, recommended that I speak with the Executive Director (ED) of the organization, as she is a prominent individual in the area of immigrant education and acculturation. As an immigrant herself, the ED was familiar with the process of becoming accustomed to a new country and culture, and thus made a concerted effort to address the challenges in creating programmes and services for immigrants in this region.

I approached the ED in early June 2002 to share my preliminary thesis ideas, motivations for pursuing those ideas, and my reservations with doing work in an organization serving immigrant women, given my own non-immigrant status. She shared some of her own stories and rationale for her choice of staff members, and we had many other conversations during the year about the language and terms used to refer to women born in Canada, and those who have emigrated from elsewhere. We also spoke at great length about the concept of "Canadian-ness," and the difficulty of this notion in a country that claims to be so multicultural and accepting, but which is mostly not. These stories and discussions were integral in informing my research questions, and the ED was continually supportive of this project and me.

To "give back" to the organization, I offered myself as a volunteer, in whatever capacity was deemed useful. For over a year, I have acted as what I term a "friendly (mainstream) Canadian presence" in a support group for over 20 women from a particular ethnic community, and more recently, as extra ESL support in one of the employment training programmes. My volunteer work has been extremely rewarding, and the

interactions with so many funny, talented, and strong women have enriched me immeasurably.

VI) Methodology

Paradigms of choice and research approach

As I mentioned, I worked quite closely with both the ED and my participants on the design of my research questions to ensure that I was being inclusive of different points of view. This was done one-to-one through informal conversation, or when I approached the ED or my participants with particular questions. This commitment to a participatory approach to my research certainly contributed to the development and also the applicability of the interview questions, the language, and the process of this thesis.

According to Patton (2002) and Reinharz (1992), obtaining different types of data through various collection methods leads to cross-data validity, is consistent with a truly participatory framework, and strengthens the research project as a whole. To support the purpose of my study, I used a combination of two methods. Firstly, I examined the organization's programme literature, and inquired about any training processes that were used for staff and volunteers. I also studied the mission statement, principles, values and goals of the organization (see Appendix A for a summary), not for evaluation purposes, but to ensure that I was knowledgeable about the working environment in which my participants operated. The intention behind this document review was to see if there were records of ways that the organization addressed power imbalances, disseminated and shared information, and addressed the cross-cultural issues of their staff, Board, volunteers, and programme participants.

Secondly, I conducted qualitative, open-ended, face-to-face interviews (see Appendix B for the interview questions used in this study). Where paper-and-pen surveys could ask the same questions, I prefer how interviews provide the opportunity to clarify, describe, and discuss issues in more depth (Reinharz, 1992). Instead of following a structured set of questions, I used an interview guide, and meandered through the questions according to the flow of what was more a conversation than a formal interview. In my experience, interviews are also good ways to access people's thoughts, ideas, and impressions, and seem to provide participants the opportunity to speak in their own words, rather than those of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992).

a) Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Because I feel that my thesis is more of a theoretical pursuit than it is practical (though it certainly does have some functional applications), my adherence to PAR was far more limited than other projects I have undertaken. For instance, I did not use a formal steering committee to guide the process, though I did use my discussions with the ED to sharpen the focus of my thesis, consider appropriate language within my interview questions, identify a sample, and create the recruitment process. I also developed the interview questions themselves with assistance from the ED, though participants did share their feedback on the questions with me before and during the interviews.

Given that my main research question was fairly simple – “How do women work together?” I did not think it necessary to involve my participants in developing questions. Although I did not officially pilot my questions before I conducted my interviews, the questions evolved from the first interview to the last, with specific regard to wording, language, and how the questions were framed.

As language was a challenging part of this research, a lot of the words I had first used were clarified according to the suggestions of my participants, and I saw the evolution of my research process as a result of their input and questions. We worked together in such a way that they understood themselves to be legitimate sources of knowledge, and I am confident that their own powerful role within the research process was realized (Alary, Guédon, Larivière, & Mazer, 1990). Finally, the quotations that you will read in the findings section demonstrate the level of trust with which my participants and I operated, especially when visible minority women spoke about their challenges with white women “like me.”

One of the primary goals in a participatory or “research as empowerment” framework (terms adopted from Ristock & Pennell, 1996) is to promote a feeling of ownership over the research process for all participants, so that the results are personal and useful (Patton, 2002). This focus on utilization is another benchmark of PAR, and I consider it promising that *all* of the women I interviewed were very interested in reading my final thesis. I hope that their own reflections on my work will lead them to act upon the research findings in whatever capacity they are able, which ideally, will contribute to social change (Taylor & Botschner, 1997).

To help women make a decision as to whether they wanted to participate, I provided space for questions during my “recruitment” speeches (see Appendix C), and encouraged women to call or email me with queries or suggestions. Once a woman had expressed her interest in participating, we had a discussion about the questions, and I asked again whether she had any suggestions for additional interview questions or clarifications of existing questions. As aforementioned, the evolution of the language

used in the questions, as well as the structure of questions, came from individual discussions with my participants, which often provided vital clarifications to our conversations.

There were no surprises for the participants, as all but one had a copy of the interview questions ahead of time (and she was already quite familiar with my intention). All participants had also consented to my recording the interviews ahead of time. Women prepared in various ways for each interview, with one participant needing some time at the beginning of our interview to review the questions, and another who had prepared a series of thoughtful notes days ahead of time. As I mentioned earlier, we often spent some time clarifying and re-working the language in the questions to ensure everyone's comfort and understanding. I always went through the most vital parts of the informed consent (see Appendix D), particularly stressing the fact that I was not going to report back to the ED, that I would keep their participation confidential, and that they were free to stop the tape at any time. In two cases, the tape was stopped, and women shared things with me that they did not wish to be recorded or referred to in this thesis. I took this as indications that these women felt confident enough to assert their rights (as denoted in the informed consent form) as participants, and trusted that I would not include their private asides in my thesis.

At the end of the interview, I thanked each woman profusely for their participation, and explained that a transcript of their interview would be returned to them for changes, additions, or deletions before I even began to look at it. Although most women did not tend to delete any sections from their transcripts, there were sometimes clarifications or additions. Finally, before anyone saw the findings section of my thesis, I

highlighted the quotations I hoped to use on each woman's transcript, and returned it once again for their approval. In this way, women did not only know which quotations may appear in the final document, but were able to see the interview context from which they emerged.

b) Feminist Approaches to the Research Paradigm

Though many of the methods I use are actually no different than those of a non-feminist social scientist, my *methodology* definitely reflects a feminist paradigm (see Harding, 1987). In addition, this research is based in the experiences of women, and I worked hard to reflect the reality of their lived experiences. Being able to represent myself, as a woman and a feminist, with all my accompanying *conceptual baggage* (see Kirby & McKenna, 1989) is very important to me in research situations. Using my voice to articulate what I want to say and using the discourses with which I am comfortable expressing myself is also essential. Mikhail Bakhtin (as quoted in Narayan, 1997) says that

“language becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with her own intention, her own accent, when she appropriates the world, adapting it to her own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the world... exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions...” (p. 2).

As you have noticed, using my voice not only means bringing an “I” into my work, but means that I often speak about how my experiences figure into where I set my academic gaze (Adamson et al., 1988; Giroux, 1992; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Given my research in this area, I was quite concerned about my white Canadian privilege, and found some of the feminist literature extremely useful in its critical scrutiny of

“whiteness” and what it means in relation to research in cross-cultural settings (hooks, 1990).

As someone interested in the exploration of culturally diverse women working together, one of my most poignant and visible privileges *is* my white skin and the power, knowledge and license to be the *subject*, as opposed to the *object* of research that is associated with that privilege (hooks, 1989; Kitzinger et al., 1996). One of the ways in which racism rears its ugly head is when white people conceptualize their superiority over non-white “others.” There are several theorists who contend that putting an end to racism (i.e., claiming superiority over another individual based on their race) “...require[s] whites’ acknowledgement that they are *white*; that is, that their experience, perceptions, and economic position have been profoundly affected by being constituted as white” (Frankenburg, 1993, as quoted in Alcoff, 2000, p. 264). I have no problem naming or talking about my whiteness, but am constantly challenged with the sense of shame I feel around its accompanying privilege.

In “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh (1980) explores how white people can, in neglecting to consider the privilege of their skin colour, inadvertently engage in oppressive practices. Using the clever metaphor of “unpacking” a knapsack, she shares with her readers the meticulous list of conditions that are bestowed upon her in daily life due to her whiteness and asks that other white women “give up the myth of meritocracy” by looking at the privileges our white skin affords us (p. 2).

I realize that my acting and speaking differently about ethnicity and culture do not guarantee that I will be heard differently, and this is a difficult pill to swallow. However,

my voluntary affiliation with the organization was valued by participants, who seemed to interpret my questions as being exploratory, rather than threatening or critical. Further, participants were very grateful for the ways in which the questions were asked, and many of the visible minority participants appreciated (and were simultaneously baffled by) the acknowledgement of the privileges of my whiteness and my mainstream Canadian identity. Given that "...the culture of the subaltern group will hardly be understood in importance or complexity by those belonging to the culturally dominant group unless exceptional measures are taken to promote a good dialogue..." (p. 50), I felt positively about my attempts to promote dialogue and understanding with my participants.

Sampling, participants, and stakeholders

As I hoped to glean a greater understanding of the interaction between ethnicity/culture and the ability to work with those who are of "other" ethnicities/cultures, I used theory-based sampling (Patton, 2002). I selected participants in this study based on their representation of particular theoretical constructs, which were the impact of culture and ethnicity upon women working together with "other" women.

As qualitative research usually takes in-depth looks at a small sample (Patton, 2002), I spoke with eight people who were affiliated with the organization in four different, yet interwoven ways. Three of these women were staff members, two women were serving on the Board, two women were volunteers, and one woman had participated in one of the organization's programmes.

I chose the participants purposefully, and each represented information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). During the interviews, I asked women to tell me about their cultural or ethnic identities, so that they would be identified in their own words and not based on

pre-existing categories. In my section on data analysis, you will hear about my challenges surrounding this decision. If I use country of birth and skin colour as a demographic way to categorize my participants, however, I had a fairly even distribution of women from each of these constructed “groups.” For example, there was a four-four split between women born in Canada and born elsewhere, and five of the participants would be considered part of a “visible minority” group while three of them were white. Though I did not ask for the age of participants, I would estimate that their mean age was around 40.

One of my grossest oversights in this research was not considering the social class of my participants. As a woman claiming to be a socialist feminist, for me to have neglected a class analysis was horrifying. Late into my data collection, I did consider holding a focus group to explore the issue of social class further, but given the internal changes occurring at the organization and the difficulty I had in obtaining even eight participants, I decided against it. My lack of attention to issues of class in this study points out to me that my own identity as a white, middle-class woman has blinded me to some of the aspects of my privilege. My assumption that class can be ignored when looking at issues of women’s ethnic and cultural identities needs to be challenged, and in the discussion section, I will discuss further the omission of a class analysis within this research.

As a volunteer at the organization in which I conducted my research, I was very careful to separate my identities of Kristi-the-volunteer and Kristi-the-student. At the proposal stage, I prepared a special informed consent form for the women’s group with whom I volunteered, in the case that I included some of the experiences within my thesis

document. I am not denying that the time I spent volunteering at this organization impacted the way I approached my thesis, but I certainly did not compromise my ethical obligations in any way. Though I am grateful for my forethought in creating a separate informed consent form, I did not need to use it, as I did not refer to any individuals or situations I encountered in my volunteer work with the organization.

The participants in this research were also important stakeholders, as the notion of working together was not only personal, but also relevant to their efforts within the organization. For all staff members, their everyday interactions are with women who are likely to be culturally or ethnically “other,” whether they are other staff members or the women to whom they provide service. The Board of Directors also collaborates to make decisions relevant to the organization, and given their various cultural and ethnic identities, being able to work together efficiently is of utmost importance to them. In most capacities, volunteers are working alongside staff to aid with the programme delivery to the service-users of the organization. Finally, the immigrant women using the programmes and services are directly affected by the ability of all of the above-mentioned people to work together.

Communication of findings

An assumption inherent in both feminist and participatory action research is that the findings become personal and important to participants (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998; Reinharz, 1992). Though I only interviewed eight women, there was certainly wider interest in the work that I undertook, and I have high hopes that my findings will empower staff, Board members, volunteers, and the women who use the organization’s programmes will incorporate them into their everyday work within the

organization, if not for the simple reason that they are both meaningful and applicable to their lives (Papineau & Kiely, 1996). As a result of this relevance, I hope that individual, personal, and organizational changes may occur, and that actions and decisions affecting women's work together may be informed both within and beyond the organization.

Though I had always planned on giving the participants a summary of the findings of my work, many of the women broached the topic before I had a chance to inform them of this decision. In all of their eagerness, a few women even asked to read the entire thesis! Consequently, I have promised to lend out a bound copy of my thesis to accommodate those who wish to read it in full and have sent out summaries of my findings.

Another way in which I will provide feedback regarding the findings of this research will be through presentations to the staff, Board, and to the volunteers of the organization. At the time of writing this thesis, I am planning a meeting with the ED to discuss the findings, and to brainstorm the ways in which they could be presented. A joint information session with the ED before staff members, the Board, volunteers, and women who use the services of the organization is one possibility that I can imagine currently, although a community/organizational forum or a discussion circle are other options.

VII) Procedure

The process of gathering data

a) Document review

As soon as my project had been approved by WLU's Research Ethics Board, I spoke with the ED of the organization to talk about what I might do to obtain the information I needed. She gave me the handbook designed for the members of the Board

of Directors, and also spoke to me about the ways in which staff members were “trained.”

I received additional documentation at the organization’s annual general meeting.

Therefore, my document review was based on these three sources of information.

b) Interviews

In early January 2003, I made a short announcement to staff members before their biweekly staff meeting. Given that I knew most of the women around the table due to my role as a volunteer within the organization, my presentation was quite informal. After the ED had introduced me, I spoke briefly about the purpose of my research, and outlined the benefits of their participation. To make participation safer for the staff members, I told them that they did not need to let me know right then, and reassured them that I would not be talking to the ED about their participation. I left my contact information with them, although this group of women actually asked that I call them instead of relying on them to call me. Though many of them displayed a great deal of interest, they said they were incredibly busy and would like to be reminded at a later date. In late January 2003, I contacted two staff members, who agreed to meet with me that month and in early February.

To inform Board members of my project, I made a short announcement during their January 2003 meeting (using the same recruitment script). As the meeting happened to fall on an evening where there was a terrible snowstorm, many of the Board members were delayed or unable to come. As a result, the Board members who *were* present offered to include my questions and the informed consent in the next mail-out of Board minutes, and they also asked that the ED give me a list of their full contact information. Similar to the staff members, the women on the Board also preferred that I contact them

at a later time to see if they were interested in participating. Nonetheless, I left all Board members with my home phone number and also my email contact should they have any questions or concerns. Phone and email contact led me to correspond with four Board members, two of whom were eventually interviewed.

Connecting with volunteers was much more difficult for me. My times at the organization did not really overlap with those of other volunteers, and therefore, accessing these women was very challenging. At one point, I drew up an information poster to be hung in the main office (see Appendix E), but the ED spoke informally to several women (using my poster as a guideline) and gave them my contact information. Having the ED connect interested individuals to me was more successful than the poster, and I obtained three participants in this manner.

Interviews took place from January-May 2003 in a variety of settings. Some women chose to speak to me at the organization, some in their homes, while others preferred a private room in my university. As the agency was going through some significant organizational changes in 2003, my data collection period extended much longer than I had planned and I had great difficulty recruiting more than eight women to participate. However, many individuals who did not take part in this research told me that it was simply a matter of bad timing for them, given the flux and adjustments occurring within the organization, and that it had nothing to do with a lack of desire or interest.

Shortly following each interview, I listened to the tape a few times, so I could include what I remembered about the body language of each participant. I transcribed five of the eight interviews myself, and received verbal consent for the remaining three to be transcribed by a neutral third party. Transcripts were constructed verbatim from the

audiotapes, and thus included our “ums,” “ahs”, and interruptions. Not only do I prefer this manner of transcription, but I also felt that it captured the essence of the interview and presented our raw, un-edited voices. In addition, transcribing in this manner reflected our experiences as they emerged during the interview process, and conveyed more than just the words that we said (DeVault, 1987; Reinhartz, 1992; Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996).

The individual who did the transcribing for me signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F) and maintained the same safe-keeping measures as I did during the time she had the raw data. Once she had completed the transcription, she returned the audiotape and the floppy disk bearing the completed transcript to me, and retained no copies of the data. Apart from this individual, no other person had access to any of the raw data generated by this research. After any transcript was completed, I went over it carefully to ensure that all words were correct and that the tone of each interview matched my memory of it.

As a researcher, I have a great deal of power in interpreting and labelling the findings (Caplan & Caplan, 1994). In listening to the transcripts, I paid heed to Krisnamurti’s proclamation that:

“...[m]ost of us listen through a screen of resistance. We are screened with prejudices, whether religious or spiritual, psychological or scientific...it is extremely difficult to put aside our training, our prejudices, our inclination, our resistance, and reaching beyond the verbal expression, to listen so that we understand...” (in cited in Barbara, 1958)

Although being cognizant of our “screens of resistance” is important, the benefits of submitting the analyses to an additional set of eyes and a separate mind were important in honouring the nature of participatory action research (Patton, 2002). Thus, I returned the

transcripts to each participant, and encouraged them to make any amendments, additions, or deletions. Though most of the women did not choose to change or edit their transcripts, many of them told me that they appreciated the opportunity to read through the interview and share their feedback. Only after I had corresponded with each woman were the transcripts printed out and kept in a locked drawer in my apartment.

Data analysis

a) Tools of analysis

As the purpose of this research was to be able to comment on how women work together across differences in culture and ethnicity, I chose to follow the framework of grounded theory. Generally, grounded theory serves as a tool to discover theory from data generated by social research, which "...means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). In addition, grounded theory helps researchers formulate theories based in the data itself, and encourages the development of subsequent action strategies to control the world "out there" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain four requisite properties to grounded theory, which are its *fit* to the reality of the data, its *comprehensibility*, both to participants and researchers, its *generality*, or ability to be applied to similar contexts, and its *control* over the potential action in the context of the setting in which the research is conducted. A grounded theory, then, is obtained through the inductive approach to a systematic set of methods used to describe a particular phenomenon.

Connected to the theoretical tools I used in this research, but distinctly important to any research study is the notion of validity. Further, an important facet of validity is the *trustworthiness* of both the researcher and the research. One of the professors in our programme, Geoff Nelson, who has taught the research methods class in community psychology, and discussed the importance of trustworthiness as a way of counteracting the popular claim that qualitative research is sloppy and overly subjective. Within trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four categories of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and suggest some activities to fulfill them.

I established the *credibility* of my research through the extended and collaborative relationships with my participants and with the continuity of my role as a volunteer at the organization. Participants often debriefed following the interviews, and I welcomed all of the women to call me at home or email me if they had any questions, concerns, or further reflections. According to Patton (2002), the fact that I adhered to my proposed methodology also contributes to the credibility of my work.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) second category, *transferability*, refers to the extent that my findings may be transmitted to another setting or context. Although my project contributes more to a depth of understanding than it does transfer a more general understanding to other settings, I believe that the findings on how women work together is relevant to many organizations, psychologists, and community workers. Lastly, both *dependability* and *confirmability* were obtained through my use of an audit trail, which demonstrated the origin of the quotations, and linked my participants explicitly to the findings.

b) The theory in action

Document Analysis

The documentation that I received was quite minimal, though it provided some interesting insights into the internal operations of the organization. In order to best analyze the documents, I subjected them to systematic examination of the language that was used (including a comparison of the language I used within this thesis) and any direct passages on how – or if – women were trained to be respectful and sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences. The two questions I used in particular to read the documentation were: (1) Is cultural and ethnic diversity referred to in these documents; and (2) How is it referred to?

Interviews

I began data analysis by re-reading each of my interviews and jotting down any common and distinct features among the responses given by my participants. Following the lead of many qualitative researchers (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tutty et al., 1996), I then began a “first-level” or “open” coding process, first using my more general research questions and then using the actual interview guide questions as a way to classify data. In the end, I chose to use the more specific interview questions as they gave a more detailed and in-depth view of the experiences of my participants.

I constructed each question as a heading, and when I read through the transcripts and encountered anything relevant to the question, I wrote it under the heading with the audit trail identifier. The audit trail was denoted first by a letter, the page number, and then an asterisk followed by the line number(s) of the quotation (e.g., A2*42-44 meant page two of participant A’s transcript from lines 42-44). Then, I grouped similar

responses together in particular categories and titled them according to a shared or common dimension.

Up until this point, my analysis was fairly descriptive and had been categorized according to similarities within particular questions. Next, I began coding across questions, looking for similar concepts or ideas that emerged from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) denote this stage of coding as *axial coding*, where data is reassembled and grouped to "...form more precise and complete explanations" (p. 124). Woven throughout my analysis was a sort of running commentary on what I was discovering, in particular, interesting anomalies that were revealed, additional questions that the data generated, and beliefs that were shared among the participants.

The cultural and ethnic identities of my participants contributed significantly to the difficulty of my analyses. I entered this research with the expectation that each woman's identity would be different and would impact the way she worked with other women. However, every single woman identified as Canadian in some capacity, whether they identified themselves primarily as Canadian, appended their Canadian identity to a different cultural/ethnic identity (e.g., Iranian-Canadian), or qualified their Canadian identity (e.g., Canadian of Irish heritage). Although there are exciting implications to the homogeneity of my participants' identification to Canadian culture, in terms of analysis, the commonality of these women's identities made things incredibly challenging. If all of my participants were all Canadian, then what was there to talk about? What conclusions could I draw?

In order to make sense of my data, I was faced with the excruciating possibility of having to "impose" categories/identities upon my participants – the very thing I did not

want to do! I realized that my opposition was less about my labelling or imposing categories than it was about trusting my data – mostly because it confirmed some of my original assumptions about the importance of colour and of women’s personal experiences with immigration. While I was concentrating so intently on being open and putting aside my biases, I virtually ignored what my data were telling me *because* it was in agreement with some of my early suppositions.

This reluctance to look at women as being immigrants, Canadian-born, white-skinned, or of a visible minority group was due to many things, not the least of which were the political connotations of the words themselves. As I cited in earlier sections, being an “immigrant” does not seem to be as simple as being born elsewhere for many people – it can also be a heavily-loaded identity with negative implications. In regards to colour, perhaps I was avoiding the inherent complexity of including colour in my analysis. However, the organization uses freely the term “visible minority,” and in being true to the language with which participants were accustomed and in listening to the data, the recognition of colour was a necessary level of analysis.

Once I had created four groups of women using the criteria of colour (white vs. visible minority) and nativity (Canadian- vs. elsewhere-born), I repeated the coding process from the very beginning. Instead of comparing the new group data with the descriptive analyses I had first completed, I made room for further variability within the new groups. I also went through each of the transcripts to search for additional relevant quotations.

As I began writing my findings section, I continued to pose to myself the same questions I had at the beginning of my analysis. Some discernible differences were

emerging *between* groups, but I still felt that my analysis incompletely addressed differences *within* groups. For instance, were there any differences between what white and visible minority immigrants said about multiculturalism? Did white and visible minority Canadians vary on the roles they considered appropriate for immigrant women? Consequently, my final level of analysis looked at both colour and country of birth simultaneously and provided the most telling findings.

As you may be able to tell, processing the data took place on a variety of planes. Sometimes I would create categories comprised of connections to the use of a single word, and other times I would examine the data by how the participants reacted to particular questions or comments. I aimed for a creative analysis, which meant "...reconsider[ing] power and its use by generating alternatives to dominant assumptions about social relations" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 79).

Throughout the data analysis process, I kept a journal – both on the computer, and also on whatever scraps of paper I could find when I was struck by a realization or an "a-HA!" Sometimes, I even woke up during the night to jot down the reflections that came to me in dreams or in those calm, alpha-wave moments between wakefulness and sleep. Thanks to Kirby and McKenna's (1989) excellent section on data analysis, I was very careful not to treat these interpretations and reflections on the data *as* data.

Conversations with others were also invaluable to my analysis. My partner was perpetually helpful in reflecting back my ideas and advising me on whether they "made sense." My advisor, along with Dr. Ginette Lafrenière, who was one of my committee members, had rich understandings of the literature and theory that I used, and my advisor in particular spent numerous hours listening to me process the interviews. I appreciated

these opportunities for discussion personally, but also felt that it contributed to the comprehensiveness of my analysis.

VIII) Findings

The eight main categories in this section correspond to my original research questions, with particular attention paid to interesting differences that emerged as a result of grouping women according to their country of birth and the colour of their skin. I will describe the women's responses to the questions that were asked in the interviews, and, when possible, will comment on how participants processed the questions.

As I mentioned earlier, the questions that I asked were really difficult in that most participants had not considered them so directly before the time of the interviews. Speaking about the previously unspoken, then, led many women to oppose themselves, both in what they said outright and also what the *subtext* of their words were saying. Therefore, consistent with Reinharz (1992), my data analysis phase was fraught with attempts to interpret the many contradictions and occasional omissions in how my participants spoke about their work across differences in culture, ethnicity, race, and colour.

I think it important to situate myself within the findings, particularly as I am talking about women based on their experience with immigration and the colour of their skin. Through these interviews, I re-realized that my orientation around whiteness, power, oppression, and privilege is not shared by most other white Canadians. In fact, I have *many* political beliefs that are not shared by the mainstream! However, something that has been consistent throughout my life has been my identification with marginalized

people, be they differently-abled, non-conforming of typical gender norms, diagnosed with a mental health issue, or of a different race, colour, or culture.

I am not suggesting that I have no explanation for why I look to the margins from the mainstream – there are a lot of things that have helped me along the way, which I have discussed throughout this thesis – but in reporting these data, sometimes I have felt more aligned with the values and assertions of visible minority and immigrant women than I have with women who are less “other” to me. I am also less reluctant to name my difference from other white mainstream Canadians, which is regarding my uncompromising commitment to overcome and deconstruct the discriminatory and stereotypical messages I have internalized, rather than accepting them without question or critique. Perhaps, as was described earlier by Adler (1977), I may be considered a “multicultural person.”

On women’s complex identities

First of all, it is important to mention that all of the actual countries/ethnic groups/cultures that women included in their identities have been changed to maintain their anonymity. To further protect their identities, I will not specify numbers of women associated with particular opinions, but will instead use relative terms, such as “a few,” (two or three) “some,” (four or five) or “many” (six or more) women. As there were eight participants in this research, I worry that identifying the number of women who expressed certain viewpoints could lead to their being identified by readers.

When I asked how the participants identified culturally or ethnically, women had a variety of responses. One notable finding was that more women who had not been born in Canada, regardless of the colour of their skin, identified first as Canadian (e.g.,

“Canadian, born in Pakistan of Iraqi-Russian heritage”) than did not. Conversely, women who were born in Canada were more likely to mention their Canadian-ness *after* other identities (e.g., “I am a third-generation Canadian” or “by ancestry Chilean, but very Canadian”). Only two women used the term “immigrant” overtly as part of their identity.

In addition, participants spoke about their cultural and ethnic identities in different ways, which included reflections on their background, origin, ancestry, “generational” status (i.e., fourth-generation Canadian), birthplace, heritage, colour, and immigrant status. As one woman commented,

...nationality, ethnicity, um, citizenship, nationality of origin...all those things now are part of one’s identity. And how we deal with it is a learning process.

None of the women duplicated the way another woman identified – each participant came up with unique ways to describe her identity to me. Save for one woman (who had recently immigrated), the commonality of every identity was Canadian culture.

Throughout the interviews, I was struck by the mutually exclusive identities that this group of participants associated with immigrant and Canadian women. Regardless of what they said in direct response to my questions, participants consistently referred to immigrant women as visible minorities, “ethnic,” and having English as a second language or spoken with an accent. In fact, one participant noted that the word immigrant itself is

used politically to keep attention on the[ir] needs...immigrants always feel like immigrants. I will never not feel like I immigrated from somewhere else, it’s not possible...I would like to give up the immigrant woman title. And I only keep it because of my solidarity with immigrant women who go through a lot. So I don’t need the term for identity as much as I keep the name for solidarity...but I’d love to get rid of it.

On the other hand, Canadian women were thought to be white, mainstream, well-educated, non-ethnic, non-immigrant, and speakers of unaccented English:

[Someone at the organization] thought [we] should have somebody Canadian [to be a receptionist], right, so that they speak properly.

I don't look at the difference of colour, but to tell you how Canadian I am and how people perceive me to be Canadian, [someone] looked at me one day and goes, "I don't consider you ethnic!"

At the same time as these two opposing categories were being constructed, I marvelled at the fact that all of my participants violated them. For instance, every woman I interviewed identified as Canadian – even if they were in fact born in other countries. Not all of the immigrants that I interviewed were visible minority women, and similarly, not all of the Canadians were white. However, the subtexts of their answers seem to reflect the normative discourse in mainstream society: Canada was built by European settlers, typical Canadians are white-skinned, speak unaccented English, and are not immigrants. Interestingly, none of the participants made mention of Canada's bilingualism, as they did not associate the French language with a Canadian identity.

I did not ask anything about citizenship, but my estimate is that most of the participants are Canadian citizens, given what I knew of the length of time they had resided in Canada. An interesting consideration for future studies would be to explore whether immigrants who are Canadian citizens considered themselves more "Canadian" following their legalization of their Canadian citizenship than those who had not completed the official paperwork deeming them so.

Because visible minority women did not fit the white, mainstream, normative Canadian mould, they sometimes spoke about the duality of their identities and the silence, negation, or even emphasis of their diversity:

I have had some real difficulties as a professional woman with white [people in a particular profession]. In th[at] context, I've been aware that because of my diversity, and these experiences first-hand, my professional work is never an issue...but I am never able to talk about systemic racism with colleagues...there is a certain negation of *my* diversity that takes place.

...well immediately when people look at you [Kristi] they think... "there's a white woman," they don't think, "there's a [Vietnamese] woman...she probably has this, this and this characteristic..."

I think that I'm from a completely different culture...because I have this shared identity right? I have not only grown up with this cultural background in my home with my parents, but...I had a lot of experiences that mainstream [Canadian] people have.

Women's motivation for involvement in the organization

There were many ways that women came to the organization, but overall, these ways seemed to hinge upon *intention*. For instance, some of the women sought out the organization because of an existing commitment to the needs of immigrant women or out of personal experience:

There were some things – immigrant women need some special, extra caring and loving...our challenges are not just immigrating, but it's also a new country...they need help.

I didn't know a whole lot about [the organization] but because of my international experience of having lived in another culture myself, I was interested in helping women adjust...to living here.

Other women, however, seemed to be led to the organization in ways that had less to do with the nature of the work, and more to do with simply requiring a job, or having been recommended by someone to serve on the board or volunteer:

I was, you know, looking for employment and it wasn't specifically that I was targeting [the organization], I wasn't targeting anything, I just wanted a job in the field...just wanted to get started.

Well one of the gals that I worked with, she was on the [] Board, you know, and then she had asked me if I would be interested in becoming

a Board member. So, you know, I went to one meeting and then...I said, "Yeah...I would."

One of the interesting things about women's motives to become involved with the organization's work is that it was clearly divided. Nearly all of the women who had approached their role in the organization intentionally were visible minorities and/or immigrants, and the work was intentional because it was personal:

I was always searching for this community belonging...the idea that we had come from [] colonies [where] our families were builders of community and society...I have a long experience that you do something outside your home.

Conversely, white women were the ones who more likely "fell into" their paid or volunteer work with the organization. However, many of these women did mention that they valued women's organizations or cited a personal commitment to working with women.

In reviewing the documents of the organization, as well as its mission and goals, the above finding was particularly distinct given the fact that members of the organization are not sought out using criteria such as skin colour or country of origin. However, as the organization's mission statement and values use language concerning the promotion of the equitable participation of immigrant and visible minority women in society, it makes sense that women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds would be drawn to such an environment.

Organizational roles for Canadian-born and immigrant women

Some of the most confusing and revealing conversations with my participants occurred around the notions of "which women should do what" in an organization serving immigrant women. Interestingly, none of the women had trouble listing *general*

attributes of people who should work and volunteer at the organization. For instance, participants noted that women at the organization should be intuitive, empathetic/sympathetic, fluent in English, well-qualified, understanding, and should have strong leadership skills. Some of these participants noted that the experience of immigration may also be important, but that it was just one of many things that contributed to a woman's "fit" with the organization.

This recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity in general, though, was not specific and mostly discussed in very broad terms:

It's good to have a mixture...volunteering here, and on the Board here, and we do have a mixture, and I think that's about the best that this organization can do is to have a mixture.

I think it's important for the staff to have diversity.

...I really think that the good or the best or the most appropriate roles [for immigrant and Canadian-born women] are the same roles, and that the mixture of the two is what makes it most important, what makes it most valuable.

Direct responses to questions about good roles for immigrant and Canadian-born women, however, were more difficult to tease out. When the answers did emerge, they appeared to relate directly to the skin colour and nativity of the participants.

a) Immigrant women's roles

When asked about good roles for immigrant women, white women were quick to claim that culture, ethnicity, and experience of immigration were not really of primary importance for women within the organization:

How [women] use their immigration experience and integrate their skills in their job is what matters, it's not got a whole lot to do with immigration, it's got to do with management.

It's the skill and not the place they were born or the colour of their skin.

If somebody's got the skills to do the job well, that should make the most difference, not that they're immigrants themselves.

In addition, each of the white women raised the notion of English language proficiency, though they differed on their opinions about "having an accent:"

Somebody with a really strong accent, it might be tricky [to teach English].

The accent is not the problem in teaching English, it's the English skills – if their grammar is good and they can understand others, then that's appropriate...

All of the visible minority women (regardless of where they were born), however, were able to list several reasons why immigrant women are not only beneficial, but necessary in an organization serving immigrant women. Notice, however, that these women also assumed immigrants were visible minority and "ethnic" women:

If I go somewhere and see [the name of the organization], I'd be looking for ethnic women there.

I think...probably the greatest understanding of [issues facing immigrants] is going to be from people who are ethnic or immigrant themselves.

If two people were going for a job, you know, applying for the job of receptionist, I would probably tend to pick somebody who either has an accent and/or is a visible minority, only because when a participant walks in, it makes them feel comfortable, I would think.

Further, visible minority women were able to describe at length concrete roles that immigrant women should play, which included being a role model, providing informal support, and working as a receptionist:

I think the roles for people who are volunteering or working is, you know, providing some leadership, some understanding...

It makes the case if an immigrant woman in that organization is hired to answer that phone.

Now there is one area...where it's important to have an ethnic person is if you're trying to do outreach with a new group.

However, all participants returned to the fact that there are other things that are important and that experience of immigration is not the only factor that need be considered for women in the organization.

b) Roles for Canadian-born women

There was a similar divide among participants when they were asked what Canadian-born women should do in an organization serving immigrant women. White Canadian women seemed to recognize that the question was about them and sometimes reacted self-protectively:

Um...I think analysis and understanding of the issues is probably *as* important as colour in someone...

[Teaching English because] everybody all over the world wants to hear English from someone who has a Canadian accent and who has English as their first language...[it's] a big advantage...

Sometimes I feel that [my Canadian identity] may actually be, um, an advantage in that...a lot of the women who come here...will look to the Canadian women around them and...that means me.

For Canadian-born visible minority women, however, there was some degree of confusion about the question, though they appeared to believe that there were roles for everyone:

Do you mean people like myself, who is a Canadian-born person but is a visible minority, or do you mean white people?

I don't think the expectation is violated if you have a white person or if you have a non-visible minority person doing the teaching and things like that...

As for visible minority immigrant women, worthy of note was the fact that they indicated overtly some of the things they felt were better suited for mainstream Canadian-identified women:

Canadian-born [women] who are working here [are good for]... just explaining...“these are the norms.” When people are not born here, they’re very confused. So I think that’s a good role to play...

I learnt a lot of things that are not acceptable and that are acceptable, and these [were] Canadian-born women who taught me those things.

The Canadian-born [English] is, you know, more clear than other people who speak English...it’s good to have an English-speaking teacher who is Canadian...

At the same time, this group of women displayed inklings of recognition that Canadian-born individuals lack the important experience of immigration. It was only visible minority immigrant women who spoke about things they felt Canadian-born women should not do:

People that have experience, working with immigrants, or if they are immigrants, they know our lifestyle. For people that are not from immigrant origins, maybe from Canada or anywhere else, and you know they never travelled, so they don’t get the problem[s] that immigrant women face, you know...

Let somebody else be a role model.

I like to *think* that there are a lot of white women and men...doing some great cross-cultural work.

The response from white immigrant women was that everyone was similar, and that

A born Canadian could do the job just as well if they had the qualifications.

Most fascinating, however, was when I asked participants outright whether it really mattered who did what. White Canadian women were consistent with what they had previously said (e.g., there are other more important things than culture, ethnicity,

and the experience of immigration; diversity is important), and visible minority Canadian women asserted similar sentiments, with the additional and explicit statement that culture, ethnicity, and the experience of immigration are important factors that should not be overlooked.

When it came to immigrant women, though, a different story emerged. Although they had previously shared fairly strong opinions about the appropriateness of particular roles for immigrant and Canadian-born women, when faced again with the question “Does it really matter who does what?” participants in this group seemed to opt out:

People are people no matter what, it's not what's outside, it's what you are inside.

I have now come to the place now where a woman who is competent and has knowledge of the field and can manage an organization will be okay.

However, some of these women were aware of the contradictions inherent in their views, remarking,

I don't want to sort of contradict myself...

I think my thoughts have evolved, and then they go back and forth. It's not fixed.

It's really hard because these questions sort of make you, um, challenge....your concept of fairness, right?

The challenges of working with “the other”

Some Canadian-born women felt that there were no real challenges to working with women who were from different ethnic or cultural groups:

Culture has rarely, or if ever gotten in the way of my work with women from other cultures. I basically think people are the same all over the world...

[Staff] are very Canadianized here. So, um, if there's ever any

dissent...it may be personalities, or your own opinions, or whatever. And that's it, but I can't say that I've seen anything cultural here.

All Canadian-born women were in agreement that individual differences contributed to challenges in their work more so than "cultural" differences. These individual variations included personality, age, language, and the generation to which particular women belonged:

I think that there are these generational things that have a huge impact on people's perceptions of what's right and wrong...

If I'm working with somebody and it's not going very smooth, the last reason I would give would be different culture. It would be, you know, you're not understanding me because of the words I'm using...

I sort of see the way we communicate here more in terms of communication period. Not because of where we **come** from or anything like that.

It was intriguing, however, to examine the perceptions of white Canadian-born women.

While some women asserted that there certainly were challenges along cultural lines, other women asserted that there were not. However, the subtext of their comments seemed to indicate otherwise:

I like people to maintain as much of their own culture as possible, but when it comes to immersing yourself in the workplace, you *have to conform or you're not going to last...* this is something that's a really hard concept for a lot of people from other cultures to grasp but...if [they're] not going to put the effort into trying to do things the way we do them here...they can either drift away or they can start...trying to do things within the structure that we have to set up...

Visible minorities in general, along with white immigrants, were able to list several challenges in working with "other" women. Common to their responses were

things like negotiating differences in cultures, as well as working across misinterpretations and misunderstandings:

Trying to understand different ways of thinking and doing...to create an understanding is challenging, because you're used to one way of doing things, one way of life, and then all of a sudden you have to look at other ways...even though it's exciting and interesting [] it's also difficult...

Women are used to being at home in their country, and Canada's a different place for women and men.

It's very easy to misinterpret something that's happened as being rudeness or whatever...in [Canadian] culture, we have certain things that we see as common courtesy. [Women from other cultures] see them as, "Boy, you've got a hell of a lot of rules!"

By far, women in the immigrant visible minority group listed more challenges than women from any other group. Unique challenges that were mentioned were the lack of respect for and the abundance of negative assumptions about immigrants (which I would presume arose from their own experiences), and issues around language:

And the other thing that I've found as an immigrant, even if you speak perfectly the language...[if] for example you are sick, or something happen with your family, or, you know, you forget the work, they will think it's because of the language, "She doesn't understand and she needs some help..."

The other challenge is broader assumptions out there about immigrants that are never challenged.

Divisive issues

When participants spoke about issues that divided women in the organization, the issues seemed to be separated – either they were along cultural lines or they were not. Generally, Canadian-born and white women named equal amounts of cultural and non-cultural issues. Cultural issues included claims that certain women who were not born in

Canada were not pulling their weight or being favoured, the fact that some women had opposing views on social issues, and the divergent ways in which immigrants were seen. When it came to divisive issues that were not considered cultural, Canadian-born women were consistent with what they previously said, and named things like personality differences and typical dissimilarities among people in a workplace. White immigrant women also felt that divisive issues were not due to differences in culture or ethnicity.

Visible minority immigrant women were the only participants who named issues that were exclusively divisive along cultural lines, which meant that they felt an issue at the organization would draw markedly different responses from Canadian-born individuals versus immigrants, or among visible minority women and white women:

When a group of [] women wanted time for prayers, some [people] felt that, you know, this is a working environment...we shouldn't be allowing them. But I also told them, now, even though we are simulating a working environment, this is only a phase for them...

There have been a lot of different opinions because sometimes, you know, when you try to accommodate one group, then the other group are "Why? Why should special concessions be made?"...usually it would be, you know, people who have grown up [in Canada saying those things]...

I think divisive issues have come about...over the efficiency model of programme delivery and a flexible approach to accommodate women...nobody understands marginalization is a lived experience.

So I know the divisiveness has been there about how [some women] see [] women as...women in need, and [others] see women as clients.

When I asked participants how divisive issues were dealt with, they felt that they were either not addressed at all, or that they seemed to fizzle out on their own. At the

same time, many women spoke about the fact that things deemed “political” were avoided entirely:

I tried this discussion on social justice...and had to leave it!
[Many people] do[] not use politically astute analysis for anything, it drives me nuts...

I think to the degree to be involved in politics is the biggest [divisive] issue and we tend to just stay away from it, I think rather than deal with it. It's okay to address the issues that [the organization] is doing on a very, very practical level, but on an advocacy level, it's...it's pushing comfort levels, and so because it would be divisive, we just don't *do* it, we don't talk about it...

The dilemma for me is...in my cross-cultural context, if people are looking at diverse issues and you talk about racism or you talk about tokenism, a lot of white women feel...that you are attacking the whole culture, therefore you are attacking them...new learning means everyone has to be equally uncomfortable...and how can you learn if they're always afraid of what they're going to call you – for you [Kristi] it'll be “racist,” for me it'll be called “chip on my shoulder”...

Uniting issues

Although there were some divisive issues discussed by the women in their interviews, they also named many matters that united them in their work with other women at the organization. One of the most salient sources of unity for all of the women was the actual work of supporting and providing services to local immigrant women:

And I think there is a main point...we know why we're there, so *that* moral consciousness is what it always came down to, you know, that we are always going to do what is right for the [women]...

[Our] similar work [is uniting] – most of us are directly involved in the employment/career development of the clients.

The way the Board works well together is uniting...I think

the staff have come back to teamwork as [] uniting...

Other participants felt that women associated with the organization were united in their appreciation for working with women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds:

There is also great appreciation...for the fact that we can work together and come from very different backgrounds and experiences.

Sometimes there is unity in difference...there's less competition. You know, everybody's different so...that is it, I'm different, you're different, everybody is different so you know, we can do our own thing...I guess you don't need to feel threatened.

Some white women noted that unity came with focusing on similarities shared by people, rather than considering people's culture or ethnic diversity:

Since we are all women, some of us are immigrants, most of us are mothers, and most of us are "partnered," there is never a lack of conversation...

I think if we look at everybody as a human being rather than a Canadian and an Indonesian, a Chinese or whatever, everyone's a human being and we all have basic human needs, and so on and so forth...

However, a few other women, in particular those who were visible minorities, commented that focusing solely on commonalities or individual differences in fact renounces the diversity of women involved with the organization:

...sometimes the things that people say are often different than the way that they really do live their life, and the way that they really do live their life has often been formed by their culture...

The welcoming of newcomers

When I asked participants how they felt new Canadians should be welcomed to Canada, responses seemed to fall into two categories – practical things that people should

do, and then attitudes that people should have. There were no real patterns that emerged among this question, although suggestions for practical ways to welcome immigrant women prevailed among most groups. These suggestions ranged from giving immigrants a gift at the reception centre when they first arrived in Canada, to ensuring that the organization has adequate resources and a set resource staff person to answer any questions incoming immigrant women may have.

Visible minority immigrant women, due likely to their own experiences of coming to Canada, had several concrete suggestions around practical ways of welcoming. The suggestions included helping immigrant women and their families fill out official immigration papers, making translators available, and building the capacity of community centres to become spaces for people to meet each other. For some white and visible minority Canadian participants, though, having a welcoming attitude was also important:

...there's this difference between this tokenistic kind of welcome to Canada, and "now you're home and this is such a wonderful place," and we as Canadians love to see ourselves as very welcoming and very wonderful...but I think that after this initial kind of *welcoming*...life goes *on*, and people sort of continue to marginalize...

...to be a welcoming Canadian means we need to recognize... that almost everybody has come as a newcomer to Canada, and each person has the same right to come as *we* did, and our ancestors did...

What was notable, however, was that when these women were asked about things that did and did not make them feel welcome, they referred predominantly to how they were treated by others, rather than citing a lack of practical services or supports:

For some people, they don't care whether we understand or not, they will just say it, some people, you know, when they talk to

immigrants, you know, they speak loud, or if they speak then they speak very slow, you know, it's not that [we're] deaf ... it's just a language problem (laughs)

Well I think what made me welcome was acceptance, most people accepted my colour, my dress, my everything...and they showed appreciation, they admired...my clothes, my everything, my jewellery...

On multiculturalism and tolerance

The notions of multiculturalism and tolerance were tied to welcoming behaviours, but seemed to trigger stronger reactions among most of the participants than did the question about welcoming newcomers. Some participants alluded to the fact that multiculturalism could be interpreted on a variety of layers or levels. For instance, it is difficult to deny that there are a variety of people from multiple cultural groups living in Canada. For some participants (who happened to be visible minority immigrant women), this presence of many cultures sufficiently embodied the notion of multiculturalism:

Canada is one of the countries in the world that you can come over, it is so good that they invite people to come from other countries. That's what makes Canada and that makes Canada... good for multiculturalism.

For other participants, the meaning of the word ran much deeper than that, regardless of the colour of their skin or where they were born. To these women, multiculturalism was seen as a way to emphasize differences, especially in relation to the colour of one's skin:

...multiculturalism, I think, means anybody who isn't white. When you arrive at the airport you didn't know that you were multicultural until you arrived in Canada...

When I look at that word and think of multiculturalism I see a division there. Why do we have to have [it]? We are all multicultural here in Canada anyway, so why do you have to point it out? Why do I have to know that you are from the Ukraine originally or whatever...you're a human being and I'm a human being, you know?

There are people who practice this kind of happy, happy, joy, joy multiculturalism and people that actually really understand... what it means to actually live in a place like Toronto, where there are so many different cultures, and...so many different ways of interacting with different cultures...I think the things that are different are the things we...inspect and that we feel like we need to shine light on...

In particular, Canadian women also spoke about what multiculturalism should be, and related it to Canadian attitudes about immigrants:

We have these monologues. White people talk to themselves, Asian women talk to themselves and now I am thinking, "Guys we need to talk cross-culturally here" so there could be this mutual understanding...that's the hope for Canada, is this cross-cultural dialogue and the life we need to build together...

There are too many white Canadians who would say [immigrants] have to become like our culture in order to become Canadian. And I disagree with that. I think in order to create or have a Canadian multicultural culture, it means that we have to be changed in our culture as much as they have to change in [theirs]...

The latter quotation is similar to the assertions of theorists such as Kalbach and Kalbach (1999), who noted that "for immigrants to become Canadian and be fully participating members in our society requires adjustments on the part of both immigrants and Canadian society" (p. 13). Other participants described multiculturalism in terms of what it is not:

It's not just existing together, because that can happen without... people understanding and accepting one another and getting along... you have to accept that someone's different than you, right?

In all fairness, I think part of what has affected a lot of people these days, is you get a few bad apples from each group, okay. It doesn't matter white, or brown, or whoever they are. And then people tend to paint with a brush – broad strokes...and I think that very much works against multiculturalism.

Other women had things to say about the utility or necessity of the word itself:

I don't want to describe multiculturalism. I want to talk about inclusive practice. You can actually learn how to do that.

...someone needs to create a word that replaces multiculturalism, but that can communicate what it means to be a whole group of people that live together and all consider themselves to be Canadians, and all came from different places.

Further, notions of tolerance and multiculturalism seemed to be related for most participants. The same visible minority immigrant women who felt multiculturalism meant groups of people living together in Canada saw tolerance as the reason for this harmony:

Tolerance means patience and understanding...acceptance, and explaining also...

Interestingly, white immigrant women also defined tolerance in similar ways, though other visible minority and white Canadian women expressed that "being tolerant" was not sufficient in working with diversely-identified women, nor did it promote multiculturalism:

What tolerance means, they're going to put up with us. They're going to grind their teeth and bear it kind of thing.

I don't like the word tolerant. What gives me the right to be tolerant of you, I mean, who do I think I am?

Tolerance is the lowest common denominator, so I'm not really keen on that word either. It's like *barely* putting up with... acceptance and welcoming are more important than tolerance.

Additionally, some visible minority women equated "being tolerant" to the intentions and attitudes of some white women, who approached their work with a condescending sort of benevolence towards immigrants:

The mainstream mindset goes two ways. It's either, "I'm doing charity, therefore all of you ought to feel grateful," or "I am going to do social justice work, which makes room for you."

There are people I know that work in the area of immigration, in settlement, and do some really really good work, but... feel[] very benevolent because they are doing all this *wonderful* work...it's not *just* about going out there and helping people, it's about helping them on their own terms, and helping them the way that they need to be helped, not imposing what you think their life should be like...

Some of the visible minority women also noted that their experiences with intolerant comments or behaviours contributed to a different understanding of what tolerance is:

As a culturally diverse practitioner [I stay away from the word tolerance] because a lot of Eurocentrism gets marketed as correct and it bugs me...when [that happens], it's in the realm of racism, it's in the realm of intolerance and all that stuff.

...I've faced racism in school because there were only two other families [from my ethnic group] where I went to school so that probably makes me more tolerant.

When I asked about tolerance, I also asked participants how, without imposing morals and personal beliefs, they felt immigrant women should be taught about Canada.

Women from every group said that explaining options in terms of choices and consequences is the most respectful way to teach immigrant women about Canadian culture. For some women, explaining options occurred more formally, through workshops, lectures, role-plays, and group work, but for others, casual conversation was the vehicle for the information:

...there are lots of processes you have to teach [immigrant women], you know, "well in Canada we have these common courtesies, and...if you're going to be successful here, you have to understand, please understand, we're not saying that you have to change your belief systems, but if it's going to work for you, these are some of the things you have to do."

I wouldn't just say "It's not done here," I would say, "This is why if you do that, you're probably not going to get a job..." and then go into explaining the norms and things that are here.

So, teaching [immigrant women] what to expect, what reactions to expect...you are not wiping all [their ways] out, you know saying, "Okay, that's wrong," – because that is very precious and important to people.

Visible minority women in particular also mentioned that being respectful of differences was key and felt that using Canadian law was a good way of denoting "correct" and "incorrect" practices:

I mean, who are we to say that they should not be able to do [certain things], right?...I feel like you need to be respectful of where other people are coming from, I think that when it becomes an issue is when it becomes illegal or a human rights issue.

I mean, you're teaching new Canadian women about Canadian life, but at the same time, you have to do it in a way that you don't run down theirs, you accept their ways at the same time, you have to say "It's a different way of doing this..."

Though Canadian women were fairly consistent with other women in framing tolerance and "teaching Canadian culture," some white Canadian women felt that teaching women about Canadian life was simply a matter of setting down rules and expecting that they be followed:

What I do, I like to let people experience things, and then the repercussions if there are any. Meaning that, if I tell somebody something and...they don't take it seriously, or they don't take my advice...and they lose the job or something like that, then that's a good lesson for them, I hate to say it but it is.

Summary of the findings

Following the analysis of my data, I thought it would be relatively easy to discuss what I had learned. Of course, once I sat down at the computer, I realized my naiveté. Similar to Sandy Shreve (1990), by "...trying to write political things or things that maybe will contribute to change, I'm fighting between looking for what it is I really

believe and worrying about whether other people will think I've betrayed the cause..." (p. 128). In my mind, I thought of all of my participants, the organization within which they worked, of feminists, of other community psychologists, of other white Canadian women, of diversely-identified women working with immigration and settlement issues, and I wondered how I could answer my research question in respectful, valuable, and useful ways.

By examining the responses of my participants according to their skin colour and their experience with immigration, I was able to provide some interesting insights into how ethnically- and culturally-diverse women work together. Although there were some similarities in the ways that women approached their work together, the responses of participants often diverged on the basis of the colour of their skin. As I have mentioned earlier, the persistence in colour as a differentiating factor among participants somewhat surprised me, because my questions addressed women's experiences of immigration more than they did the colour of their skin. As Henry and others (1995) assert, "skin colour as a feature of race therefore carries with it more than the signification of 'colour;' it also includes a set of meanings attached to the cultural traits of those who are a certain colour" (p. 4).

Through the responses of my participants and a careful review of some of the organization's documents, two very interesting points emerged. First, it became clear that women's work together was greatly influenced by how the organization situated itself within the greater community and how it positioned itself with respect to issues of colour, oppression, and privilege. Second, this "organizational culture" affected how women

interacted and worked together, and affected visible minority and white women in different ways.

In the following sections, I will describe the organizational culture and the larger context within which it developed and will then discuss the ways in which women negotiated their environment and their own identities to be able to do their work. Finally, using a feminist and critical framework, I will theorize about how women can continue to work together in ways that speak to the evolution of multiculturalism, so that they may contribute to social change.

IX) Discussion

In earlier sections of this thesis, I reviewed the abundance of literature on differences of power and privilege between white and visible minority women, and spent a considerable amount of time wondering how *my* identity as a white Canadian woman would impact the process of this research. Two of the things that struck me about the data were that critical discussions about colour were not occurring between white and visible minority women, and thus, the different levels of power and privilege among women were not being addressed. However, as discussed in the literature review, there is a great deal of evidence that these critical discussions are neglected by society in general, not just at the level of individuals or organizations.

Community psychologists often use *ecological levels of analyses* to examine social or community-based phenomena that affect individuals (see Dalton et al., 2001; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). As this research focused on women's work together, I will first express the themes that emerged as interrelated functions of attitudes, policies, and limitations occurring in Canadian society (the macro-level) and within the organization,

(the meso-level). Then, I will discuss how these contexts have affected the micro-level or how women working together (1) conceptualize the notion of “difference;” (2) negotiate their identities within a Canadian context, and (3) approach their work, differences, and identities in ways that permit them to “fit in.”

The uneasy junction of multiculturalism and the anti-racism movement in Canada

As I discussed in the literature review, Canada’s policies on multiculturalism were designed to influence the interactions of people from different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds who live in this country. Although the purpose and origins of multiculturalism were admirable, many participants in this study reported that the ways they experience multiculturalism are inconsistent with its honourable intentions. Akin to Goldberg (1994), many participants expressed frustration that “multiculturalism and cultural diversity are assumed as mantric administrative instruments that serve to contain and restrain resistance...by paying lip service to the celebration of cultural distinction” (p. 7-8).

Several participants indicated that multiculturalism is practiced in Canada in ways that may endorse diversity on a surface level, but which do not necessarily promote equity among people of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, or communities. This discrepancy between ideology and action was demonstrated by participants’ noting that diversity was rarely celebrated in ways that moved beyond a level of “song, food, and dance” to an acceptance of deeper differences. Finally, some participants indicated that multiculturalism practiced at the level of tolerance was neither sufficient nor consistent with the purported intent of multiculturalism in this country.

Indeed, the notion of “levels” or “types” of multiculturalism have been theorized by many authors (e.g., Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Goldberg, 1994). McLaren (1994) refers to four types of multiculturalism, which include conservative multiculturalism (which I liken to the U.S.’s aims to construct a common culture, regardless of differences); liberal multiculturalism (which sounds a lot like mainstream Canada’s assertions that a natural equality exists among whites and other racial groups); left-liberal multiculturalism, which emphasizes cultural differences, while somewhat ignoring the “historical and cultural ‘situatedness’ of [those] difference[s]” (p. 52); and critical multiculturalism. Rather than scratching the surface of diversity and difference, McLaren (1994) argues that critical multiculturalism focuses on social justice and avoids the overly simplistic, essentialist construction of identity in comparative terms of sameness and difference.

Fleras and Elliott (2002) also examined the multifaceted definitions and practices of multiculturalism. For instance, multiculturalism used *descriptively* (i.e., that many people of diverse cultures live in Canada) and multiculturalism considered *prescriptively* (i.e., as ideology that explains how these diverse people live together) frame multiculturalism in very different ways. The fact that multiculturalism can be seen from various perspectives was reflected by my participants, in that some women spoke about what multiculturalism *is* doing, others reflected upon what it was *intended* to do, while still others spoke about what it *should* be doing.

The North American anti-racism movements of the 1980s and 1990s imparted messages that conflicted somewhat with the intentions of the multiculturalism movement in Canada. Where multiculturalism was designed to recognize the plethora of cultures and ethnic groups in Canada while promoting their equality, the most publicized, liberal

campaigns of the anti-racism movement dispersed the message that talking about or emphasizing cultural and ethnic differences or variations was undesirable and in fact was racist (Giroux, 1993; Williams, 1999).

Similarly, the popular notion of “colour-blindness” that pervaded the first flurry of anti-racism (and second-wave feminism, to some degree) on the Canadian scene has not encouraged discussions on difference (Williams, 1997). Unless we are truly (and by that I mean medically, related to a dysfunction of the eye) blind to colour, we cannot help but notice physical aspects about people, and no amount of learning can prevent us from seeing them. What we *can* learn to do is to deconstruct the moral judgments, assumptions, and characteristics we associate with the colour of people’s skin and other physical attributes, and to be relentless in our efforts not to perpetuate them.

Racism, however, according to many third-wave feminists, as well as other postcolonial, critical and cultural theorists, is more about the value statements we place upon differences in culture, colour, or ethnicity than it is about actually noticing or speaking about them (Fine & Addelson, 1996; Giroux, 1993; James, 1999; Mohanty, 1994; Williams, 1997). In addition, a definition of racism needs to explore how particular differences are assigned privilege and power, while others are not (Henry et al., 1995; Williams, 1997). As was discussed in some of the feminist literature, *not* acknowledging or speaking about differences is also a problem, and leads people to feel further marginalized and disregarded (Jaggar, 2000; Narayan, 1997; Spivak, 1990).

Without a critical understanding of this definition of racism, though, many individuals have come to associate the word with talking about cultural differences, and

differences, therefore, have become taboo (Giroux, 1993). The lack of discourse on differences have done a great disservice to both white and visible minority women.

Similarly, inadequate understandings of anti-racism practices lead people to believe that racism can become extinct if one ignores colour and does not speak about differences (Henry et al, 1995; James, 1999). I think these claims that racism can become extinct are dangerous, as they position racism as something whose existence can be denied. Like Henry and others (1995), I think we instead should frame anti-racism more theoretically as a chosen orientation from which we can oppose the expressions of racism, rather than concrete things we can do to convince ourselves that we are not racist. I find it difficult to theorize in this area, however, since I come from a stance in which I believe *everyone* is racist, including me, and that the best we can do is to challenge and reconstruct our biases as they arise.

As the organization with which I was involved was formed during a time when the liberalized anti-racism movement was at its peak, it is understandable that many of the features of that movement support and inform the organizational structure. Because many of the original staff has remained at the organization since that time, the practices of colour-blindness and the “downplaying of cultural and ethnic differences” in favour of “celebrating diversity” have been upheld. These particular orientations have been very functional, have increased the appeal of the organization among various members of the community, and have attracted women who may not have otherwise approached a “women’s organization.” Further, the people within the organization, as well as others in the greater community, value an organization comprised *of* women that works *for* women.

The “culture” of the organization

The research carried out with women associated with the organization was not meant to be evaluatory, nor was it designed to comment about its policies, practices, and environment. Instead, I saw the organization as a microcosm of greater patterns of societal interaction among culturally and ethnically diverse women. As aforementioned, I chose to use this organization for my research in the first place because of its commanding reputation in the K-W community for its work with immigrant and visible minority women, and also because of the longevity of the diverse range of women on its staff, Board, and among its volunteers.

In terms of women’s work together, the organization had implicit expectations that ethnically- and culturally-diverse women could, and *would* simply work together – period. In reviewing the manuals for the Board and staff, there were no formal or direct orientations in regards to working across cultural and ethnic differences, recognizing power imbalances, or resolving conflicts arising from variations in culture. From speaking to participants, I know that this education happened in certain degrees on a more informal basis, but any official discussions on working together across differences in general did not seem to happen.

The lack of critical discussions on working across difference was surprising in some ways, given the strength of the language used by the organization for their mission statement, goals, and values. Clearly, the organization situates itself in a way that is political (i.e., as a women-directed and women-centred organization), but not in a way that threatens its own safety within mainstream society. For an organization that is mandated to provide support and programmes to immigrant women and to encourage

their full participation in Canadian civic life, the organization has undoubtedly had to work for many years to dismantle its own marginality within the dominant white Canadian culture. Although I had originally considered the organization's lack of critical analyses around differences, power, and privilege as a function of its general avoidance of "political" issues, I have since recognized that the organization's social location is in fact a *very* political and functional manoeuvre.

By not asserting overtly critical analyses of power and privilege, and by avoiding certain "trigger" words (e.g., feminism, racism), the organization reduces its perceived threat to individuals who may not want to participate within a feminist or politically-oriented organization. Indeed, most participants did affirm that anything related to advocacy or perceived to be political was divisive among women working and volunteering at the organization.

Further, the organization focuses on fostering an internal environment of cultural diversity, and thus has a wide variety of different women working and volunteering in it. For many white, mainstream Canadians, the visible presence of cultural and ethnic diversity is often sufficient in demonstrating the good work and adherence to multiculturalism of such an organization, though many of the participants in this study had an abundance of suggestions for truly addressing multiculturalism with greater depth and on more meaningful levels. Thus, women engaging in the process of the work carried out within the organization are necessarily affected by its position within the community and the ways in which it has chosen to function. As can well be imagined, this environment has different effects on white and visible minority women, which are

important to consider in understanding how ethnically- and culturally-diverse women work together.

How women work together – a microanalysis

The two main themes emerging from this research on women working together concern women's challenges in discussing "differences" and the complexity of Canadian identities. Together, these themes lend insight to women's attempts to "fit in," and enable their work together.

a) The discourse of difference

One of the main ways that women were able to work together was that they focused on uniting issues (which were usually things that were common to all women), rather than divisive issues (which tended to be related to ways that women differed). In regards to things that united them, all participants cited things like the nature of the organization's work, an appreciation for diversity, their roles as mothers, partners/wives, and the social activities that occurred in their workplace.

When it came to divisive issues, however, women varied widely on the kinds of things that were divisive. Canadian-born and white women did name some divisive issues along cultural lines, but named an equal number of divisions that occurred along non-cultural lines, which included individual differences pertaining to personality, age, or even generation. However, visible minority immigrant women only named divisive issues relating to culture and colour, meaning that they felt that divisions occurred neatly along lines that separated immigrant women from Canadian-born women and white women from visible minority women. All of the participants, though, felt that most divisive

issues, whatever they were, did not really get addressed or resolved. In addition, things that were perceived as being “political” were considered by all women to be divisive.

I also asked participants about the challenges they experienced working with women from other cultures. I was surprised to find that Canadian-born women, including visible minority Canadian-born women, responded that there were few challenges in working with women of different cultures. However, from the beginning of this research, I imparted that this setting is somewhat of an anomaly, both in terms of its longevity as an organization and also in terms of the loyalty of the women it attracts. As such, the responses of Canadian-born participants may reflect the fact that they did not conceptualize the “bumps” inherent in their work as challenges, but as “par for the course” in working with women who are ethnically and culturally diverse. Their references to challenges as individual factors is consistent with this fact, although immigrants identified several challenges along cultural lines, including working across misunderstandings and variations in individual cultures.

“White” perceptions of difference

Consistent with the tendency of white people to smooth over differences (James, 1999; McIntosh, 1980; Mohanty, 1994; Stiehm, 1994), the women in this research also skirted issues of differences, opting instead for less-threatening expressions of unity and respect for diversity. Giroux (1993), however, is hopeful that a “discourse of difference can be used to rewrite the social contract between groups in ways that deepen and extend the possibility for a democratic community” (p. 74), which I will discuss shortly.

As aforementioned, most white participants seemed uncomfortable with talking about differences, which was expressed in their tendency to speak instead about

commonalities among women or to direct the conversation to general discussions of diversity. For instance, most white women avoided the questions on appropriate roles for immigrant women, and chose instead to talk about the fact that the experience of immigration had little to do with a woman's suitability for a particular role in the organization. Further, white women, both overtly and in the subtext of their statements, seemed to recognize that challenges arose from culture, though they were reluctant to talk about them.

Another interesting dynamic that emerged during the analysis was that of threat – in particular relation to talking about appropriate roles in the organization with white participants. Although few women used a discourse of power and privilege, many of the white women, particularly those born in Canada, responded to questions in ways that made me think that they were concerned about their utility and their presence in an increasingly multicultural society. We could regard these responses as expressions of white women's *feelings* of marginalization, but I would have difficulty asserting that it reflects their – our! – *actual* marginality within Canada.

Historically, the responses of mainstream white individuals in situations of perceived threat (by immigrants, by cultural/ethnic "others") has been to claim that Canada's national unity is being destroyed or that we are at the hands of an "invasion" of immigrants (Giroux, 1993; Henry et al., 1995; James, 1999). Back in Winnipeg, I can remember a local white Canadian politician referring to the insidious "Asian invasion" of Canada (appropriately, she resigned her campaign in response to the stir she had caused). In a similar vein, we have all heard the accusation that "immigrants are taking our jobs"

on Canadian newscasts, in newspapers, and from the mouths of acquaintances in our places of work, learning, and play.

In addressing the tendency of mainstream people to talk about diversity versus difference, Stiehm (1994) warned that “diversity” is well on its way to attaining negative connotations, due to the fact that “it is being used as a symbol with the purpose of avoiding the complex and sensitive...” (p. 141). Further, Mohanty (1994) claimed that “difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism” (p. 146).

Visible minority women’s conceptualizations of difference

In contrast to white women’s preferences to speak of “benign variations” and commonalities, visible minority women were not only able to acknowledge differences, but spoke about them a great deal, particularly those differences they felt existed between women whose skin colour or culture was dissimilar. Further, some women were more able to identify divisive issues along cultural lines in the organization, were more sure about appropriate roles for immigrant and Canadian-born women, and responded more personally to issues around multiculturalism, tolerance, and the kinds of behaviours that are welcoming to immigrants. These differences in responses were related to participants’ own experience with immigration, as well as the colour of their skin.

For instance, visible minority women were strong in their insistence of the importance of immigrant and visible minority women’s expertise and understanding within the organization. However, visible minority women, especially immigrant visible minority women, named many good roles for Canadian-born women as well, although

they cautioned that the experience of immigration was still very important. Finally, of any of the other groups, it was only visible minority immigrant women who spoke about roles that they felt Canadian-born women should *not* play.

When asked about challenges, visible minority women spoke about challenges along cultural lines freely, and visible minority immigrant women interpreted the question even more personally. According to visible minority immigrant women, the challenges they had experienced arose from assumptions about and a lack of respect for immigrants, and were often exhausting to defend to “fellow Canadians.”

It makes sense that visible minority women, whose skin colour stands out against that of the normative white Canadian landscape, experience difference more personally than do white women. Visible minority women do not have the privilege of disregarding their difference from the norm, as their outward appearance “gives them away.” In addition, many visible minority women do not see difference as bad, but as something that simply *is* – difference is difference! More than wanting to focus upon it or use it to divide people or as proof of everyone’s racism, visible minority women wanted just to have differences recognized.

As a queer woman, I feel I can relate to the frustration conveyed by visible minority women about the ways in which differences and multiculturalism are “liberalized” and conceptualized by white Canadians. When some of my heterosexual friends or family members tell me that my relationship is no different from their relationship and that it is really no big deal, I want to scream. Though I understand that the intention behind what they are saying is to *equalize* our experiences, it is not that

simple. I have come to understand *very* personally that when you are part of a minority group, it is not as easy to explain away differences or to consider them negligible.

Marlatt (1990) asserts that “to be different in our other-phobic, our alter (even ultra)-phobic society is to be branded as somehow less than human: an anguish, an absurdity, a maddening misrepresentation...” (p. 10). Similarly, I live the experience of knowing that my relationship with my female partner is not equal to heterosexual relationships – not in the eyes of the law (as the resistance to same-sex marriage rages on), in the eyes of the church, or in the eyes that would blaze contempt if we chose to hold hands or embrace on the street. Similar to what one of the visible minority immigrant participants remarked (and I am paraphrasing here), “some people don’t understand that marginalization is a lived experience.” Though I have a great deal of privilege, I am also marginalized as a result of whom I love.

If we were to construct a very simplistic continuum of power and privilege for the participants of this study, white Canadian women, as part of the norm identified by my participants and the larger Canadian society have the most power and privilege, while visible minority immigrant women have the least (see Appendix G). In addition, from what I have learned from this research, I would say that being white brings more power and privilege than does being born in Canada, although a larger sample would provide more evidence to support this hunch. Thus, I would place white immigrant women closer in power and privilege to white Canadian-born women and then visible minority Canadian-born women nearer visible minority immigrants.

At the same time that I write the above paragraph, I am only too aware of how tricky, and even dangerous it can be to speak about power or try to “rate” oppression. In

particular, my lack of attention to issues of class and sexuality, to name just two, make the above analysis especially rudimentary. As Bishop (1994) asserts, “as long as we who are fighting oppression continue to play the game of competition with one another, all forms of oppression will continue to exist” (p. 10).

Similarly, in one of her poems, Betsy Warland (1990) says, “i fear for us, if we cannot come to grips with how deeply threatened we feel when we encounter differences among ourselves – i fear that our names will only be exchanged with those women most like ourselves...” (p. 75). In Canada, although we live amongst all kinds of cultural and ethnic diversity, we are not having the conversations on a large enough scale that would permit us to build bridges across our differences or to identify ourselves freely without question, marginalization, or penalty.

b) The complexities and implications of Canadian identity

One of the first things I asked of women in the interviews was how they came to the organization. I was in the midst of the data-analysis phase when I recognized that the experience (or lack thereof) my participants had with immigration influenced their involvement in the organization. For instance, visible minority immigrant women attributed their ties to the organization to personal reasons with respect to wanting to help other immigrant women. White women, on the other hand, cited reasons related to valuing women’s organizations in general, without any specific reference to the population with which the organization works. Although I did not ask specifically, I would imagine that these divergent motives would impact their work with other women. When we pursue work that feels personal, it often takes on different meaning than does work that is simply employment.

Women's ways of self-identification were particularly interesting, especially when held up against the participants' constructions of immigrant and Canadian identities. Canadian people, according to the participants, were white, English-speaking, and non-ethnic, while immigrants were thought to be visible minorities, ethnic, and non-English speaking. Not only were these constructions in opposition to each other, they appeared to be mutually exclusive, and I was baffled by how these identities could have arisen from participants who were both immigrants and Canadian-identified.

Women did not tend to identify based on their experiences with immigration per se; there was only one participant who used the word "immigrant" when asked about her identity (though others referred to it at other points). Although the women who were born in other countries did not necessarily see the term as a simple demographic label, I did not gain the impression that they were avoiding it as an "identifier." Perhaps this definition was reserved for women who were "newcomers" and were using the organization's services, or perhaps there was a line (such as the official acceptance into the country through Canadian citizenship) that allowed women to shed one identity for the other. Still, the exclusion of immigrant from a definition of Canadian identity is fascinating in a comparably new country that is comprised largely of people whose origins lie elsewhere.

A common identity shared by my participants was that of being Canadian, though it was expressed differently for immigrant and Canadian-born women. For example, women born in countries other than Canada identified themselves as Canadian first, followed by a variety of qualifying information (such as heritage, country of birth, and so forth). Women who were actually born in Canada, however, mentioned their ethnic

backgrounds first and *then* said that they were Canadian. In speaking about identity, one woman also said that she was white, and that she had only come to know what that meant after she had travelled to a country where she *became* a visible minority. To feel recognized in a setting that celebrates diversity, perhaps Canadian women, and particularly white Canadian women, spoke about their ethnicity first to assert a sense of belonging.

Within this research, exploring the degrees to which women “lived” their named cultural and ethnic groups would have been beneficial in further understandings of the ways in which they self-identified. For instance, some visible minority and immigrant participants referred to dual identities, where they felt they had to choose one or the other in order to facilitate belonging or functionality in particular situations. Further, for some of the Canadian-born visible minority women, their identification as Canadians often caused difficulty and led to their ethnic identities being neglected or “othered.” Many theorists refer to this process as “identity politics” (e.g., Giroux, 1993; Goldberg, 1994; Yeatman, 1993), which, according to Gürses, Herzog-Punzenberger, Reiser, Strasser, & Çinar (2001), “come to the fore when public recognition of a self-determined different identity is claimed, or conversely when the promotion of a positive self-image is mobilized in order to transform stereotypes...” (p. 31).

Acculturation is one of the processes studied by researchers working with immigrant communities, and is defined by researchers like Berry (1997) and Phinney (1996) as the changes in cultural beliefs and attitudes occurring when ethnic minority groups make contact with the dominant culture. In particular, Berry (1997) has discussed at great length the four ways in which members of ethnic minority groups typically

associate with the dominant, host culture: assimilation, marginalization, separation, and integration. *Assimilation* is considered to be the degree to which an individual identifies with the mainstream culture and disassociates with their “natal” culture, *marginalization* as the rejection by individuals of both the host culture as well as their own culture, *separation* or *segregation* as the identification with one’s own group while rejecting the host culture (the former is used when a group is in an inferior position of power, while the latter is when the group is relatively powerful), and *integration* as an individual’s strong identification with two or more cultures simultaneously.

Tonks and Paranjpe (1999) conducted two studies in which they requested participants to choose an identity (Canadian, ethnic, or ethnic-Canadian) and to provide an “ethnic” label (Canadian, Canadian-ethnic, ethnic, ethnic-Canadian, or other). Similar to my participants, individuals who identified primarily as Canadian did not necessarily name their ethnic group as being Canadian. In other words, Tonks and Paranjpe’s Canadian-identified participants sometimes labelled their ethnic group as being non-Canadian (Chinese) or hyphenated (Scottish-Canadian).

In addition, when Tonks and Paranjpe related his findings to Berry’s (1997) scheme of acculturative attitude style, he found that individuals within the Canadian ethnic group showed the highest mean scores for assimilation, which meant that they preferred the “melting-pot” notion of acculturation. Interestingly, Tonks and Paranjpe noted that the official Canadian policy prior to the advent of multiculturalism was one of assimilation. Further, individuals in the Canadian-ethnic group (e.g., Canadian Indians) scored highest on measures of integration, which made sense given that people preferring this style of acculturation identify strongly with two or more cultures. Finally, people in

the ethnic-Canadian group (e.g., Afghan-Canadians) had the highest scores for separation, which meant that they rejected Canadian culture in favour of their natal culture.

Although I was not interested in assessing the degree to which women identified with the mainstream culture, it would have been interesting to explore further the strength of each woman's ties to her named identities, and also to consider generational issues. In addition to the findings described above, Tonks and Parajpe (1999) also discovered that the recency of immigrant experience (first- or second-generation) impacted the acculturative styles of individuals, where first-generation immigrants more often held on to their traditional culture, while Canadian-born (second-generation) individuals preferred the integration of Canadian and traditional cultures.

Further, understanding the degree to which individuals identified to the cultural and ethnic groups they named may help us understand more about identities within a multicultural Canadian context. In any case, the notion of multiculturalism and colour often arose when women discussed their identities, as evidenced by comments such as "I only became multicultural once I came to Canada" and "multiculturalism refers to people that are not white" (both of these are paraphrased). Regardless, Tonks and Paranjpe assert that multiculturalism policies do appear to nurture a variety of acculturative strategies and provide possibilities for very diverse identities in Canada.

The fact that women work to fit into a framework of diversity was reflected in the ways they spoke about appropriate roles for women in the organization, as well as uniting and divisive issues. When asked about "appropriate" or "suitable" roles for immigrant and Canadian-born women within the organization, participants were quick to name

general attributes (e.g., understanding, intuition, fluency in English), but were less able to talk about anything “cultural,” save for an emphasis on diversity. After the first few interviews, the responses I received to questions about roles made me wonder whether I was looking for responses differing among cultural or ethnic lines where there were not any to begin with. Since analyzing the data in its entirety, however, I have come to realize that women had opinions on these matters, but that they were reluctant to disclose them.

Conceivably, sharing a common identity of Canadian-ness makes women’s work smoother. As general diversity was valued a great deal in the organization, perhaps Canadian-born and immigrant women constructed themselves to balance out their “ethnicity” and their “Canadian-ness,” which could account for the order in which they identified as Canadian. Immigrants, particularly visible minority immigrants, are not permitted by mainstream white Canadian society to neglect their cultural/ethnic otherness. Held up to a white norm, visible minority individuals are consistently asked about their background or where they came from (Bissoondath, 1994; James, 1999).

Finally, women’s common identities of Canadian-ness could be seen as a way that they have learned to “fit in” to their work with each other, as could be the ways they focused on diversity but not difference. In the next section, I will focus on these and other ways that women attempted to “fit in” so that they may work together in the organization.

Women’s work to “fit in”: A summary of the discussion

According to my interviews with the women and the organizational data, one of the main features of women’s work together have been the measures they have taken to fit in. In the context of this particular organization, “fitting in” meant that the women

emphasized commonalities and swerved away from critical and political analyses, particularly around notions of colour, power and privilege. In addition, women within this organization adopted mainstream society's "liberal" view of multiculturalism, which celebrated women's diversity, but did not make room for a deeper understanding of the differences between individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. As such, ethnically and culturally diverse women tended to work together as "Canadians," and swept aside their differences or challenges.

The organization was also discussed in relation to its influence upon women's work together, as well as the way it positioned itself within greater Canadian society. As a space where diversely-identified women in fact have worked together in relative harmony for over 15 years, the organization itself has had to adopt some of the values of mainstream culture to evade its own marginalization. At the same time as the organization remains highly functional and holds a widely-valued position in the community, the women in its midst do struggle, albeit privately. Though the women *are* working together, they sometimes feel compromised, tokenized, and threatened as a result of their skin colour and their personal experience with immigration.

Further, the effect of the macro-level upon the micro-level was evidenced through the vast array of literature from feminists, psychologists, and sociologists on racism, the insufficiency of multiculturalism, and "identity politics" (e.g., Bissoondath, 1994; Giroux, 1993; James, 1999; Kalbach & Kalbach, 1999; Rosaldo, 1993). Visible minority women contributing to the literature, including the participants from this research, affirm that white women need to acknowledge, rather than overlook these forces. Given their observable difference from the mainstream white Canadian norm, visible minority

women are hard-pressed to claim ignorance about “differences,” as their experiences of differences are personal, and, as we have heard through this research, profuse.

Though it is important to effect change on a large scale through modifications in policies, governments, and protocols, I *am* a community psychologist and a feminist, first and foremost, and given these overlapping points of reference, I am convinced that the impetus for change moves from the bottom (individuals) upwards (to systems) (Chavis, 2000; Dalton et al., 2001). In the following few paragraphs, I will reflect upon some of the practical things that women may do generally to work together to recognize differences in power, privilege, and colour. Lastly, I will comment on the contributions of this research and directions that could be incorporated into future research.

a) Applications of women’s work together in the “real world”

As I learned from this research, it is important that all of us create situations in which notions of our differences, and the multiplicities of our identities can be acknowledged and discussed. Williams (1999) notes a concern that arises around difference, which is “how to acknowledge [them] within groups without losing the potential to mobilize around commonality...” (p. 225). It seems important that white mainstream Canadians work through our defensiveness, so that we may first hear and then act upon what women who are traditionally considered “other” are saying. If we are to criticize multiculturalism, we must at the same time consider our own influence in perpetuating the ways in which it is currently enacted, as Edwards (1996) has similarly said about feminists participating in the women’s movement. As we have seen in the literature, without addressing things that are often deemed impolite, unpleasant, or uncomfortable (like colour, racism, oppression), women will continue to speak to those

others to whom they are most similar (Marlatt, 1990; Mohanty, 1994). Not only is this affinity for sameness an impediment to the realization of a critical multiculturalism, it will only make women's work together increasingly difficult.

Many of the issues cited by women in this study were also reflected in the literature. In regards to women working together, findings by feminist and other critical researchers on race, culture, and ethnicity reflected on the marginalization of visible minority women (Bishop, 1994; Hurtado, 1997; Lucas et al., 1995; Narayan, 1997; Ng, 1996; Weenie, 2000; Williams, 1999; Yeatman, 1993; Yee & Dumbrell, 2003), the need for women to acknowledge the significance of skin colour, including whiteness (Ferguson, 2000; hooks, 1989, 1990, 1992; James, 1999; Kitzinger et al, 1996; Schutte, 2000), and the importance of allowing and including a multiplicity of social locations and identities (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Kogawa, 1990; Maracle, 1990; Razack, 1999; Reinhartz, 1992; Warland, 1990).

Though participants in fact did refer to these things, what was striking was their discomfort with the language and words that were used in the literature to describe them. As was aforementioned, notions of power, privilege, and colour were not used by the organization either. As language is a way in which we transform and make sense of our experiences (Giroux, 1993), the inadequacy of the language that addresses the dynamics of women working together is problematic.

Sometimes it is hard to strike a balance between being an activist or a theorist and doing the actual work in the field. For me, this tension between activism and practicality often centres around language struggles or adherence to ideologies. At this point in my life, I am less a stickler for labels than I am for the action behind it. For instance, in the

queer community, endless disputes rage about the labels chosen by woman-loving women – for instance, being bisexual somehow makes someone “less queer” than women who identify as lesbians. Though I understand the need for categories and distinctive identities, the labels or terms we use do not particularly matter to me. Similarly, I am not especially attached to the discourses of power, privilege, and colour-blindness, as long as we address the ideological issues that underlie them.

Regarding language, I believe that we either need to (1) work to create new language, (2) reclaim and redefine existing language and words, or (3) address the matters of colour, racism, power, and privilege without using words that trigger “fight or flight” reactions. As an example of this third option, B.C.-based psychologist Linda Hill (1998, 2001) has designed a process for “building bridges across differences” and “moving from exclusion to inclusion,” and has applied it to a wide variety of groups and communities, including children, youth, mental health consumers, differently-abled people, and the Deaf. I had the honour of attending such an “Inclusive Leadership Adventure” workshop in May 2003. I was struck by people’s eagerness to learn and talk about power inequities, feminist principles of discrimination, racism, intolerances, imbalances in privilege, and differences. Apart from the fact that she is an amazing facilitator, educator, and human being, I believe that much of Linda’s success is due to her re-framing of these issues using notions of inclusion/exclusion, rather than speaking about power and privilege using those words.

Further, I think that an anti-oppressive framework has exciting implications for women working together across cultural and ethnic differences, given that it acknowledges the ways in which we are marginalized, yet can marginalize others

(Bishop, 1994; Razack, 1999; Williams, 1999). When used critically, it can also address power as an inequity, rather than as “zero-sum,” which implies that the amount of power one group possesses lessens the power of other groups (Davis, 1991, as cited in Onyx, 1999; Williams, 1999).

In describing her work on developing an anti-oppressive approach within her university classroom, Razack (1999) notes that “of critical importance are efforts to ensure that, rather than organizing oppressions into hierarchies, [we] recognize the unique experiences of different groups, and the intensities of each oppression through an understanding of historical and socio-political climates” (p. 237). Although there will be tensions, the job of the facilitator/teacher is “to *promot[e] dialogue* and shifts towards change” (p. 237, emphasis mine).

In addition, anti-oppressive practice seems informative for conducting feminist analyses, as it “enables us to think about power beyond dominance and subordination, and so explore[s] the potential for active restructuring of power relations” (Onyx, 1999, p. 420). Though anti-oppressive practice itself has been condemned for its appropriation of the knowledge of oppressed groups “whilst still retaining the power to determine just what it is that counts as ‘anti-oppressive’” (Wilson & Beresford, 2000, p. 565), I find the notion of simultaneously “being an oppressor” and “being oppressed” useful and promising to the examination of women working across differences.

An approach that is similar to one of anti-oppressiveness is that of *diversity-mindfulness*, which Russo and Vaz (2001) describe as “the process of perceiving and processing a multiplicity of differences among individuals, their social contexts, and their cultures...from a feminist perspective [diversity-mindfulness] incorporates the feminist

values of diversity, egalitarianism, and inclusiveness into critical analyses” (p. 281).

Although diversity-mindfulness does not mean that every possible dimension of diversity should be considered, it seems to emphasize an openness to differences among and between people, an appreciation of different perspectives, a general valuing of difference and respect for others, and the recognition that each of us are concurrent subjects and objects (as discussed in Greene & Sánchez-Hucles, 1997; Russo & Vaz, 2001).

b) Contributions, limitations, and directions for future research

Strengths of the current study

As a woman researcher, the very act of conducting this study has been a living, breathing example of working together with other women. I followed in the footsteps of many feminist researchers in the ways I conceptualized my own role as a white researcher, particularly to address the inequities experienced by research participants, the construction of whiteness as “the norm,” and the insidious imbalances of power (e.g., Alcoff, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Schutte, 2000; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). In addition, the description of my process will allow future researchers to carry out similar work.

As the “how” of women’s work together across cultural and ethnic differences has not been explored by community psychologists or feminists, I have worked to describe *features* of my research that were consistent with or divergent from the literature of each, though I have no studies for direct comparison. Because the topic of my thesis has not really been studied before and discussions of diversity are often omitted from the community psychology literature, this research is an important contribution.

In addition, the little documented overlap between community psychology and feminism that does exist was an incentive to be mindful of how I integrated my feminist and community psychology principles, methodologies, and research approaches. In particular, I wanted to provide community psychologists with a template for “walking the walk” of critical, feminist and post-colonial research, both to encourage further interdisciplinary endeavours, but also as other examples of actions undertaken to assert a respect for diversity and social justice (see Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). Further, as many of the values of feminism and community psychology are intertwined, I hope that this research and its methodology may be taken up by some of my colleagues in community psychology, so that I may look to journals in our subdiscipline and actually find evidence of the overlap of our interests in this area.

Given the pride of Canadians in regards to our “tolerance” of a variety of ethnicities, cultures, and races, I would hope that the impressions of multiculturalism cited by the women I interviewed in this study would be of great interest to a variety of people. This research also has valuable implications for individuals working in other immigrant organizations and may be able to lend some insight about the kinds of roles women from particular ethnic and cultural groups could play (e.g., staff, Board, volunteer, and leadership roles). Finally, I hope that my findings encourage dialogue across differences, and inspire groups of people to work at redefining “difference as being different,” rather than “difference as something bad.”

Suggestions for improvement

As a socialist feminist studying the notion of women’s work, the absence of social class in my analyses of colour, privilege, and power was a serious oversight, which I

attribute to my own lack of work in examining the impact of my own middle-class identity. Although I skimmed the surface of a socialist feminist analysis of class by *acknowledging* the challenges of difference in race, class, and sexuality (see Adamson et al., 1988, Glucksmann, 1994; Hamilton, 1993; Ng, 1993), I did not discuss the role of the state, the sexual division of labour, or deconstruct my own assumptions around class. According to some of the classic works on the intersections of gender, class and race (e.g., Armstrong & Armstrong, 1994; Davis, 1983), separating class from gender, sexual orientation, and race is superficial and inadequate.

A class analysis would not only have benefited the research, but would have been more consistent with a socialist feminist identity. In retrospect, I did not subject my social class to the same scrutiny as I did my cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. Further, by not examining the class of my participants, it could be said that I was assuming a degree of sameness among us that may not have existed. As class is another expression of "...a process whereby people construct and alter their relationships to the productive/reproductive forces of society" (Ng, 1993, p. 202), knowing and analyzing the social class of my participants would have enriched the context of my findings.

Another improvement to the study could have been made around the design of the interview questions. For instance, additional questions that would have clarified my focus within this research are: Do you identify with mainstream Canadian culture? Who is Canadian? Who is an immigrant? Though I did develop my questions in partnership with the ED, and also shared the resulting questions with a variety of people (my classmates, my partner, my advisor), further collaboration with my participants may have accounted for these oversights.

Although I would not consider my small sample size a weakness, I was often speaking about individuals. In future research, a greater number of participants would increase the ability to transfer the findings of this research to other groups of women, and would also lend more strength to my findings in relation to colour and experience with immigration.

X) Conclusion

Though it has been challenging and at times, immobilizing, the way in which I situated myself within this critical, feminist, post-colonialist research as a white, queer, middle-class English-speaking, Canadian woman is a considerable contribution to the literature, as well as to understanding how this woman-researcher was able to work with “other” women. Through the journey of this research project, I have come to believe that there *is* space for me to work with women who are culturally and ethnically “other” than I, and that I do not need to be ashamed of my whiteness in order to conduct work that is valuable. My white skin, identification with mainstream Canadian culture, and my inexperience with immigration do not disqualify me from working with visible minority or immigrant women in Canada – they simply exclude me from understanding personally their experiences of marginality. In addition, I have come to understand that the critical ways in which I acknowledged, spoke about, and recognized our experiential, power, and colour differences are appreciated by women who have been marginalized by women like me in the past.

Further, although this thesis tackled a “micro-level” issue, my findings on women’s work together potentially influence *every* woman in Canada, who each day necessarily work with other culturally and ethnically diverse women. Only when

individual women become mobilized and begin to abandon their monologues in favour of dialogues across differences of colour, power, and privilege will the ascent toward societal change begin.

Appendix A
Summary of the Mission, Vision, Values and Principles

The organization believes in working with women holistically, which includes addressing a variety of needs (e.g., emotional, mental, physical, social, etc.). In this way, women become empowered with a healthy sense of self.

As immigrant and visible minority women must overcome many barriers in their adjustment to Canadian society, which include but are not limited to racism, heritage, language, and skin colour, the organization aims to facilitate their participation in Canadian society. This is done through cooperation amongst Board members, funders, staff, community members, and the women who use the programmes/services.

The organization sees all women as worthy and capable, regardless of her sexual orientation, ability, race, colour, religion, heritage, and culture. Each women's hopes for her community, her family and herself are considered important, and the organization will support her growth and economic progress. Finally, the organization strives to encourage the development of skills, the furthering of education, and successful employment for women, and hopes to increase access to various services for the families of immigrant and visible minority women (e.g., social, employment, recreational, etc.)

Appendix B
Interview Guides

a) Interview Guide for [Organization's] Staff, Volunteers, and Board Members

1. Tell me what you do. How long have you done this?
2. What brought you to this work? How did you become interested?
3. How do you identify ethnically/culturally?
4. What do you think are appropriate roles for immigrant women working/volunteering for [this organization]?
5. What are appropriate roles for Canadian-born women working/volunteering [here]? Are there things that they shouldn't do?
6. In carrying out your work, are there any times where it doesn't matter who plays what role? (for instance: Who should teach English classes? Who should run things? Who should do job skills training? Who should work reception? Who shouldn't? Why?)
7. How did you come to an understanding about these roles? (e.g., was this behaviour modelled to you, did you grow up thinking this way, did you read something?)
8. In your experience, what are the challenges to doing work in collaboration with people who are not from your culture?
9. In your experience with [this organization] (on the board, as a volunteer, as staff), have there been any divisive issues? How were they dealt with?
10. Were there any uniting issues? Why were they uniting?
11. How do you think we should 'welcome' New Canadians to Canada?
12. When you first arrived in Canada, what made you feel welcome? Who did things that made you feel welcome?*
13. What does tolerance mean to you? How do you teach women about Canadian life without imposing your own morals or interpretations of what is correct and incorrect?
14. What does multiculturalism mean to you?

* Only applicable to those volunteers, staff and Board members who are not native to Canada

b) Interview Guide for Programme Participants

1. What do you think are appropriate roles for immigrant women working/volunteering for [this organization]? Are they doing it? Why or why not?
2. What are appropriate roles for Canadian-born women working/volunteering [here]? What are things that they shouldn't do?
3. Are there any times where it doesn't matter who plays what role? (for instance, in your opinion: Who should teach English classes? Who should be the Executive Director? Who should do job skills training? Who should work reception? Who shouldn't? Why?)
4. How do you identify ethnically/culturally?
5. In your experience, what are the challenges to working with people who are not from your culture?
6. How do you think we should 'welcome' New Canadians to Canada?
7. When you first arrived in Canada, what made you feel welcome? Who did things that made you feel welcome? What didn't make you feel welcome?
8. What does multiculturalism mean to you? Do you think Canada is a multicultural country?

Appendix C
Participant Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Kristi Kemp, and some of you may know me as a volunteer here at [the organization] with [a particular group at the organization]. I just want to take a couple minutes and tell you a little bit about why I'm here today.

I am a Master's student at Wilfrid Laurier University, and am writing a thesis this year. Because I enjoy doing work with women across different cultures, I thought that [this organization] may be a good place to concentrate my research. I know that [this organization] has been around for many years and has helped many immigrant women with their settlement to Canada. I also know that [the organization] draws women from many different cultures and ethnic groups into its staff, Board, and volunteers. I am interested in learning how all of these different women are able to work together in an organization serving immigrant women.

From my own experience, I know that our culture or ethnic identities can fluctuate. For example, I am have Métis status, but have grown up in such a way that I feel more white than Aboriginal. This could change, once I have learned more about this part of my heritage. Some of you may have been born in Canada but may feel more connected to the culture of your parents, and others of you may have been born somewhere else and feel more Canadian. Or maybe you feel a part of several cultures. I am also interested in how your cultural or ethnic identities – whatever they may be – play into the work that you do here at [organization].

I know that you have many things in common – for example, you are concerned about immigrant women's settlement, you enjoy working with diverse people, and you are caring – but are any of your challenges you face due to cultural differences? I would really like to hear about these experiences too.

I am hoping to do a few interviews with you – among staff, Board members, users of your programmes, and some volunteers. This is a list of the questions I want to ask [hand out questions to each person in room]. You don't need to tell me now whether you are interested – I know that's a lot of pressure! I've included my number and email address at the bottom of the list of questions, and I invite you to give me a call with any questions or to let me know if you are interested. Participation is voluntary and will occur with the utmost confidentiality. Your name will not be used in the thesis, nor will I tell [the ED] anyone else here whether you participated.

I thank you very much for your time and hope to hear from you soon. Are there any questions?

Appendix D
Informed Consent for Interview

Dear Participant,

Please read the following information very carefully, and indicate your consent for participation by signing at the bottom of the page. If you do NOT sign this form, I will not include your experiences in my thesis project.

To fulfill requirements for a Master's degree in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, I am doing a thesis entitled "Bridging the Gap Between Ethnically/Culturally Diverse "Others": A Contribution to the Understanding of How Women Work Together." For part of this thesis project, I am interviewing eight women – volunteers, staff, Board Members, and some of the women who use [the organization's] programmes – to explore how culturally diverse women affiliated with the organization work together. The purpose of my project is to understand how an individual's cultural identification influences their work with those of their own culture, and those of other cultures.

I invite you to participate in this interview with the following understanding:

- ★ This voluntary interview will last for a maximum of 1.5 hours, and will be audiotaped. It will also be kept confidential. For the duration of this project, the tape will be kept in a locked drawer in my home. Following this project, this tape will be destroyed, as will be the transcript of the interview.
- ★ Your personal name will not be used in this project, nor will be any information directly traceable to you. All attempts will be made to keep your identity unknown to the reader.
- ★ You are under no obligation to participate in this interview, will receive no reimbursement for doing so. You may withdraw any time without explanation or penalty.
- ★ You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to.
- ★ You are free to inform me of things you said that you do NOT want transcribed or recorded.
- ★ You will receive a copy of your transcripts to edit before I submit the assignment to my thesis advisor/committee. If any direct quotations from you are used in the final thesis, you will be consulted and given the opportunity to withdraw them.
- ★ Finally, [the organization] will receive a bound copy of this thesis in the fall of 2003. If so desired, you will receive a summary of my findings at this time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this interview after we have spoken, do not hesitate to call me at _____ You may also

contact my thesis advisor, Anne Westhues, at _____ at _____

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions on this form, or your rights as a participant have been violated during the course of the project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University at _____

Thank you very much for your help and valuable contribution to my thesis.

Kristi Kemp
Community Psychology Program, Wilfrid Laurier University

I sign below to indicate my consent to participate in an interview to explore my experiences of how my cultural identification impacts my work with those of my own culture, and those of "other" cultures.

_____	_____
Name	Date
_____	_____
Witness	Date

Appendix E
Recruitment Poster for Volunteers

[organization's logo in colour here]

IF YOU'RE A VOLUNTEER AT [organization]... I'D LOVE TO TALK TO YOU!!!

My name is Kristi Kemp, and I am another volunteer here at [the organization]. I used to be with [a particular group on a particular weekday], but now I'm helping [staff member] in her [class]. I am also doing my Master's degree in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, and am writing my thesis this year. The topic I am interested in exploring is how our cultural/ethnic identities impact the ways we work with women from "other" cultures or ethnic groups.

I hope to interview 11 women associated with [organization] in different ways: staff, board members, women who participate in [organization's] programmes, and two volunteers. I have completed five interviews already, which have taken (on average) an hour long in a location that is comfortable to the participants. Your participation is 100% voluntary, and I will not use your name, nor will I let anyone know whether you do or do not want to do the interview. Attached to this flier is an envelope containing copies of the questions I want to ask, and the informed consent form I am using. Please do look at them to help you decide whether or not you're interested.

If you *are* interested, thank you! You can email me at _____, or give me a call at home at _____. There is an answering machine at this number, and you are free to leave any messages or questions (I will be the only one checking it) in addition to your name and contact information. I look forward to hearing from you!

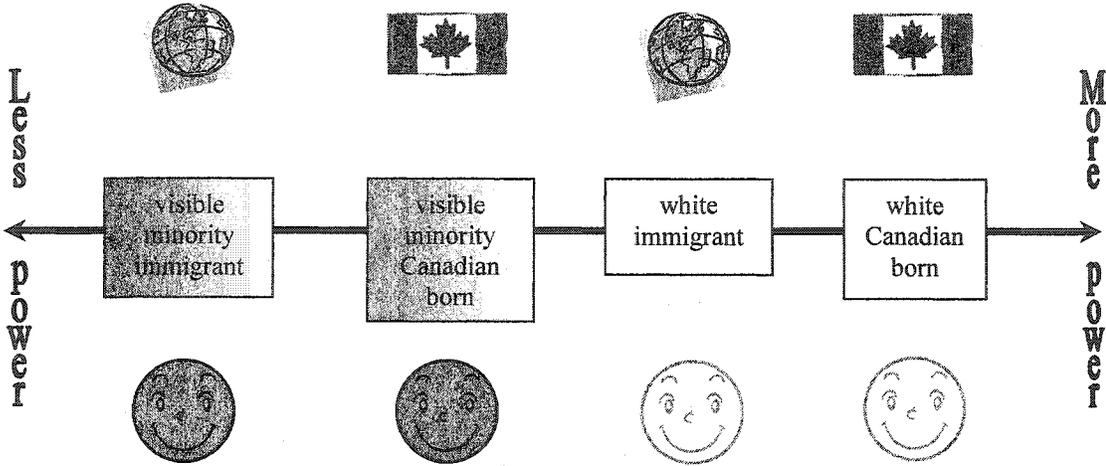
Appendix F
Agreement of Confidentiality with Transcription Assistant

To ensure that this transcription work remains ethical, I, _____,
agree to hold all names and information from the taped interviews and transcripts in strict
confidence.

Signature of transcription assistant

Date

Appendix G
The Continuum of Privilege



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