IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND THEIR WORK IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN TORONTO: IMPACTS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract
This research examines the everyday experiences of immigrant women working informally in the City of Toronto (Canada). The study is based on analysis of original in depth interview (n = 27) and focus group data (n = 19). The thesis begins from the belief that the choice of highly educated immigrant women, with and without professional work experiences from their home countries, to do informal work in Canada is part of a fact that they are going through a particularly intensive process of change. With special attention to the potential for critical transformative learning (e.g. Mezirow; Freire) – how this change is produced, experienced, and addressed is the key focus in this study. The study considers three avenues of experience potentially influencing change in the lives of immigrant women post-immigration: i) the ways of knowing, frames of reference, and worldviews of these women as shaped by the complex relationship between their private (e.g. as mothers and wives) and public (e.g. as community members and informal product/service workers) lives; ii) the various economic and cultural
relations and shifting locations that mediate how the individual makes choices regarding (formal and/or informal) work activities; and, iii) the social relations shaping the changing experiences and interpretations of interlocking systems of power relations involving gender, race, class and disability.

Agentive participation and learning in the context of economic participation are key in understanding women’s choices, experiences, and outcomes in the context of their work and life experiences in Canada. This study reveals the multidimensional, often contradictory, processes of change that individuals in marginalized situations post-immigration go through and their awareness of and influence over these change processes. The analysis suggests a multilayered process that supports and sometimes inhibits the creation of a new foundation for various types of transformative learning trajectories; one that keeps the loose threads together and moves people towards and along a path they individually or collectively choose to follow in order to find meaning and realize positive change.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action (Freire, 1970, p.122).

My doctoral research focuses on Asian immigrant women (from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China) in terms of their everyday lives and their activity as informal workers in Toronto. Notwithstanding my own background as an immigrant from India arriving in Canada (via the United States), in many ways the underpinning of my thesis journey began when I started interacting with these women and learned of the life-altering changes some of them were going through post-immigration. This was at a period of time when I started doing community development work in a downtown neighbourhood of Toronto where a large number of residents are immigrants from Asia. I have observed during the period that I worked with the community the degree to which, after transnational migration, people encounter drastic changes in all aspects of their everyday life. In my work with the women in the community, I also learned that, although the changes appear negative and disadvantageous, not all changes should be viewed or counted as negative. In fact, in some cases, changes made people think of their own perceptions, values systems and worldviews in contrast to their experiences of other people, family, community and service systems, and other societies that they came in touch with. The disadvantages of immigration, in other words, produced opportunities for a variety of critical, transformative moments of learning. My particular interest
is in women’s work, and the way immigration impacted their lives, as well as the way immigrant women navigated their everyday life/work processes, in combination with these initial experiences in the community, are what led me to this research.

What we will see going forward is that this thesis begins from the belief that highly educated immigrant women, often with prior professional work experiences from their home countries, find themselves doing informal work in Canada. And, I argue this is an indicator of the fact that they are going through a particularly intensive and complex process of change. How this change is produced, experienced, and addressed is a central concern in this study. The study considers three avenues of experience potentially influencing change in the lives of immigrant women post-immigration: i) the ways of knowing, frames of reference, and worldviews of these women as shaped by the complex relationship between their private (e.g. as mothers and wives) and public (e.g. as community members and informal product/service workers) lives; ii) the various economic and cultural relations and shifting locations that mediate how the individual makes decisions regarding (formal and/or informal) work activities; and, iii) the social relations shaping the changing experiences and interpretations of interlocking systems of power relations involving gender, race, class and (dis)ability.

Thus, in this dissertation I show how learning in the context of alternative forms of economic participation may be quite central to understanding women’s choices, experiences, and outcomes in the context of their new life in a major Canadian urban center more broadly. Specifically, this study speaks to the multidimensional, often contradictory, processes of change that individuals in marginalized situations post-immigration go through and their awareness of and influence over these change processes. The analysis suggests a multilayered process that supports and
sometimes inhibits the creation of a new foundation for various types of transformative learning trajectories; a process that keeps the loose threads together and moves people towards and along a path they individually or collectively decide to follow in order to find new meanings in their lives, and through this realize positive change. Over the course of my analysis, I pay special attention to several specific areas of immigrant women’s lives. The main questions that lead this research are:

- Why do immigrant women often work in the informal sector and does this work enhance or marginalize their position in the household and community? How does work in the informal sector shape women’s roles in the family and society?

- What barriers and opportunities for personal and social transformation emerge from immigrant women’s work in the informal sector?

While grounding my research in these two main questions, I also tried to find answers to a number of sub questions in order to help me clarify my thoughts and enhance the process of field research. There were four themes that prompted me to develop these questions: 1) the influence of immigrant experiences on women’s worldviews and perceptions of self and society, 2) social relations and economic situations of immigrants that reinforce change, 3) informal work not just as a basis of survival, but also as an entry point of learning, and change, and its outcomes and impacts on workers, in this case immigrant women, and 4) the necessary conditions for a transformative learning experience for people living on the margins or whose life conditions are altered by transnational migration, war, or other significant life changes.

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1Some of these questions are explored further in the coming chapters.
The main three concepts that will lead the analysis of this study are agency, social relations, and transformative learning. Drawing from insights offered by a range of theoretical and methodological approaches suited to the topic – including anti-racist feminism, concept of social network, institutional ethnography, narrative inquiry, methods from the margins, and so on – this qualitative research aims to faithfully represent the voice of women who volunteered to participate in this study to arrive at observations about their learning lives that have, I argue, been under-appreciated in the research literature.

The changes examined in this study revolve around women’s worldviews, cultural and/or religious practices, as well as their perception of gender roles, class status and work. By contextualizing the process of change in the realm of transformative learning approaches, I am attempting to explain some of the contradictions and gaps that exist in the current theory, which makes it hard to capture the multidimensional aspect of change that occurs in the lives of people, especially people’s lives that are altered by transnational migration, disability, war, natural calamity, and so on. The ultimate purpose of this study is to understand the possibilities of individual and social transformation and the way everyday life and work experiences impact highly educated immigrant women, and how their local experiences are coordinated by the extra-local elements of capitalism, neoliberalism, cultural imperialism, patriarchy, class, gender, and ethnicity. In focusing this study in this way, I argue the research will aid in our understanding of how a certain cross-section of immigrant women are responding to the social situations in which they find themselves, and the way they negotiate their new roles, spaces, and individual and collective identities in Canada.
The above comments mean to preview the type of findings and conclusions I will be drawing over the course of the thesis. For the remainder of this chapter, I offer a brief overview of immigration issues and some basic facts that help to situate the immigrant women we meet in this study while also introducing the topic of informal/cash work. Then, I offer some initial comments on learning viewed through a transformative lens. Further on, I provide a brief outline of my methods, and then conclude this opening chapter with a chapter-by-chapter guide/synopsis. But first, in order to help the reader more easily navigate the body of this introductory chapter (as well as the thesis as a whole), I would like to begin by offering just a few basic comments on some of the key terms and phrases I will be using.

**Usage of Key Terms and Phrases**

As an initial sub-section of this introduction, I feel it is necessary to offer some preliminary comments about my use of specific terms, descriptors, words and phrases in the research. While the term *immigrant* is socially and politically constructed and has implications for people based on their race, class, and ethnicity (see e.g. Guo, 2009; Li, 2003), my use of the terms “immigrant women” or “immigrant” (unless otherwise stated) is used to mean a subgroup of this category, that is, a woman of colour who has family origins from Asia, not necessarily their current legal status (The construction of the term ‘immigrant’ is further explored in Chapter Two). In a later part of this chapter, I contextualize the immigrant population in Canada by providing some statistical and economic reviews. I can also add here that, in connection to my use of the terms immigrants and immigrant women, the words “community” and “neighbourhood” are used interchangeably. In both cases, they refer to the geographical space in which immigrant women live, create their networks, perform their work and related activities, and their primary social
space where their public life is shared and shaped by their everyday experience of interaction with others.

The term, *gendered work* in this study is used to denote specific activities that are deemed traditionally female-oriented and which are performed by women (e.g. in Arnot, 1985; Mackie & Pattullo, 1977; Richardson, 1972; Yeandle, 1984; MacDowell, 2009; Luxton 1980 & 2001). My use of the term “women of colour and culture” in this study indicates Asian immigrant women and their cultural perceptions. While acknowledging Asia is the largest continent in the world with great diversity of countries and cultures, I use the term “Asian immigrant” to refer to my research participants, who come from China, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Again, more detail on the background of the research subjects will appear later in the thesis.

Under the umbrella term *informal sector*, a broad range of work activities takes place in different spaces and locations (ILO, 2002). In this research, the term “informal work” is used to describe cash in hand work that is either community- or home-based. In keeping with most of the literature on the topic, cash work and informal work will be used synonymously, the same going for cash sector and informal sector. More detailed definitions of these terms are given in chapter two, where I provide a proper overview of informal sector work and some of the key literature that has looked at it.

In the most general sense the notion of *mainstream* means “the ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional” in any given society, place or culture (Oxford dictionaries, 2014). The concept of *mainstream* is used in this thesis to highlight one of the phases of change people intentionally go through, or want to go through, as part of the
process of settling in the new country. The same is applicable to the notion of integration.

Critiques, such as Li’s (2003) posit that in general, successful integration assumes becoming like white Canadians or obliging to the expectation of conformity to the dominant values of the host society and it is a reality many immigrants face (Guo, 2010, 2013; Maitra, 2011). This thesis analyzed it as part of a very complex process where integration and joining the mainstream represent broader interconnected issues; however, it may be a learning point for the individual.

For the purpose of this thesis, transformation is examined as a paradigm shift in an individual’s personal and social life. I discuss this as being influenced by numerous external factors (e.g. gender, class, ethnicity, religion and culture, capitalism, patriarchy, and transnational migration).

Closely linked with this treatment of the idea of transformation - “social” and “social relations” in this thesis refers to the everyday activities of people coordinated by various power-infused complex relationships (e.g. Wilmot, 2011), and involves an appreciation of an individual and their relationship to the ‘other’ (a person or structure) that produces or reproduces power dynamics in their individual and social lives.

In this thesis, the use of the term contradiction is used dialectically. There is an everyday usage of the term contradiction and Ollman (1993), provides a dialectical definition of it.

Of the five movements found in contradiction, the two most important ones are the movements of mutual support and mutual understanding. Pulling in opposite directions, each of these movements exercises a constant, if not even or always evident, pressure on events. The uneasy equilibrium that results lasts until one or the other of these movements predominates (p. 51).

As Sawchuk (2015) argues, the stake for recognizing the contradiction involves an admission of our understanding of the nature of change, and in this thesis the exploration begins with the
nature of change that immigrant women go through in different areas of their everyday life. According to Engestrom & Sannino (2011), there are four main discursive manifestations of contradictions, namely “dilemmas”, “conflicts”, “critical conflicts” and “double binds”. Engestrom’s discussion of contradiction helps point out the ways in which change is experienced, the different responses to change and the potential for learning occurring through this process. Therefore, the word contradiction in this thesis is not used as to determine a person’s capacity to change or to challenge their understanding of it, but as a means to showcase the complexity of the process and the tension it produces.

Building on these brief, opening comments, this thesis makes inquiries into the possibilities and challenges to individual and social transformation for immigrant women in Toronto. However, three overarching categories discussed from the everyday lives of immigrant women of this study are: everyday experience, process of change, and informal work post-immigration.

**Overview of the Situation of the Immigrant Woman Worker in Urban Canada**

Transnational migration is one of the common features of the neo-liberal era, where, at least in the first instance, labour power and skills seem to play an increasingly important role in people choosing to migrate and gaining access to settlement in other countries (Pyle, 2006). As part of the introductory back-drop to this thesis we should note that more than 1.2 million people arrived

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2 “Dilemmas” are traditionally studied in social psychology as means for understanding processes of decisions making, moral reasoning, social representations and ideologies. “Conflicts” take the form of resistance, disagreement, argument and criticism. “Critical conflicts” are situations in which people face inner doubts that paralyze them in front of contradictory motives unsolvable by the subject alone “Double binds” are processes in which actors repeatedly face pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in their activity system, with seemingly no way out (Engestrom & Sannino, 2011, p. 373-374)
in Canada between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009) and another 1.2 million foreign born population arrived between 2006 and 2011 (HRSDC, 2011). Between these two periods the majority of immigrants came from Asia (58.3% and 56.9% respectively) and more than half of the immigrants were women. We can also note that 93% of this population settled in urban centers, mainly in Canada’s three major cities, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (68.9%), with 40.4% of these immigrants settled in Toronto specifically (HRSDC, 2011).

The majority of these immigrants came through the skilled/economic category and, according to an Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada report (2012), 63% of all immigrants are from Asian countries. The criteria by which skilled category\(^3\) immigrants are selected indicate that they are highly educated and participated in formal employment before their arrival in Canada. In 2009 alone, Canada accepted 77% of immigrants through the economic category.\(^4\) Out of those, 47.75% belonged to the skilled category (CIC, 2009). This data indicates that many immigrants to Canada are highly educated and skilled. However, much of the research on immigrant populations reveals that labour market outcomes for immigrants have remained quite poor. And, this in turn often leads them to look for other work options such, as contract, part-time, or precarious employment in lower-income jobs and, compared to men, women are more likely to tend towards these situations (Guo, 2010; Mirchandani, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Maitra, 2010, 2011; Ng, 1996; Vosko, 2009).

\(^3\) Skilled category immigrants are selected through a point system in which they get points for education, employment experience, language proficiency, and age

\(^4\) Economic category includes professionals and skilled workers, Canadian experienced workers, investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed persons
The fact is that women of colour who are over-represented in precarious work, and immigrant women who are excluded from the formal labour market, often are forced to find alternatives to supplement their income. Since many of the women working in the informal sector have families and children, sometimes the flexibility offered by precarious employment makes this an attractive option. I claim that an examination of the everyday experience of this process for Asian immigrant women - who are identified as a minority, person of colour, part of the growing precarious workforce, and situated in a particular class category in Canada - makes it imperative to study this population to try to understand and possibly articulate what is typically beyond the explainable and observable given the context.

Growth of precarious employment and the informal economy in developed countries in the last couple of decades indicates that labour market insecurity is prevalent in all parts of the world, with women being more vulnerable in these changing conditions (AHBRSC, 2004; Enste & Schneider, 2002; Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003; Smith, 2012). All informal work occurs outside the formal system of authority and it is therefore difficult to estimate its size in terms of participation or its impact on the economic system of a country (Enste & Schneider, 2002; Pigeon, 2004; AHBRSC, 2004; Reinhart, Job & Braithwaite, 2004). In Canada, the reason why the informal economy is an understudied area within the topic of precarious employment might be because, as Ghorayshi (2002) notes, in Canada, official labour statistics omit Canadians who work in the underground economy, whether legally or illegally.

The Link between Immigration, Informal Work and Alternative Choices by Women

Observations and literature reviews from developed nations indicate that poverty is the reason immigrants are attracted to informal work (HRSDC, 2006; May & Cooper, 2007; Phizacklea &
Wolkowitz, 1995). Literature on the informal economy reveals that people of all backgrounds get involved in informal activities for a variety of reasons (Carr & Chen, 2001; Losby et al., 2002; Marcelli, Williams & Jossart, 2010). In the case of urban Canadian immigrants, I claim this is likely not only their tool for survival, but is also a way in which they show (and develop) agency despite all the barriers they face within their environments. However, this has numerous outcomes for both men and women, who each tend to be affected differently. My thesis focuses on women’s work and how it shapes their experience. The rationale for exploring informal work and the experiences of women is that, I argue, it helps us unravel the extra-local elements, such as race, gender, and class influences in how the work decisions are made, that result in certain experiences and outcomes, and to helps us to see if there are other challenging, oppressive relations that co-exist with this work. In addition, I hope exploring everyday work experiences will support and generate women's political agency and give meaning to their various activities in the realm of informal work. This may also help to understand the transformative process/change that women go through when making choices and acting upon them, which in turn shapes their personal and public lives.

In raising this question of transformation however, it is important to recognize that women organize themselves in a variety of specific ways in the city and in their neighbourhoods. Some initiatives and choices are individually motivated and executed, and are derived from a desire to be active and to support one’s family. Some of these activities are forced upon the immigrant women I spoke to, by different elements of the social structures or other influences that direct them toward specific choices. In both cases, women change their personal priorities and needs for the sake of their families and for the community in order to foster their socio-economic survival in the city. What we will see in this research is that women often navigate these
situations and activities with great precision and diligence, as they consider every opportunity as allowing them to take a step closer to reaching their goal of establishing themselves and their families in Canada. This is important to explore as it helps to draw a picture of how and why certain decisions are made and creates room for understanding the types of action and changes that occur during the process. Another reason why this analysis is important is this will add further to the existing literature on the race, gender, and class representation of people working in the lower sector of the labour market in formal or informal work. The issues of class, gender, and race coupled with feminization of certain types of informal work and questions of what is considered work and what is counted as valued work, all come up in this study. In addition, the literature reviewed did not include much about the experience and subjectivity of the worker (in this case, women doing informal work for cash). While there are a number of studies looking at informal economies, only a few look at it from a woman's point of view and analyze women's work in the sector.

Although informal work can be found in the realms of home-based work, self-employment, and in precarious work in general, the reason I selected informal work as an analytical category in this study is because the way it is portrayed, and the circumstances in which it operates, makes it invisible. The fact that most of the work done by immigrant women takes place in their homes or in the immediate neighbourhood in close-knit circles contributes to this invisibility and makes their work unaccounted for by society or state. Therefore, their contributions to the wellbeing of families are not recognized, thus affecting their ability to negotiate power relations in and outside of their homes. Based on this, I also will explore whether informal work can be transformative in nature and whether current theories of transformation help understand these phenomena and experiences.
A Transformative Lens to Examine Process of Change and Learning

In this thesis, I present the forces of change, the experience of change and the dynamics of learning/praxis as simultaneous processes that are part of the everyday experience of immigrant life. As noted in the previous section, I posit informal work as one of the common option affecting the outcomes of everyday life experiences and as an important, under-studied avenue through which transformative learning is potentially supported. I use this particular work arrangement as a key example of a sphere of activity in which an individual’s capacity to transform their worldview is expanded. Furthermore, the context of this study helps to examine the conditions in which people implement their learning in their everyday life in relation to what I refer to as their distinctive social set ups. I make this proposition based on the notion that individual economic and civic lives are in constant interaction with each other, providing the bases for the formation of new experiences that, among other things, often challenge the individual’s perception of self and society. In other words, the importance of context and conditions in shaping the possibility for transformative action is significant in this inquiry. I also argue, and aim to unfold through my discussion of the data, that transformative learning is a multileveled process that may not appear as continuous and steady and may be quite contradictory, but which is both subtly and not-so-subtly coordinated nevertheless; and that, in this context the potential for learning and action in an individual’s life should not be overlooked, dismissed or otherwise discounted simply based on the enormity of the barriers that their current social and economic reality present. In this sense I point towards the potential transformative learning that lies in the engagement of the individual with the social/economic, and vice versa.

Another important aspect of transformative learning in this thesis lies in the concept of what is considered successful integration in the immigrant discourse in Canada. We see that, for
example, the four key areas for successful integration identified in a Canadian government report are, (I) finding employment, (ii) getting education, (iii) access to health care, and (iv) getting housing (Xue, 2007/2011). Of course, this type of list speaks to the notion that having access to basic necessities of life is critical and should be treated as the right of all people (UN, 2012). According to Xue’s report (2007/2011) however, although after several years of being in Canada, immigrant life gets better in all these four areas, immigrants still lag behind in these basic needs compared to their Canadian-born counterparts. However, According to Li (2003) there is a normative ideology behind the immigrant integration discourse in Canada that nominally endorses diversity, but specific cultural differences, especially those deemed to be far removed from the Canadian standard, are seen as obstacle to integration.

What is equally important to note is that basic material necessities are not the only measure of integration: the idea of mainstream culture and one’s relationship to it is deeply rooted in this notion of integration as well. In fact, in Canadian immigration discourse, “integration” also refers to the desirable way by which immigrants should become members of the host society and their success depends on their human capital (Li, 2003; Li & Li, 2013). However, what is viewed as appropriate and acceptable – and by whose definition – remains vague and contradictory. In this and other studies such as in Maitra (2011), what we see overall is that integration tends to be viewed most often as revolving around a process of becoming more similar to white Canadians. In this sense, maintaining cultural difference may sometimes be viewed as the opposite to integration (Li, 2003; Maitra, 2011). The notion of integration, therefore, has a complex and contradictory relationship to notions of a truly transformative learning process in most of the cases. Indeed, for many of the recent immigrants who come to Canada through the skilled category, their current situation represents a significant change in terms of their perceptions of
socio-economic standing. Prior to immigration, such people generally had a certain standard of life, and access to basic necessities was not an area of concern. Finding access to basic needs may be one of the first phases of change they experience and that process, while it often retains a very contradictory dynamic and may not be transformative in itself, may also set the stage for learning and further change; change which seems to bring to the surface a complex relationship between immigrant perceptions and notions of mainstream culture and integration more broadly.

To be clear, in my discussion of change and transformation in this thesis, I am focusing primarily on the dynamic cultural and social aspects of learning and integration (less centrally do I deal with issues of basic material necessities and external elements of integration such as healthcare, housing, and employment which are more often addressed in the research literature). That is, while it is clear that people’s basic necessities need to be met in the course of the process of people coming to engage in broader social and political issues affecting them and their society, for this study, the main questions revolve around whether economic and social integration can be considered transformative from learning perspective. And in this sense, I go on to argue that under certain conditions people’s desire to “integrate” and become part of the “mainstream culture and society” can be vital to the transformative process. Beginning in a deep desire to find their sense of belonging and bring meaning to their existence as social beings, this concern for integration into the mainstream offers an initial, fundamental desire that can, I try to show, continue to evolve considerably. In fact, I argue that this is an especially relevant dynamic to consider if the interplay of race, class, and gender all contribute to the feeling of being isolated and affects their socio-economic integration. And, in the case of individuals on the margins, one can argue that against a backdrop of profound up-rootedness and alienation, an initial wish to be like the majority, in the centre, is completely understandable. Thus, the idea of mainstream
culture and society in this thesis represent a complex and contradictory process in which economic and social integration serve as the first of many phases in people’s journey. I use transformative learning theories to examine this claim. As suggested in these comments on transformational experiences, the notion of integration and the satisfaction of basic needs – work and economic life is often key elements of immigration and settlement. For immigrants who find it hard to access the formal labour market, informal work provides a way to challenge market relations. I investigate whether and how informal/cash work can also serve as a starting point for change. The inquiry necessarily includes consideration of an important point also raised above: does this change influence their perceptions of life, class, work, race, gender and various forms of social relations in which they have participated and participate in currently? Unlike the majority of studies of immigration and informal/cash work, I argue that potential for objects and opportunities of learning often emerge from such processes. In this context, the notion of “unlearning” becomes very important. That is, unlearning as a distinctive form of learning that must cope with preconceived ideas of gender roles, religion, class, and race. Thus, overall in this study we find accounts of informal work/learning by the immigrant women as offering several new insights to the discussions of gender, race, class and capitalism at the macro-level. I argue that the everyday learning that surfaces various dichotomies (of gender, race and class) is among the first steps towards resolution of the contradictions that lie at the heart of the injustices that the women in this study experience, and thus, in a variety of specific forms, transformative potential can be detected. Moreover, the issues of power relations that permeate private and social spaces are key to understanding and tracing the emerging learning frames, as well as the potential for individual or collective action occurring through this process. The awareness and the process of learning that the participants go through may be identified as what Freire calls conscientization;
although complex, it seems clear that this is a central dimension of a first step toward broader transformative change.

Examining informal work as a learning process allows me to argue for the possibility of emerging and increasing capacity for political and collective agency. While here I use the words political and collective agency, I am aware that, based on the evidence I will be providing in this study, the notion of agency is still quite fractional and almost dismissible. However, I argue that even the more modest seeds of agency are important to trace if we have an interest in understanding emerging capacity and the creation of new possibilities in the future. In keeping with this, an important element of the conversation that helps explain transformative potentials and barriers will be around the role that culture, religion, and customs play in shaping the ideological perspective and practices held, such as responses to suffering, hardship, women’s role in the house and outside; these also play an integral role in how participants react to certain oppressive situations in their lives.

**A Brief Introduction to the Methods Used in the Research**

Though oriented overall by an anti-racist feminist perspective, as noted earlier, I draw from a variety of critical perspectives on adult learning approaches to transformation in this research. In keeping with this type of analytic approach, my approach to data gathering, analysis and discussion is associated with ethnographic and narrative inquiry which are utilized to ground women’s voices and views, and also to compare and contrast their processes of change in the context of transformation theories used in adult education and feminist anti-racist scholarship.

Practically speaking my field research took place in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. I chose a densely populated, low-income neighbourhood where the majority of the residents are immigrants from
Asia. From my observation of this neighbourhood as well as available background information gathered from the City of Toronto, this is a place where informal work might be a necessary condition for economic survival, as many struggle financially. My familiarity with the neighbourhood, my own personal background as a Canadian immigrant, as well as my personal connections with some of the residents, I suggest, were extremely helpful in allowing me see some of the subtle as well as more obvious aspects of the life circumstances of immigrant women and their families. Another major factor in my choice of this particular neighbourhood was my role as community research coordinator with a large-scale research project that focused on the City of Toronto (the APCOL CURA). The neighbourhood in question was included in this broader project and this enabled me to collect data under APCOL research and ethics protocol, as my thesis focus fit within their study of anti-poverty campaigns and learning strategies as a distinctive subset of the broader study. In order to protect the identity of my research participants, I am not naming the particular community and not elaborating too much on the details of my past involvement in the community.

Additional details on my methods and methodology are covered in a subsequent chapter of this thesis, but for now it may be helpful to simply note that for my field research, I conducted 27 individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women from eight countries in Asia, specifically: China, India, Philippines, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. I also facilitated three focus groups with a total of 19 women from all of the countries mentioned above. In addition, I observed group activities that the participants got involved in in the

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5 The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project examines grass-roots popular education and learning strategies within anti-poverty community organizing campaigns in a sample of the highest poverty neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).
community for social and income purposes, and visited a few homes where people ran home spas and prepared food for catering. Throughout the study, I collected and analyzed various public policy documents and reports in order to understand labour market structures and processes that are mediated through policies, which in turn impact the lives of immigrant women and their families.

Before I present a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of my thesis, I would like to also introduce some of the basic limits of this study; issues that I will return to again in the closing chapter of the thesis in the light of the overall findings and conclusions. I start by noting that I could not interview all the women who wanted to be part of this study, as they either did not fit the identified criteria or they did informal work as a family unit. Second, while I could have included non Asian immigrant women and women of colour who are in the same, or in some cases a worse, financial situation than the Asian women of this study, I chose not to since I wanted to compare similar immigration patterns and cultural or religious traditions. Third, this study is not a complete representation of all Asian countries. The majority of the women are from south Asia. Fourth, to maintain the anonymity of the participants, I had to limit some of the important observations from the field in my descriptions of the community and events, which may positively or negatively affect my discussion. In each of these ways, while I do offer some tentative observations that speak in more general terms, there are clear limitations to what can and cannot be said based on this research, since my central claims are focused on a specific set of dynamics, amongst a specific sub-group of people, in a specific place and time, under very specific conditions.
Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis

To conclude this introduction, I offer a brief synopsis of each chapter. There are altogether nine chapters and the final chapter is the executive summary. This first chapter of course introduces the research background, terms of reference, research questions and concerns, and the rationale for doing this study.

Chapter Two is my literature review that discusses the broader aspect of immigration, immigrants, informal economy and precarious work in Canada. Additionally this chapter explores the idea of social networks in the context of immigrant women’s everyday life and work. This literature review helps situate the immigrant women participants and their life/work in Canada. This chapter will also contribute in the analysis of immigrant women’s everyday experience upon arrival in Canada with special attention to the role of their work in the informal sector.

Chapter Three presents my conceptual framework based primarily on critical discussion of key transformation learning theories. The first section provides an overview of various transformation theories and illustrates the key differences. The second section of this chapter examines the major themes such as agency and social relations. The third section explores the ways in which these different approaches intersect and the way these approaches will help address issues identified in the empirical analysis and elsewhere. In addition, this section identifies some gaps that exist and ways to address them in order to develop a more comprehensive theory of transformation suitable to immigrant women’s lives.

Chapter Four focuses on my research methods, research design, and processes, and introduces the research participants. It also discusses some of my observations and questions that arose
while collecting the data. In addition, this chapter offers some additional discussion of the methodological limitations of this study.

My research findings are presented, analyzed, and synthesized across four chapters that function as an interactive whole ( Chapters Five through Eight). Specifically, Chapter Five provides the life history accounts of two specific immigrant women who were part of the individual interviews and focus groups. The goal of this chapter is to situate the immigrant women and their everyday work experiences based on an appreciation of the life course. This chapter documents the process of change closely for these two individual women and is meant to stimulate an initial awareness of the complexity of learning and transformations. My memos from the field shape the context of this intense, yet informal conversation. By providing these two accounts, I highlight their journey to Canada, the process of change, their experiences as immigrant women, informal workers, and other roles they play in the community and home. In this chapter, the story is primarily narrated in their own voices with minimal interpretation, except for addition from my field notes to fill the gaps in context. Race, class, ethnicity, patriarchy, and many other interconnected themes come up in this section, as they were experienced firsthand by these women. This chapter is meant to provide a rich, if only preliminary, base for subsequent analysis in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Six situates the immigrant experiences in the broader themes of citizenship, labour market access, navigation of space, education, work, culture, and tradition. The two individual journeys narrated in Chapter Five are integrated into an exploration of the various themes that emerged from analysis of the data set more broadly. The main objective of this chapter is to illustrate how women’s experiences are influenced and impacted by the changes in their social
relations and the way transnational migration posed a challenge to their perceptions on individual (private) and social (public) roles of women, their work, and learning. This also aims to provide answers to questions about the overall experience of immigration and integration processes for women, how it either helped them make the choices they wished for and/or forced them to make choices out of necessity. In this chapter, I argue that the process of change immigrant women go through is significant and impacts all aspects of their lives. There are aspects of change they see as welcoming and positive; and others that they see as demeaning and oppressive. The experience of change, and the way it was perceived, varied greatly from individual to individual and yet, the majority of the participants identified some significant common experiences with regards to change, especially with respect to the categories of race, ethnicity, class, and gendered work. This chapter also provides the context with which to view the immigrant experiences that lead to making the life changing decisions that largely contribute to immigrant women conforming to the hegemonic values of the host country or resisting change in the face of adversity.

Chapter Seven examines informal work in the context of work and learning and how it contributes to the process of change. This chapter examines whether the choice of informal work is an indicator of adaptive change in order to integrate better, and/or if it is a normative process that is a necessary step to survive. It illustrates the ways in which immigrant women establish themselves in the community through networks, as well as their reasons for choosing specific activities over others. Their negotiation of space, time, and role in the community and family helps them find balance between the household and other responsibilities. Another important aspect of informal work, as shared by many participants, was the development and sharing of skills and learning, which they see as an individual and collective responsibility. We see that the
power of collective action and consciousness-raising that is experienced through this work make women think of the possibilities in the future even when the labour market or education attainment seems like an unattainable goal at present. Discussion of the positives and negatives of informal work provides insight into the gendered labour relations that are constantly negotiated and reinforced in the privacy of individual women’s homes and how that transfers to the social space through discourse where ideologies and practices get created and deconstructed on a regular basis.

Chapter Eight offers an overall synthesis of the analytic themes of the thesis as a whole. Specifically, it discusses the main themes that came up in the previous three chapters and attempts to conceptualize transformation through the experience of immigrant women doing informal work in urban Canada. It encompasses the process of change, agency, and resistance in creating new roles and navigating place and structure. Education and learning are viewed as central to integration here, however, managing to separate that from one's own individual ethnic identity, culture, and tradition in their private space is part of the daily process among many research participants. What emerges in this synthesis is the multilayered construction of immigrant life. Furthermore, it examines the ideology of the ‘perfect woman’ and her role, her place in the family, and her work and how these views, perceptions, and experiences either motivate her to go through a process of change willingly or force change upon her. The objective of this chapter is to assess the impact of immigration on an immigrant woman’s social and personal life, examining how and under what conditions the process of change that she goes through can be considered “transformative”. Whether or not informal work is transformative or reproductive, and the implications of this type of categorization are also discussed. Contrasted with the current theories of transformation, what are the new themes that come up as a result of
this investigation? This chapter provides insight into adult education and feminist anti-racist approaches to transformation by contextualizing them in the life work context of immigrant women.

Finally, Chapter Nine offers an executive summary of the study. It concludes with a discussion of practical, theoretical, and policy implications of my research findings. It proposes a perspective on transformative learning/practice, based on the evidence considered, that may bring out the voices of people in the margins to the center where policy makers and academics can take their lead and consider more clearly the role of everyday experience and informal work amongst immigrant women in Canada under certain conditions. This concluding chapter closes by offering suggestions about areas of future research, additional limitations of this particular study, and potential ways to address the gaps identified.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review chapter reviews a few key areas that are important in analyzing my research questions. This chapter examines three aspects of immigrant life that are relevant to this thesis. First, the review examines literature on immigrant population; second, it provides an overview of informal economies in general and informal work in relation to immigrants in Canada; and third, it briefly explores the notion of social networks in the context of immigrant lives and their informal work. To situate the immigrant women participants and their life/work in context, the research literatures addressing these areas are necessary. This chapter will provide the basis for the analysis of immigrant women’s everyday experience upon arrival in Canada with special attention to the role of their work in the informal sector.

To build on the points raised in Chapter One and to provide further context for the following literature review briefly providing a few additional facts will be beneficial. According to Statistics Canada, more than 70% of the immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2009 are Level A and B category workers\(^6\) (CIC, 2009) where the majority are from Asian countries such as China and India. The criteria by which skilled category immigrants are selected indicate that they are highly educated and were part of the formal employment sector before their arrival in Canada.

\(^6\) Level A and B are professionals with managerial and technical experience that are listed in the national occupation list of Canada.
According to Statistics Canada, the majority of recent immigrant women are waged workers with an average annual income of $26,700 and 11% of their total income came from government transfers (Chui, 2007). Women are most commonly involved in work that has been traditionally associated with women such as waitressing, and cleaning. In addition, 64% of immigrant women work part-time while 10% of all immigrant women are self-employed (Chui, 2007). While the data does not specify the type of work women are participating in or the localities in which work is being performed, it is evident from this report that the majority of immigrant women are involved in some form of precarious work (discussed later in the chapter) suggesting that many may be working informally. Williams (2004) suggests that the gender gap in the formal employment sector may also be because women find it easier to work informally for cash compared to working in the formal sector. However, much of the research on the immigrant population reveals labour market outcomes to be poor or limited. This leads many to look for other employment options such as contract work, part-time, or precarious employment in lower-income jobs (Guo, 2010; Maitra, 2010; Mirchandani, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Ng, 1996; Vosko, 2009). In addition numerous studies (some of which will be shared below for the purpose of this discussion) have examined different aspects of immigrant life trajectory in Canada.

King (2009) explains that immigrants tend to Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver to settle in as they are accepted as gateway cities for immigrants. This has in turn made immigration an urban issue. Due to this trend towards urban settlement, the labour market outcome and income levels of immigrants in the cities varies putting them in lower categories compared to the Canadian born population.

Immigrants in the largest immigrant-receiving provinces have the largest income differentials earning $20,740 less than the Canadian-born in Ontario followed by smaller differentials in Alberta, Quebec and British Columbia (King, 2009, p.2)
In other words, immigrants settling in large cities are prone to encounter a difficult labour market. Moreover, the literature on the immigrant population also reveals that having access to the markets does not necessarily mean active participation in the markets. Researchers have shown that an individual’s characteristics including their culture, race, ethnicity, and gender all become deciding factors in determining who gets to access and participate in the labour market (Creese, 2007; Galabuzi, 2006; Mirchandani, 2003).

These preliminary comments about immigrant population in general and my review below will addresses several major studies conducted on informal work in the context of immigrant population. My goal is to work through the literature to showcase how immigrant women's labour market participation in the cash economy is an important area for further research and discussion, as it remains an under-appreciated area in the context of developed countries like Canada. However, undoubtedly the undocumented nature of work in the cash economy remains one of the chief barriers. The only statistical information that was found was that an average estimate of 15.4% of the Gross Domestic Product is generated from the informal sector, and that 65% of all Canadians are involved in some form of cash-in-handwork (Enste & Schneider, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2006). One of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reports I reviewed indicated that Canada does not include informal economy work in its national accounts, which partly explains the lack of data (OECD, 2009). Perhaps more importantly, the reasons why immigrant women of colour with good educations and marketable skills choose cash work over other types of precarious employment, and the outcomes of this work on them, is largely absent in the current literature. In fact, exploring several academic and government databases for information on the number of immigrants and/or Canadians working in the
informal sector did not yield any results, with the sole exception appearing to be the studies that was conducted (in the same period as my research) by the Wellesley Institute (2013). However, this study focuses on immigrants work in the cash economy in general without delving into either the underlying themes of culture, race, gender, or class dynamics, or the processes of learning and change.

Below I turn towards more detailed thematically organized reviews of literature. I begin with a discussion into the historical construction of the category “immigrant”.

**Construction of an immigrant**

The historical development of the Canadian immigration system suggests that it went through several phases before reaching its current state. The contemporary construction of Canadian immigration saw the majority of settlers arriving to Canada (late 1800’s- 1960’s) predominantly from Europe and America (Guo, 2009; Li, 2003). The point system was introduced in 1967 due to a great shortage of skilled labourers and the need for economic expansion. This saw the rise in immigrants from non-European countries including many from Asia and other developing countries (Guo, 2009). Drawing from various scholars on the development of immigration history, such as Ng (1986), Guo (2009) argues that decedents of European settlers no longer think of themselves as immigrants, whereas the majority who came from other nations, especially from developing countries, are viewed as immigrants. Guo (2009) argues that the social construction of the term immigrant, and the way in which it became a codified word for people of colour from non-Europeans racial and cultural backgrounds in Canada is largely informed by the historical development of immigration policies.
A review of several immigration studies including Ng (1986 & 1989); Man (2004) and Gupta (1989) revealed that the social construction of “immigrant” is deeply influenced by racial, social, and ideological perceptions within the host country. Negative labour market outcomes are examined in the context of the social construction of immigrants as people of colour in a white-dominated market economy in studies such as Shan (2009) and Maitra (2011). Precarious work and home-based entrepreneurialism are also discussed in the work of Maitra (2011) and Shan (2009). Precarious work among racialized immigrant populations has also been a key focus of many studies within the past two decades (see e.g. Man, 2004; Teeluksingh & Galabuzi, 2004; Vosko, 2009). Additionally, the research by many of the aforementioned authors explored the interconnectedness of gender, class, and ethnicity in the formation of labour market expectations and consequently the outcomes of this expectation for immigrants.

With the discussion of labour market outcomes and labour market experiences, a number of studies discussed gendered dimensions of this work for professional immigrant women and immigrant women in general. These studies also discuss how immigrant women of colour are more marginalized in this difficult labour market situation and their gendered roles at homes. This is because home takes precedence over their other needs and aspirations (e.g. see the works of Mojab, 1999; Ng, 1989, 1996; Shan 2009). Ng (1989) argues that immigrant women’s interests are sacrificed for what is perceived to be her first/top priority: her household and children. Maitra (2011) explored the experiences of home-based immigrant women entrepreneurs in her research, which can be another aspect of informal sector. However, the focus of Maitra’s research is mainly based on the “concept of the enterprising self in the neoliberal economy” and she did not specify if cash is the medium of exchange in the category of home-based businesses. Findings from Maitra’s (2011) study suggests that immigrants are
expected to follow the norms of the host society in order to be considered for better employment prospects. The expectation of immigrant conformity to the host country’s norms and practices are also discussed in relation to (formal) labour market practices in Guo’s (2009, 2010 & 2013) study as well. Guo (2013) argues that institutional barriers, which he describes as ‘glass gate,' prevent professional immigrants from entering professional organizations. The glass gate creates a divide between the immigrant and non-immigrant population. He further argues that this limited or lack of access also means that immigrant knowledge and experience are treated as different, deficient. This experience speaks to the notion of immigrants as a social construct, and their skin colour is used as the basis for social marking (Li, 2003). The ‘triple glass effect’ (glass gate, glass door and glass ceiling), in other words different layers of institutional barriers, cause unemployment, underemployment, poor economic performance and downward social mobility.

Shan (2005) research on professional Chinese immigrant women who chose clerical jobs in Toronto also revealed that women are in worse situations than their male counterparts within the labour force. Similar to this, Ng (1986, 1989, & 2006); Mojab (1999) and Mirchandani (2004) explored immigrant labour market outcomes in the broader context of gender, race, class, and capitalism. The works of Ng, Mirchandani, and Mojab also provide analysis of how immigrants are faced with numerous barriers, such as de-skilling, credentialism, and racism that stops them from using their experience or education they collected prior to immigration to Canada. What remains of interest in this thesis going forward, however, is the way in which immigrant women process this internally in their private spaces (i.e. at home/ domestic space) and externally in their social spaces. Indeed, reviewing this literature makes one realize that it may be important to examine the way immigrant women process and navigate this change because, in so doing, it raises many critical, preliminary and under-appreciated questions inclusive of the following: Do
immigrant women conform only for the sake of a job or do they wish to conform to be part of the mainstream culture and society? How much of this process involves personal will, desires and choices, and how much of it is coerced by their situation?

Learning is another one of the key themes that is discussed in the context of formal labour market expectations and outcomes in the work of Guo (2010), Shan (2009), and Shan and Maitra (2007). By identifying two learning categories, conformative and transgressive learning, Maitra and Shan (2007) for example, discuss how immigrant women’s learning is contingent on work. Likewise, important to the analysis in this thesis, I note that Guo (2010) proposes a transnational lifelong learning model inclusive of education that acknowledges and affirms the cultural differences and diversity in the place of lifelong learning that serve as the vehicle for accumulating dominant cultural norms and values of the host society. Both Barsan and Zong (1998) and Mirchandani (2004) discuss the various aspects of this lifelong learning process and the inadequacies of the current theoretical formulation. It is in this context that coupled with my interest in transformative learning theories that I was lead to explore learning and change as significant themes to explore in the everyday life of immigrant populations. This will be explored in depth in later chapters culminating in the identification of the multilayered process immigrants go through after their arrival in Canada beyond their labour market experiences. Doing so, I argue, allows us to consider a theory of transformation in terms of possibilities and barriers presented by cash work in immigrant women’s everyday lives. In other words, while change is discussed elaborately in many of these prior studies, and in many cases learning is identified in particular work contexts, at the same time the transformative learning possibilities offered by informal work represents a gap in our understanding as it regards immigration, human agency and hidden capacity in the face of adversity.
Much of the literature reviewed suggests that capitalism and globalization intersect with factors such as race, class, gender (e.g. see Maitra, 2011; Mojab 1999; Ng, 1989, 1996). This research makes it obvious that while globalization and immigration policies make the skilled immigrant's access to the borders easier, their academic qualifications do not allow them to enter the formal labour market at the same rate as the Canadian born population as they were led to believe. In addition, these changes in the socio-political and economic landscape of Canada have made settlement and integration a much more difficult process for immigrants. For example, changes and cost-cutting in the governing system, in turn, has forced changes on mandates and objectives of the service delivery sector, which has negatively affected people who have depended on these services for accessing the labour market (Ng, 1996; UFCW, 2014). This makes the formal job market highly inaccessible for many immigrants with professional experience and education. Another factor that impedes the settlement of immigrants, according to Ng (1996) and Mojab (1999), arises from the neo-liberal trends of the host country. Contracting out services, cost cutting, privatization, and restructuring of the public sectors and services (Treanor, 2005; Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003) become a common feature for the system of governance which adds further burden for people who need support in their initial years and are looking for full-time permanent opportunities in the formal labour market. Federal cuts on funding for settlement work in Ontario and British Columbia are an example of such change (CBC news, 2010). Immigrants, who are already faced with difficult labour market prospects, are pushed further to look for alternative sources of income being forced to take on survival jobs when they find the services are inadequate to help them get settled. Examining these experiences in the light of these changes made me wonder if the constantly changing immigration policies are another example of a neo-liberal agenda in Canada that selects only people who are needed and fit for the
market. Based on this observation, it is easily arguable that, in the neo-liberal world, the informal sector is not only a major structure but also a necessity for survival.

According to a Toronto social planning report (Tinglin & Wilson, 2013), the largest single category of people living in poverty is recent immigrants (46%) while the rate of poverty among immigrants in general is 28%. What is apparent is that a large number of immigrants settling in cities like Toronto find the formal labour market inaccessible. This makes them part of a low-income stratum and, in turn, creates a natural breeding ground for the rise of informal sector work. My desire to research informal/cash work stems from what I have identified as the struggles and the interconnectedness of various themes that contributed to the struggles immigrants face in the literature reviewed. Two crucial areas I found were somewhat underdeveloped in the discussion in the current literature focusing on immigrant population and research on informal economy. This includes undocumented work or cash work as a choice people adopt especially immigrant women and outcomes other than economic survival. There are several reasons why this is an important topic to explore at this point in time. Some of the reasons include: the notion of choice vs. choosing labour market participation not being completely related to economic reasons alone, and if it is not, what else might be leading people to informal work choices. When considering outcomes, what might be some of the outcomes other than economic survival that occurs through this work if it is an active choice. Looking at informal work from the perspective of ‘choice’, ‘choosing’ open ways to analyze the possibilities and barriers to learning and change that occur through the most precarious or invisible forms of work. The main themes related to choice and choosing, learning and change inform the theoretical framework of this thesis discussed in the following chapter.
In order to understand the various aspects of informal work, it needs to be distinguished from precarious work. From the literature reviewed, the conditions of informal work are similar to what is discussed in the literature on precarious work. It may be the case that informal work is a different category of precarious or home-based work. However, the experiences of informal workers is invisible in these discussions, which implicates the worker, and the various layers in which this work is developed and established, in positive and negative, short term and long term outcomes. The crucial distinction of what makes work invisible or unaccounted for, especially pertaining to work that is traditionally associated with women, is discussed broadly in the literature on unpaid household labour (e.g. Luxton, 1980; Luxton & Corman, 2001).

**Precarious Employment and Informal Economy in Canada**

In Canada, precarious employment means non-standard types of employment, which include contract positions, part-time work, temporary work, own-account, and self-employment (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Vosko, 2003; Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich 2003). In some studies, precarious employment, informal work, and contingent work are terms used synonymously/interchangeably (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Maitra & Sidiqui, 2009). However, there are differences in the way both concepts are framed and perceived. Precarious employment covers almost all aspects of informal economy, however not all of the informal economy is precarious in nature; the legal and conceptual framework in which informal economy is perceived in developed countries such as Canada is very different from the way in which it is perceived in a developing or transitioning nation, where half or more of the economy is informal.

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7 Non-standard work in employment situations differ from the traditional model of a stable, full time job with benefits and job security.
in nature (e.g. ILO, 2002). Different terminologies used in the literature to define informal economy indicate this difference. The literature reviewed on this topic covers a few of the common themes that are prevalent in these types of employment or work situations. Main themes include: no long term plan or commitment from employers, limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risk of ill health (e.g. Vosko, 2003; Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003; Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Maitra & Sidiqui, 2009). Growth of precarious employment and informal economy in the developed countries in the last couple of decades indicates labour market insecurity that is prevalent in all parts of the world and women being more vulnerable in these changing conditions (AHBRSC, 2004; Enste & Schneider, 2002; Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003).

The main conceptual difference between precarious employment and informal work is the way in which they operate within or outside the formal system of authority. Although precarious work is non-standard in its output, it still operates under a formal system of authority and most of the work is accounted for, perhaps with the exception of the self-employment category where it is dependent on the individual to report the income especially in the case of unregistered self-employed persons. All informal work is outside the formal system of authority; therefore it is hard to estimate its size or its impact on the economic system of a country (Enste & Schneider, 2002; Pigeon, 2004; AHBRSC, 2004; Reinhart & Braithwaite, 2004). Another difference between the notions of informal work and precarious work is that precarious work includes all forms of work on the lower end of the economic scale, whereas informal work is performed by people from all sectors of life; rich and poor alike operate in the sector for various reasons. Some of these people are doing it for survival; some are working in both sectors simultaneously because it is available to them, and still others for tax evasion and other illegal purposes (Losby
et. al., 2002). In most cases, precarious employment is measurable and informal work is not. The common thread that connects precarious employment and informal work in this research is that women tend to be the main face of both and there are growing numbers of immigrant women doing precarious work in Canada, as noted in the work of Ng (1996); Maitra (2010); Vosko (2003 & 2009).

This research will try to address and analyze one of the gaps identified in the literature reviewed on precarious work and informal economy: the intersectionality between the aspect of self-employment in precarious work categories and informal economy as a whole operating in that realm of work. Current literature on precarious employment notes own-account self-employment as the lowest type of precarious work in terms of visibility and economic gain but does not explore further why and how own-account self-employment is developed or the outcomes of it on the individual. Furthermore, it is limited in addressing the potential of these categories of work that come under cash economies. The reason I make this claim is because not all own-account self-employment is precarious in nature if analyzed through a wider economic lens in relation to informal economic activities. However, own-account self-employment being suggested as the lowest form of precarious work indicates it could be that people are working for cash–in-hand jobs for survival. Further research may help to clarify this ambiguity. One of the reasons why informal economic activity remains an understudied area within the topic of precarious employment might be because as Ghorayshi (2002) notes, in Canada, official labour force statistics omit Canadians who work in the underground economy, both legally and illegally. In order to narrow down the topic of discussion in this study to immigrant women and their work in the cash economy, this discussion will use only one of the concepts, that is, 'informal
economy', while treating this as the lowest form of precarious employment for the purpose of this research.

It is crucial to examine what types of work people are doing in the informal sector in order to analyze what types of work are preferred by workers and why, along with determining who does which type. This examination will help determine the choices and experiences of people involved in the informal economy. In this study, the focus will be on the experiences of female immigrants in the cash economy. The theoretical significance of this group is that the women who are the focus of this study are immigrant women of colour with higher education and, in most cases, had a good job or were in higher income categories prior to immigration. Now they are part of a workforce where women of colour are overrepresented in the lowest form of precarious work that is crucial for their survival. However, their work remains invisible and under-valued, as it is not accounted for in the official labour market category as work. This study explores the intersectional relationship between class, gender, and race, coupled with feminization of certain types of informal work, as well as questions of what is considered work and what is accepted as valued work.

**Women and Informal Work**

A review of the literature suggests that there are strong links between poverty, unemployment, and informal work (Carr & Chen, 2001; Harding & Jenkins, 1989, Losby et al., 2002). The main actors in the informal sector are people who are on the margins and have a low socio-economic status (Carr & Chen, 2001, 2004). From the definitions of informal economy and the categories of work that are dominant in this sector, it is easy to observe who the main actors in this sector are and where they are placed in the socio-economic spheres of a neo-liberal society. The
immigrant population, for various reasons, is the one group of the population that is most likely to be involved in the informal sector (HRSDC, 2011). Data from Europe, the US, and Canada indicate that the urban poor and lower-waged workers in the formal sectors make up another category of people who get involved in the informal sector in developed nations (Enste & Schneider, 2002; Losby et al., 2002; Melendez, Theodore & Valenzuela, 2010; May & Cooper, 2007). People who run small family businesses and people with fewer marketable skills and education also tend to be part of the informal sector.

Recent research suggests that women participate more in the informal sector than men do, which runs contrary to earlier studies (see e.g. U.N, 2010; Geshruny, 1987) that depicted men as the main actors in the informal sector. If it is in the context of contingent or precarious work, ethnic minority women are overrepresented in this sector (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Carr & Chen, 2001; Ghorayshi, 2002; Vosko, 2003). It is quite possible that in the earlier studies on informal economy, work performed at home and cash in hand type of work were not considered in economic terms, and since work that is traditionally associated with women operates mostly in private spaces, it is therefore often excluded from discussions (Carr & Chen, 2001; Losby et al., 2002). Many female-dominated occupations are in the service sector and there is a natural link to high rates of informal work activity in these service occupations and informalization of the job market due to capitalist tendencies (McDowell, 2009; Philzacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995; Wolkowitz, 2006; May & Cooper, 2007). A survey on the hidden economy in Quebec suggests that, although the gap is narrow between men and women, men are more active in the hidden informal sector (Marcelli, Williams & Jossart, 2010). However, the data reveals that women spend more hours doing informal work than men and make less money than their male counterparts. The Wellesley (2013) Report suggests that the majority of immigrants involved in
cash work are women. Comparing income data with the research on informal work and the type of work women do in the sector in countries like Canada, indicates that cash work is prevalent among women and is one of the strategies women use to fight poverty while managing household and childcare responsibilities. This resonates with the previous studies on home-based workers and self-employed women in the low income brackets, as they choose to do this work as a way to manage their household and childcare responsibilities while contributing to the family income (Luxton & Corman, 2001; Maitra, 2011; Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995). The income gap between men and women in informal work is significant, with men earning more (Fortin & Lacorix, 2010; May & Cooper, 2007; Enste & Schneider, 2002). While there are a number of studies looking at informal economies, only a few look at it from a women's point of view and analyze women's work in the sector.

McDowell (2009) examines the rise of the service economy and argues how certain types of work, typically those undertaken by women, are viewed as natural attributes of femininity, and as a result are devalued in the labour market. Furthermore, she notes, what is considered work is often associated with waged labour, therefore all the work that is undertaken in the home (and often completed by women) is excluded from the discussion. Although McDowell’s (2009) analysis is not on immigrant women in Canada, it aligns with other feminist research exploring gender and work and the devaluing of women's work at home, paid or unpaid (for further examples, see the work of Donovan (2000) and Hartsock (1998). Waring (1999) takes this discussion further by analyzing women's work by counting what women do in detail using a twenty-four hour clock method. The example Waring uses is from Zambia and the context is farming where crops and livestock are in the boundary of production, but food processing, handicraft, fire wood collection, childcare, and housework are excluded. This same method can
be applied to analyze the informal workers in Canada, noting the numerous tasks that are executed by worker which are excluded based on what is perceived to be valued as work by the economic and labour market policies and indicators.

McDowell (2009) notes that in the development of industrial capitalism, many of the previously home-produced free goods and services become commodities for sale; however, the provision of household services remains largely female driven. Commodification of household services and labour creates perfect fodder for natural development of cash economies where international experiences or education are not contested and the invasion of regulatory boards is largely absent. Probing further, one can see how and why immigrant women might be attracted, or socially constructed, to be part of this development. Phizacklea and Wolkowitz (1995) point out that, in gendered division of labour, women's responsibility for unpaid work is the key factor in producing a homeworking labour force. Analyses of paid and unpaid work, labour markets, and capitalist organization of the marketplaces, are key in understanding how certain practices are produced and reproduced by the market and construct dichotomous social positions for all involved.

Scholars have explained and divided the informal economy into several categories that are crucial to the discussion presented here. Losby et al. (2002) presents the informal economy as a labour market category, while Carr and Chen (2001) present it as an employment-based category, and Geshruny (1983) presents the informal economy as a household, communal, and underground or hidden economy. These categories can inform and influence policy and research in the field and are applicable to the target population of this research. As a whole, these categories include people who own small family businesses or informal businesses are self-
employed, or who are casual workers without a fixed employer, such as industrial house workers, domestic workers, or unregistered workers. Based on their division of work in the informal sector as an employment category, Carr and Chen (2001) in WEIGO\(^8\) suggest an employment-based definition of the informal sector that includes all non-standard wage workers who are engaged in precarious employment: that is, those who work without insurance, assured work, minimum wage, and other benefits in formal and informal firms. In my opinion, this is the most comprehensive definition from the recent literature reviewed. The limitation of scientific (quantitative) data presented from developed countries such as England, Germany, and Canada is such that it may exclude a few listed categories, such as unpaid household workers, self-employed, and people who work in family-run businesses without pay. Therefore, I will argue that this data does not represent or portray the realities of the informal market as an employment or work category.

McDowell (2009) defines work as activities that are essential to the material existence of an individual's place in the world and in all aspects of their life. Looking at work from this perspective will help to unravel some complexities that are present in the category of work women do at home and elsewhere by naming it as paid and unpaid work. Employment, on the other hand, is a more defined and objective term because the social relations in which it takes place are specified (Wolkowitz, 2006). Drawing from Marx, MacKinnon (1999) notes that work is the social process of shaping and transforming the material and social world, which creates persons as they create value. The informal activity they lead defines who they are; in the case of immigrant women, I will be exploring this further in the analysis chapters. In addition to their

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\(^8\) Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WEIGO)
household chores and responsibilities, the informal work they are involved in varies from childminding to catering to hairstyling to home-tutoring of their neighbours kids. Because it is all performed in the private spheres of their homes, and for cash, it is rendered less visible as a medium of exchange. Analyzing work in this broader category helps in understanding the varieties of work that are separated from the formal framework and therefore devalued and how the types of work women are performing are influential in shaping their place in the community.

Losby et al. (2002), Carr and Chen (2001) and May and Cooper (2007), in their discussions of informal economy, note how immigrants from developing nations, such as from Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, who observed informal economic activities chose it in order to survive when they are faced with tough labour market and economic situations. When the labour market and other oppressive structures exclude them from the neo-liberal economy of their adopted countries, they look for alternatives means to survive financially and socially. This may be the case for many immigrant women in Toronto: this is their way of survival in the alienated marketplace, or it may be their resistance to an oppressing social system. Research from England, other European countries and the US reveal that racialized women are overrepresented in the homeworking group (May & Cooper, 2007; Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995). The findings from the Wellesley Report (2013) also suggest that this may be the trend in Canada. Although the discussion here is on women's contingent or precarious work in general, self-employed home-based workers are mentioned as the most vulnerable among the category of that work (see e.g. Benach & Muntaner, 2007; May & Cooper, 2007; Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995).

9 65% of the economy in Asia is informal in nature (ILO, 2002).
The key to understanding informal economic activities of the West and their relation to the market lies in adopting a historical view of the capitalist nations and analyzing immigration and immigrant movements. Historically, informal sector activities were viewed by most scholars as a pre-modern form of exchange and were expected to disappear as global capitalism took center stage; however, evidence suggests the opposite is true (Marcelli, Williams & Jossart, 2010). Informal social and economic interactions were the main features that directed the work and employment of the general population in pre-capitalist societies. For example, pre-capitalist societies in Europe engaged in the barter system of exchange and small markets depended on local goods and services. This reality persisted with the exception of limited luxury goods that were produced for the wealthiest in society (Woods, 1999). The capitalist society creates a clear distinction between work and employment. The commoditization of labour and labourers, as noted in Woods (1999), is necessary for the survival of the market. As in pre-capitalist societies, the division between work and employment are blurred in the informal sector, especially in the cash economy, which was a large share of women’s work. However, in the current capitalist society, work from home, work in exchange for other services, and domestic work are often not considered to be valuable labour that is important for the formal labour market. The way capitalist markets and pre-capitalist markets operate is different, and yet the informal sector work nowadays carries the same characteristics of work as in pre-capitalist markets. This is one of the reasons why work and skills gained through informal work remain inferior and largely unrecognized in the formal sector.

An examination of informal work patterns identified in the literature suggests that it is produced and reproduced through informal networks. However, the role informal networks play is not discussed as a significant component in the literature but is key in understanding the
development of informal work initiatives among immigrants. The rational for me to explore networks is to develop an understanding of how networks operate and what role networks play in the life of an immigrant woman. I ask questions such as, what do social networks and community mean in the context of an immigrant women’s life, especially after transnational migration in which they lost their familiar geographically bound familial/communal networks?

**Social Networks and Women**

In this study, while I do not carry out a social network analysis, I use the notion of social networks, informed largely by Granovetter's activity-specific network theory analysis (1973). Granovetter (1973) presents two aspects of networks in his analysis that is relevant to this paper. The first is networks in employment, that is, how a potential employee collects information on available jobs or access to jobs. The second is an analysis of the impact of weak ties on people from diverse economic backgrounds. It is noted that social networks play a huge role in the way new immigrants navigate the city, from finding housing, to accessing health and social services, to making and meeting new friends and neighbours (Wellman, 1999). Transnational migration and a good majority of immigrants choosing to stay in the urban centers in Canada make it an important group to study in the context of social network. In my examination, the ways in which immigrant women are involved in domestic and community activities are very informal. They meet other women or find connections through networks, in a city where most of them have no extended family or relatives.

The notion of the social network as defined in Granovetter (1973) offers a useful analytical tool in this context as networks become crucial for women navigating the Canadian socio-economic landscape. This concept of networks helps to support the way people share and gather
information about the country and the way they make choices in terms of selecting a place to live, communities they choose to interact with, and schooling for their children. Social networks, strong and weak (Granovetter, 1973), become important in settlement of immigrants in accessing the new labour market. However, how effective these networks are in the lives of immigrants in their search for formal labour market career opportunities in a new country needs to be investigated.

In this context, it is not the virtual networks that are considered for analysis but networks that are geographically bound and spatially found by actual people coordinating in all kinds of situations in communities and neighbourhoods. It will be important to analyze the types of networks they are involved in and the dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and class within these networks to understand how they operate in the lives of people. These networks have multiple functions in the lives of immigrants in countries like Canada. The primary function is that they introduce them to job markets, housing availability, and connect them with services and programs available to them. However, Razin (1993) notes an issue is the number of jobs available in the market and the fact that housing does not increase as the number of new arrivals increases. The networks only facilitate immigrants’ introduction to the existing market without efficiently guiding them to the next step. Faced with limited mobility in the formal sector, immigrants then rely on informal networks to survive (Razin, 1993).

A secondary function of the social network is related to survival and alternative strategies women find for themselves and their families. Through these networks, and other community connections, women market their ideas to profit from their skills. The transferable and sellable skills identified in the literature vary from child-minding, tutoring, cooking, and selling food at
local events or neighbours parties, house cleaning, beauty care, and home-based hairdressing (Williams, 2004 & 2010). These activities are identified as typical “women's jobs” in the informal sector as noted in Windenbank and Williams (2010), Harding and Jenkins, (1989), Losby et al., (2002), and Carr and Chen, (2001), and they point out that the gendered division of labour that extends beyond the boundaries of the household.

The participants of this study largely come from communal cultures where women have strong interpersonal ties that extend to all areas of their lives so the notion of networking is not new to them. My study explores the ways in which women create the social organization in which they are struggling and find ways to address the barriers. In their adopted country and community, I explore how they create networks and explore whether they are strong ties or weak ties. I also explore the following questions: How do immigrant women go about creating networks? Is it through culturally and socially acquired ways? What will a strong tie look like in this community and among these immigrant women and what is the role of weak ties for immigrant women in navigating the new social setup? Is it through these informal networks that immigrant women become active in informal work that then gives rise to an informal economy in Toronto and elsewhere? Can networks provide an answer to the ways in which immigrant women find alternatives to their struggle? What are some of the outcomes for the immigrant women, as well as the community, in this new setup in which they create new forms of networks?

In summary, this review is the starting point of a critical exploration of the shaping of immigrant women’s lives and their participation in the informal economy in Toronto, Canada. The goal of this study is to shed light on how immigrant women's lives are shaped by the labour market outcome of a capitalist society, how they survive given the injustices they encounter, and to
examine if their participation in the cash sector is transformative in nature. This thesis critically examines women's involvement in the cash economy to gain socio-economic survival, and potential positive and negative outcomes, through a transformative lens. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how gendered division of labour is reinforced through the type of work, women chose or are forced to do in the informal economy. This is because, as Mirchandani (2003) notes, there is hardly any attention paid to women’s placement in the hierarchical structure of society, which reinforces gender difference. The next chapter explores key themes such as agency, social relations and positionality in connection to the questions that emerged from this review.
Chapter 3
Agency, Agentive Participation, and Social Relations in Transformative Learning Literature

The previous chapter discussed the literature on immigrants in Canada, provided an overview of selected research and concepts dealing with informal work and the idea of social networks. This chapter presents my theoretical framework developed out of a critical reading of transformative learning theories. In this chapter, I intend to offer a conceptual discussion of the change, drawing principally from two transformative learning approaches. The two main approaches to transformation examined in this chapter are first, the individual and psychological approaches to transformation, and second, the feminist anti-racist approaches. The two main approaches are highlighted as central because they both specifically focus on learning, change, and transformation in individuals and in their social relations, which is crucial to develop an understanding of different dimensions of change. The ultimate aim in this theoretical inquiry is to understand and articulate a clear position on what transformation is within the context of adult education and learning, including how current theories of transformation address the issue of marginality and learning for the population of this research. I argue that these approaches assist to analyze and assess the process of change that occurs through the activities and the social relations of immigrant women and their families.

The review of key issues and concepts will eventually support the exploration of questions revolving around the adequacy of current theories for helping us trace transformation and learning in the context of informal work in Canada. The introductory section illustrates transformative change on the global level, especially in the areas of economic and political policies, which in turn impacts individuals and their social relations. In order to find answers to
my research questions and to examine how these theories address marginality, I explore two major themes, agency and social relations, and two main approaches in relation to adult learning literature.

Overall, by doing this, I wish to understand individual agency and resistance in the face of particular forms of adversity, and the potential for individual adult learning processes as well as the collective action resulting (or potentially resulting) from those processes. To do so, I will examine the necessary social conditions and detrimental features that support an individual to move in a direction of becoming an agent of social change/transformation in relation to increasing agentive participation in society and the economy, more broadly.

**General Perspectives: Transformation**

Researchers from a broad range of perspectives share the view that transformation encompasses some form of paradigm shift; specifically, in one way or another, transformation involves a change in one’s worldview (see e.g. Mezirow, 1998, 2000, 1991,1995; Pedwell, 2012; Scott, 2003; Tisdell, 1993; Pickel, 2002). Most broadly, transformation denotes change in personal, social, local, or global and in institutional, political, and economic structures depending on the context in which the theory is developed (Scott, 2003). Many of the different views on transformation make sense at a general level. Social transformation is described differently from the general definition of transformation in the literature reviewed for this study. For example, from a classic Marxist perspective, social transformation is viewed as a transition from one economic and political order to another (Pickel, 2002). Social transformation is defined in general as the way society and culture change in response to factors such as economic growth, political economic contradiction including everyday exploitation, war, and/or political upheavals (Castles, 2010 & 2001). Castles (2001) notes that development in western countries is a plan in
progress towards a predetermined goal. However, in some of the literature I reviewed, development is portrayed as social transformation. For example, Stiglitz (1998) notes,

> Development represents a transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional ways of thinking, traditional ways of dealing with health and education, traditional methods of production, to more ‘modern ways’ (author’s emphasis) (p.58).

A broader understanding of approaches and discussion of transformation is a necessary component to understanding the transformative nature of transnational migration trends that are fuelled by capitalist and neoliberal tendencies and market economies.

**Transformative Adult Education: Major Themes for Understanding Marginality**

The broader purpose, the goal, of adult education is to help adults realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous learners – that is, to make more informed choices by becoming more critically reflective…in their engagement in any social context. (Mezirow, 2000, p.30)

In many ways, the field of adult education can be said to have emerged from a long tradition of social movements that were borne of the economic and social needs of people (Carpenter & Mojab, 2013; Scott, 2003; MacKreacher, 2009), and their desire and/or need to bring about some form of change/transformation. Certainly, transformative adult education aims to identify the political nature of all educational interventions and examine the root causes of oppression (Mayo, 1999). At the same time, it is also worth noting that although learning is central in all adult education perspectives, social, collective, or group learning also remains a foundational aspect of this approach. In fact, given an interest to explore adult learning and marginality in this chapter (as well as this thesis as a whole), a specific concern in this context is who can be the
learner, which is a question underpinned by the conditions through which their learning becomes transformative. To establish an understanding of the historical development of these themes, here I draw mainly from the work of Freire (1970, 1978 &1997) and Gramsci’s prison letters (Gramsci, 1929-1935/1996). Both Freire and Gramsci identified and critically addressed the issue of dominance through education as a way of fighting oppression. Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony\(^\text{10}\) to explain the issue of dominance, which is relevant in this discussion as it helps to discuss other main themes in the context of adult education. Another reason for drawing from Gramsci and Freire are because their theories of learning and themes of transformation were developed out of their work with marginalized populations, which is the focal point of this chapter.

The major themes of agency, social relations, and positionality are discussed in relation to marginality and learning in this chapter. Many scholars in the field of adult education explore these themes as a pedagogical concern, with transformative learning as a goal, and as a way to address the issue of oppression in general (see e.g. hooks, 2000, Mayo, 1999; Mezirow, 2000, 2003; Tisdell, 1993). These themes also help analyze the way the issue of marginality and learning is addressed in the two main transformative approaches discussed in this chapter and the challenges attached to it. In the latter part of this chapter I explore the main themes of transformation identified in adult learning literature as key in addressing the issue of oppression and therefore, marginality.

\(^{10}\) According to Gramsci, hegemony is, “a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class” (as quoted in Mayo, 1999, p.35).
Agency

There are numerous terms generally used to define agency. Some of those are selfhood, motivation, will, choice, initiative, and freedom (e.g. see overview by Emirbayer & Miche, 1998). In Gramsci’s writing, he conveys an individual’s agency as a given capacity of individuals to think and act regardless of their social positioning. Gramsci discusses the notion of agency in his writings as,

This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist…. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (Gramsci, 1929-35/1996, p.9).

In both Gramsci and Freire’s (1970) work, agency is positioned as people’s capacity to examine and manage their world, regardless of their class, but with particular attention to various marginalized groups. In Gramsci’s work, it is in this discussion of an ongoing counter-hegemonic activity where the agency and agentive participation of the individual is a necessary condition for their survival. Later in this section, I will examine the individual’s position in this struggle, a phenomenon that Gramsci calls the ‘war of position’ (Gramsci, 1929-35/1996).

Gramsci views this as a political struggle, whereas Freire emphasizes more directly how this is an educational struggle.

Drawing from Gramsci and Marx, Freire explores agency further in his work. He emphasizes the political nature of educational activity, where human beings should become active subjects instead of simply being the object of teaching. Freire views this process of critical educational
activity as leading to agentive participation, which in turn leads to social transformation. An example of obstacles to agentive participation, and the change that takes place after people become aware of their oppression, is conveyed in Freire’s (1970) critique of the theological practices of the church that give a false view of oppression and suffering as being a part of God’s will:

> It is extremely unlikely that these self-mistrustful, downtrodden, hopeless people will seek their own liberation in an act of rebellion, which they may view as a disobedient violation of the will of God, as an unwarranted confrontation with destiny…When the people have reached a relatively clear picture of oppression, which leads them to localize the oppressors outside themselves, they take up the struggle to surmount the contradiction in which they are caught (Freire, 1970, p. 164).

Both Freire and Gramsci point out the binary nature of a hegemonic society where one is invited, or is expected, to follow the dominant practices without questioning them, but also discuss the capacity of the individual to change their social relations. According to Freire (1970), people will use their agency to change their social relations when they are given the opportunity to learn and reflect on one’s own situation, which will then lead to action. He calls this process conscientization¹¹.

In the context of having an eye to reviewing materials in relation to adult learning, transformation, and marginality, Freire’s reference to conscientization is particularly important. It indicates the capacity individuals have in changing their realities. What is not so evident in this

¹¹“Conscientization refers to the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1972)
discussion of agency is the exploration of conditions and the everyday experiences of individuals that may be leading people to submit to the hegemonic class and to their practices. For example, the neoliberal and capitalist tendencies of the state encourage people to move from market to market to seek better opportunities for work/survival, where their lives and social relations are conditioned by the market standard. The research on immigrant experiences by Guo (2005, 2010), Maitra (2011), and Mojab (1999) confirms this reality. In addition to individual social relations and everyday life experience, an examination and discovery of the historical material on class relations is necessary to trace the dynamics of agency and/or to create an environment where everyone can equally exercise their agency.

**Social Relations and the Place of Practice**

Social relations are the myriad of patterns of complex, coordinated, power-infused, intersubjective happenings (and our consciousness of them), carried out and lived by individuals in actual places across real time, as they produce, reproduce, and challenge the social structures created by this human activity (Wilmot, 2011, p.112).

The concepts of the social and social relations have been fundamental themes in critical adult education theory and practice for many decades (Mojab & Carpenter, 2011). Social relations provide a way to understand the complex social dynamics that are historically coordinated and constantly changing (Wilmot, 2011). Both Gramsci and Freire (1970) suggest identifying social relations and the site in which they are coordinated as crucial in creating democratic (and genuinely transformative) learning and dialogue among people (Mayo, 1999). In this context, learning is possible through collaborative work and communication. The process of collaboration, working together, and learning about one’s social situation leads people to self-reflection that, in turn, leads to an emancipatory learning process in which transformative action
becomes necessary to change social relations. In this sense, social relations are the way people relate to each other through discourse, which can, in some situations, lead them to transformative action or contribute to the clear potentiality for transformative action. According to Freire, this is a fundamental step for transformation.

From an adult education perspective, many have noted specifically that it is relationship of mutuality in the sphere of production that helps individuals to become aware of their ‘social’ as defined by Smith (1995). Both Freire (1970 &1998) and Gramsci (1929-35/1996, Mayo, 1999) write about this relationship of mutuality in the context of the worker and of the student and both note the importance of learning and experience in economic life more broadly. In my opinion, the role of the adult educator in this space outside the academia is to be an organizer or facilitator who is actively seeking avenues for counter-hegemonic activity where the relationship with the worker is of reciprocity. From a critical feminist anti-racist adult education perspective, theory of the social and social relations have three major purposes; one is to, “explain and understand the world around us, second is, to produce transformative forms of knowledge and consciousness and finally, to generate revolutionary politics” (Mojab & Carpenter, 2011, p.4)

Site of practice is an equally important factor in this process, as it is an important feature in shaping who can participate in transformation and how viable adult education’s goal of transformation is for marginalized individuals. I argue that discussions of the issue of marginality need to reference the effect of norms, hegemonic worldviews, the sites of practice, and broader social, historical, and material relations. According to Freire (1970) and Gramsci (Mayo, 1999), a revolutionary praxis takes place at the site of production. An important point Freire (1970) makes in connection to the discussion of site of practice is that the face of oppression and the
oppressor changes from context to context where at times one can be the oppressed in one location and be the oppressor in another. According to Freire (1970), a person who becomes aware of their own particular positioning within social relations will be convinced of the need for struggle against oppression that leads to revolutionary change. Recognizing one’s own agency, the social relations in which one experiences everyday life, and the position an individual takes to confront the situation, should lead to a place of praxis. According to Freire, it is not a movement that is hierarchical in nature but a place of collaboration.

From an ideological perspective, both Freire and Gramsci help address the cultural and social dynamics of oppression among individuals and examine the context in which this takes place. What may still be needed, however, is attention to the question of basic needs and/or sustenance of the learner and the teacher, and an overall deeper appreciation of the dynamic positioning and conditions within various sites of practice themselves. Another issue that is not addressed is the question of knowledge, where often subordinate or marginalized groups’ knowledge is considered inferior or invalid. Sawchuk (2003) elaborated another aspect of this in his critique of Freire, he writes:

> Although the work of Freire and critical pedagogy help us to unmask ideologies, they do little to help us to understand the masking and unmasking practice that goes in the lives of the oppressed outside pedagogical relations (p.36).

In relation to this, another important question emerges: Who is to provide for the day to day needs of the person who is supposedly on the margins while fighting for his or her freedom from oppression? In the discussion of the issue of marginality and conditions of agentive participation, positionality is another crucial theme that helps understand transformative praxis.
Positionality

In Gramscian terms, it is ‘the war of position’ that creates the possibility of genuine counter-hegemonic activity (1929-35/1996; Mayo, 1999). The individual’s stand is important in this context as one can be seen as taking the position of supporting the hegemonic structure and ideology or the position of the proletariat who struggles against the hegemonic activities (and occasionally may even be doing both). ‘War of position’ leading to positionality or vice versa is crucial in deciding whose voice can be heard and whose story is represented in defining social transformation.

Feminist anti-racist literature argues in favour of recognizing and articulating positionality for a transformative learning/teaching environment (e.g. Tisdell, 2003; Ng, 1989; hooks, 2000). According to feminist anti-racist theorists, another function the notion of positionality can serve is creating space for articulating social relations from the everyday experience of people living on the margins. From a methodological perspective, these approaches offer an invitation to think about one’s position (in the site of practice as well as, for the researcher, in the research process itself) with regards to gender, race, class, and culture. This is particularly important. This is a point that resonates strongly with the feminist standpoint theories of Hartsock (1998) and Smith (2005). Drawing from Marx, both Gramsci and Freire (1970) likewise make a clear distinction in the realm of ‘position’ where they identify two groups - one representing the proletariat/oppressed group and the other as the dominant hegemonic class. The position and positionality of the individual is often mediated and is decided by the social relations in which they live their life, but out of which agentive action may or may not be genuinely transformative. From a pedagogical perspective, Freire emphasizes the need for an equal position between the teacher and the learner to address the issue of authority. According to Freire (1970),
Authentic education is not carried on by "A" for "B" or by "A" about "B," but rather by "A" with "B," mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it (p.91).

The Learner and the Issue of Marginality

In the first section, I explored the major themes of critical transformative adult education. Exploration of these themes allowed me to convey the role and capacity of the individual in changing their social relations and vice versa. This also revealed several key aspects of the theoretical debate around the issue of marginality, and the possible solutions to address the issue. The importance of learning and reflection are emphasized as key factors for a transformative change. I noted that Gramsci portrays every human being as having the intellectual capacity to transform their situation regardless of their social situation, although his approach is quite broad and he argues for the need for ongoing political action to keep fighting the hegemonic other. In comparison, Freire helps us focus somewhat more directly on adult learning dynamics. Freire make a distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed and suggests an individual needs to go through a process of critical learning (conscientization) in order to become aware of their oppressive reality. Still, like Gramsci, Freire views the individual as having the agency to transform their situation in collective action. He lists the conditions for that change as learning, reflection, and action through dialogue.

The main themes explored here reinforce the main concern of adult education/learning in terms of the adequacy of approaches to deal analytically with the issue of marginality and transformation. The discussion thus far conveyed the notion that every individual can exercise agency and is therefore capable of change. However, it also points out that social relations and the site of practice are key factors in deciding whether the individual can exercise transformation
agency or not. It also reveals that positionality of the individuals and groups are influential in changing relations, perspectives and worldview. What has not yet been addressed are these issues in terms of individual and/or psychological dynamics inherent to them. Thus, in the next section, I examine how (and how well) these main themes are incorporated in the two main approaches of individual/ social transformation and how the issues of marginality and learning are addressed under these approaches.

**Individual and Psychological Approaches to Transformation and Learning**

The first part of this section explores literature focusing on individuals and dimensions of learning in order to understand who is (and who can be) a transformative learner and under what conditions this type of learning takes place. For this I draw mainly from the work of Freire (1970, 1972 &1998); Mezirow (1978, 1994 & 2000); Belenky et al. and Goldberger (1986 &1996) and Daloz (1986 & 2000) as they specifically focus on the individual’s ways of learning, knowing, and conditions of learning; and each offers different responses to the question of transformation, learning, and marginality.

Arguably Mezirow’s chief contribution to the field of adult education is his theory of transformative learning:

Transformation theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others-to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear- thinking decision makers (Mezirow, 2000, p.8).
According to Mezirow (2000, p.5) learning is, “understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action”. Mezirow (2000) refers to transformative learning as:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference…to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more or justified to guide action. (p.7)

At the center of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning theory is the idea of the learning of specific types of meaning schemes that may create meaning perspectives which may, in turn, lead to perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978, 2000). One of the major contributions from Mezirow to transformative learning theory is the ten phases of transformation\textsuperscript{12} he applied in his research. A fundamental aspect of this approach is based on an individual’s need for meaning in life, leading to learning with the possibility of action resulting from it. According to this perspective it may not necessarily be an individual act but a collective and interactional effort (Mezirow, 1978, 1994 & 2000), Daloz (1986) and Goldberger (1996). However, Goldberger argues that although individuals are situated in communities of knowers, the dynamics of power and status are often deciding factors in how one knows and what one knows. An individual’s environment, cultural forces, and their particular life situations become a determinant factor as to whether or not the learner can make a shift in their frame of reference (Daloz, 2000). In all four

\textsuperscript{12}A disorienting dilemma
A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Planning of a course of action
Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
Provisional trying of new roles
Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective (Mezirow, 1978, 2000)
of these scholars’ work, conditions of learning and transformation are given great importance as it is noted that they are the main deciding factors in who can be a transformative learner and, therefore, who can be a transformative agent. Furthermore, it helps uncover the conditions of agentive participation under these individual approaches.

**Conditions of Transformative Learning (Transformation)**

Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection [...] But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone (Freire, 1970, p. 86).

According to Freire, learning takes place in dialogue and that dialogue leads to refection and action. Every person should be part of the dialogue, regardless of his or her social and economic conditions. Dialogue is a necessary condition for transformation and it is through dialogue that people have the opportunity to name the world with people who were otherwise denied that opportunity (Freire, 1970). The first step in the dialogue is the need for people to reclaim their voice and then participate in the dialogue. Freire suggests the steps in which dialogue will foster equal opportunity and respect for people who have been denied their voice in creating their reality: “Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence” (p. 88).

Drawing from Freire, Mezirow (1978, 2000, 2003) suggests critical reflection and discourse as two crucial elements of perspective transformation that can lead to individual and social transformation. Discourse refers to dialogue that involves an assessment of beliefs, feelings and values; it is the way one understands what someone means when they communicate with them. Furthermore Mezirow (2000) lists out conditions for discourse,
Values like freedom, equality, social justice, and rationality provide essential norms for free full participation in discourse...preconditions for realizing these values and finding one’s voice for free full participation in discourse include elements of maturity, education, safety, health, economic security and emotional intelligence.

Hungry, homeless, desperate, threatened, sick, or frightened adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse to help us better understand the meaning of our own experiences (p. 15).

According to Mezirow, a transformative learner is an individual who is having a disorienting dilemma in their life that leads them to critical reflection resulting in rational dialogue that leads them to action. However, when he outlines who can be part of discourse, Mezirow clearly makes a distinction as to who can be transformed or, in other words, who can be a transformative learner and who can not be a transformative learner. According to Mezirow, people who are poor and marginalized are not capable of discourse therefore reflection (Mezirow, 2000). In such situation, the educational praxis becomes the reflection of the hegemonic order of the dominant class where transformation becomes an alienating concept that has no value for the poor and the oppressed. Mezirow lays out the conditions of who can be a transformative agent, which is contradictory to what Freire suggests, as the possibility of praxis that allows collective agency of people who are denied of their rights.

Daloz (2000) suggests four conditions for transformation that occur through engagement with others: “presence of the other (engaging with a difference), reflective discourse (critical reflection on our early life assumption about how life is), a mentoring community and opportunities for committed action”. Daloz further provides practical steps, such as intentional moves to create diversity, valuing difference, fostering mutual respect, and creating opportunities
for action, to move to that direction for educators. Daloz is in agreement with Freire when he writes about the importance of patience, care, the conviction that we are not working alone, and the faith that change is possible for transformative action. These theories provide different standpoints and perspectives on who can be a transformative learner and under what conditions. Mezirow underestimates the potential for transformation for people who are marginalized by their life situations, whereas Freire demonstrates the ways in which it is possible for all people - the oppressed and the oppressor alike. Daloz provides inclusionary tools to make learning accessible for all.

Belenky, et al. (1986) Goldberger (1996), in their five perspectives on women’s ways of knowing, help situate individuals as knowers who are making conscious choices to move forward in their lives. In addition, they provide ways to understand the type of knower and how she proceeds with choices and actions based on his/her life experience. Belenky et al. (1986 &1996) provide a lens to understand the way women learn and exercise their agency regardless of economic, class, race, and ethnic background.

The Learner and the Issue of Marginality in These Types of Approaches
Freire suggests that each individual in the society, all of whom are capable of learning, should be a learner and a giver and therefore, individual’s agency will lead them to collective action. According to Freire, any individual is capable of learning and reflection and is therefore a learner. On the other hand, Mezirow clearly distinguishes individuals capable of transformative learning and action as people who have education, economic and social security, and high emotional intelligence. While these may be necessary conditions, these may not stop any individual from becoming a transformative learner. From Mezirow’s overall perspective, if the issues of poverty and marginalization become undermining conditions to be part of discourse, a
marginalized individual may never be able to exercise their agency for their personal or social benefit. For a comprehensive theory of social change, these exclusionary conditions need to be addressed. In this context, Daloz’s four conditions for transformation may offer a useful response. However, he fails to identify who will lead this process and how the issue of material need will be addressed. In sum, important aspects of the site of practice (including social, material, political, and economic dimensions), positionality, and marginality are difficult to address using these perspectives alone. Mezirow provides steps to transformative learning as well as explaining how the process unfolds. However, I would argue that his approach does not address the issue of marginality adequately. The contradiction in this stream of adult learning theory is that, while following at least some of the same principles as the critical scholars reviewed earlier (e.g. Freire), it varies significantly in portraying who can/should/could actually become a transformative learner. While individuals and their ways of learning are discussed in detail, the issue of social and economic relations that often plays a significant role in who could be a transformative agent is at least partially undermined in this perspective transformation stream of adult education research.

To adequately reflect, analyze, and begin to explain processes of social change, local and global components of political, social and economic developments also need to be considered, and along with them the concurrent themes of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. In this chapter, I have argued that these features impact the personal and collective worldview of people and their social relations. Critical feminist anti-racist approaches to transformation address some of the key external factors that influence and impact a process of change among individuals and groups.
Adult Education Studies and Feminist Anti-Racist Approaches in Relation to Issues of Transformation and Marginality


The main themes of agency, social relations, and positionality (difference) are discussed in detail in this approach, along with interconnected themes such as gender, race, difference, and context (e.g. the site of practice), as these offer crucial elements of inquiry to address and transform oppressive practices that affect the individual and her social life. While individual approaches to transformation helped explore the individual and their domains of learning, critical feminist anti-racist approaches to transformation helped me situate the individual in the ‘social’ that coordinates and transcends their private and public spaces. In order to keep the focus on the main themes discussed earlier, first I explore social relation and secondly, I examine tools proposed to address oppression among marginalized people in this approach.

Social Relations and Transformation

According to the critical feminist anti-racist approaches, an examination of the ‘social’ is a necessary condition for emancipatory transformation (Smith, 1997 & 2011). Examining the ‘social’ will assist in examining the site in which these relations are created and re-created that
either leads to transformative learning or hinders the prospect of learning. It also helps unravel the forces that coordinate people’s productive and reproductive activities. Mojab and Carpenter (2011) explain this as the major purpose of critical adult education:

The substance of adult education is processing and making sense of the everyday and -night life of people. Our lives consist of actual experiences, in actual places, woven together in complex relations. In critical adult education, the goal is to develop this understanding of experience to change actual social conditions (p.4).

Mojab and Carpenter argue that theory of the ‘social’ is integral in keeping away from fragmentation of the social organization. Bannerji (2011) takes it further to explain how the theory of social or social relations helps understand the power relations imbued with social difference. The discussion of the social and social relations is fundamental in this discussion as it leads to an exploration of how individuals knowingly, or unknowingly, contribute to creating their social worlds that either keep them in the centre or move them to the margins. Another important aspect of this concept of social relations, as discussed by several critical anti-racist feminist approaches, is the focus on modes of production that maintain all social relations that produce or reproduce their material, social, and cultural worlds. It is through human agency that the social is created or recreated (Carpenter & Mojab, 2011). However, for a person who is on the margins, having agency does not mean that their mode of production will change automatically resulting in change in their social relations.

This review conveys that individuals having agency is not enough for them to move forward since their social relations implicate their agency. What it reveals is the connection between individual and their social relations in mediating and shaping an individual’s agentive
participation, as well as their knowledge production and learning. Mojab and Carpenter (2011) point this out as a process and an activity that is imbued with power relations that legitimizes certain knowledge as valid. How much an individual’s religious beliefs, spiritual, and intellectual activities influence their use of agency and their connection to social relations is an area left unexplored in the literature reviewed.

**Tools and Processes for Transformation**

Feminist approaches to transformation and learning processes offer a variety of ways to achieve the goal of individual and social transformation. For example, Scott (2003) suggests a transformative action plan. First, Scott envisions transformation by a structural change at the personal level that involves a change in the worldview, a developmental stage change, and a personality and/or irreversible public role change. Second, Scott suggests social structural changes in institutions, and these institutions include market-driven businesses and corporations. She views this as a requirement because these institutional structures constitute the body politic¹³. For informal emancipation, citizenship development, and learning, Scott suggests Broad Based Organizations (BBO)¹⁴ and communities as the best place. Scott (2003) provides examples and findings from her empirical study among a group of community organizers and trainers on their everyday work experiences. Findings from this study address three steps to transformation but also the validity of learning that occurs between the learner and the educator.

“THE BUILDING OF COMMUNITY POWER (A BBO) TO BALANCE AN OTHERWISE PERVERSIVE SYSTEM OF

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¹³ The people of a politically organized nation or state considered as a group.

¹⁴ Organizations or groups focused on community organizing and development.
neoliberalism has the capacity to transform personal structures within individuals and social structures in society” (Scott, 2003, p.283).

Community learning and dialogue are integral parts of a transformative process (Humphries & Martin, 2000; Merrill, 2005; Goemz, et al., 2011). “Both educators and oppressed groups need a critical understanding of the relationship between ideological struggles and material struggles in order to effect transformation” (Thompson, 2000, p. 90 as cited in Merrill, 2005). In examining the historical development of social action and change, it is easily identifiable that dialogic transformation has challenged and changed many traditional political, economic, socio-cultural, and private domains and it can benefit people who are not necessarily in the mainstream (Gomez et al., 2011). Moreover, Boler (1999), Jasper (2010), and Pedwell (2012) explain the role empathy plays in transformation of the self, a role that is central to achieving social justice. Empathy is showcased as the cure for society's ills by the political and disciplinary fields (Boler, 1999). However, Boler warns of the ineffectiveness of passive empathy that does not produce any action to change the situation, yet feels the pain or oppression of the other. This discussion of dialogue, empathy, and structural change assist in unraveling the issues of power and power imbalance in the course of building a deeper understanding of how social and economic transformation and issues of marginality relate to adult learning processes.

Themes from materialist feminist approaches are drawn on in this review to explain yet another aspect of transformation and marginality in adult learning. Feminist approaches to historical materialism focus on social structures and the way in which women are exploited and oppressed through such structures. Fundamental to materialist feminist approaches is the notion of praxis - a practical theoretical struggle involved in movements for social change. Historical materialism
views, starting with or at least including the experiences of individuals, recognizes the continual productions of life, involving systems of connected productive activities and also identify the need for people to produce in order to meet their basic needs to survive (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997).

Materialist feminist perspectives connect women’s oppression to capitalism as a key element of a class system. This helps us explore why social life is changing and how it is connected to historical shifts in production of life under capitalism. Discussion of class begins with the distinction between those who own the means of production and those who sell their labour power for wages (Benston, 1997). Furthermore, a materialist framework allows the freedom of looking at multiplicity and simultaneity of oppression through gender, class, and race (Brewer, 1997). Additionally, class relations are explored analytically drawing from the work of theorists like Ollman (1978) and Eagleton (1976 and 2011). This perspective helps to locate the individual and root cause of their marginality in their local and global social organization. Learning is the uncovering of these conditions and finding ways to address this oppression.

The Learner and the Issue of Marginality

In anti-racist feminist approaches, the emphasis is on oppression and marginality. Here, social relations are perceived as the major factor that maintains the social positioning of the individual. According to this approach, marginality can be addressed only through changing the social relations. With the exception of Scott’s (2003) work, I argue this discussion is still highly theoretical in nature: the conceptual tools it provides for empirical analysis need to be developed further and it too often does not give enough room for practical ways of changing the social relations. Another revealing aspect of this approach is the learner positionality can vary greatly and marginality is a highly contested topic in this as an individual could be well positioned in
terms of material well-being but could, however, be marginalized by other social attributes, such as race and culture.

**Similarities and Differences of These Approaches**

The approaches I selected to apply to this research relate to my concern of gaining a deeper understanding of the combined issues of transformation, adult learning, and marginality. There are many similarities as well as differences across the approaches I have reviewed in this chapter. The types of psychological approaches I have discussed focus primarily on individuals, their meaning-making, worldview, and experience, and view individuals as the constructors of knowledge, emphasizing their free will as a necessary condition for transformation. In opposition to this, the other approaches I have discussed had a different focus. They offered resources for critically examining the role social and political conditions and structures play in attributing change to the individual and society. Both approaches acknowledge, in their own way, the role agency plays in individual and social transformation, but in some instances presented a challenge to a deeper understanding of transformation and adult learning and marginality. Feminist anti-racist scholars, especially structural feminists, explore the politics of knowledge production, giving spaces for different voices, issues of power, and privilege, and positionality differences based on ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and age, space which is largely absent from the individual psychological models, with the partial exception offered by the work of Belenky, Clinchy & Tarule (1986 & 1996).

The main theoretical distinction I would like to point out – looking from individual approaches to various feminist approaches – is the way critical reflection and discourse is perceived under these approaches. This is important because both approaches highlight critical reflection and discourse, as important elements of transformation, yet do not apply this in the same way. Mezirow
suggests this as two crucial elements of perspective transformation that can lead to individual and social transformation. Yet, he suggests that people living on the margins, intimidated by desperate life situations, cannot either fully or freely participate in discourse and critical reflection (2003). While Mezirow provides a tool to understand transformative change in specific ways, he does not, in general, see it as possible for a marginalized person to be transformative agents. Feminist perspectives, on the other hand, pick up where Mezirow departs, while using similar concepts such as critical reflection and dialogue. They explore a wide range of issues related to oppression from critical pedagogy that address the issues of power, position, and difference in ways to create and promote dialogue. However, neither elaborates on how a marginalized individual can deal with their immediate needs so that they can freely participate in dialogue. Here, I argue, we find the importance of conceptual tools suited to understanding positionality in relation to the site of practice (inclusive of all the political, historical, and economic factors that bear on it). Also unclear is who can initiate this conversation without objectifying the learner as the recipient of the expert knowledge; a point nicely emphasized in the original works of Freire on the implications of the creation of subjects versus objects of educational practice.

Mezirow’s conception of the transformative learner is different from the rest of the literature reviewed for this thesis. In terms of deeper understandings of transformation and marginality in adult learning processes, it largely ignores a great deal concerning a theory of social change that reflects changes in their everyday life situations. The theory of transformation it supposes becomes relevant in only the most limited situations. Involved in this type of broader framework, I argue, must also be a conceptualization of social change where local and global components of political, social, and economic developments are captured along with the concurrent themes of
race, gender, class, and ethnicity that impact the personal and collective world view of people, their everyday experiences, and social relations.

Different feminist scholars have looked at the politics of knowledge production and social structures and their influence on learning. In terms of integrating critical feminist scholarship with perspectives on adult learning, the results support the investigation of connections between individual and social structures. In contrast, global theories brought into relation and/or discussed in the context of adult education studies, focus primarily on the political and economic transformation occurring as a result of capitalism, globalization, and neoliberalism. I argue that the strength and differences of these approaches allows for a deeper conceptualization of distinct aspects of change, transformation, and marginality in adult learning processes, a conceptualization that may illuminate critical dynamics in the life of marginalized people, such as immigrants, in urban Canada.

Summary
The first part of this chapter discussed the major themes of agency, social relations and positionality as explored mainly in the work of Freire and Gramsci as underlying themes of transformative adult education. The major finding from this review is that individuals regardless of their place and role in the society have agency however, their social relations shape how they use their agency and if their agency can lead to transformative learning and change. A major challenge for adult educators and people interested in transformative learning processes is to find inclusive ways to address the issue of social relations without undermining people’s voices and their capacity to lead their own change. The conditions of transformation identified in the individual approach specifically of Mezirow contradict with the rest of the theories as Mezirow undermines the capacity of marginalized individuals to learn and transform their lives. The
danger in such conceptualization is that it removes the individual from having any role in controlling their environment, which can lead to normative biases and oppressive ideologies being replaced by new ones that do not necessarily reflect the need or voice of the individual who motivated such theories.

According to the theories discussed above, agentive participation is a necessity to transform the world. For agentive participation, individuals need to be given opportunities for dialogue and participation. Individual approaches provide some practical tools that can help generate agentive participation and feminist approaches help pay attention to specific areas that needs care in order to create a transformative learning environment and learner. In the context of my research, an important thing I have learned from this analysis is the need for finding common themes that reflect the local and global nature of transformation that can help deconstruct and then potentially address the complexities around the notion of transformation and marginality analytically. The critical review and suggested synthesis across multiple approaches, theories, and concepts provides the beginnings of new tools for analysis of adult learning, while it also could inform for the practices of participatory learning and action for marginalized groups such as the participants of this particular study. The latter would depend on opening up a dialogue to include feminist academics, community organizers, and activists who work hard to fight oppression and injustice for and with marginalized people, inviting the building of partnerships. The main themes explored in this chapter will be used to analyze the possibilities and barriers to transformative learning and change for the immigrant woman individually and collectively. The next chapter discusses methods and participant details.
Chapter 4
Methodology and Methods

Understanding the research methods used in this study is important for research findings. Therefore, I will introduce my research, my subjective role in the study, the philosophical framework that informed my choice of methods, research design, methods of data collection, research processes, and introduce the research participants. When I began thinking about the methods and methodology I was going to employ when conducting this study, there were three issues that I was interested in resolving. My first set of concerns was ensuring that there would be actual representation of peoples’ voices in my research, that there was clarity regarding my subjective role as a researcher in collecting those representative voices, and that I openly articulated the issue of power imbalance between the researcher and the research subjects. My second set of concerns was finding a framework that would help me examine my research questions with objectivity and without compromising the authenticity of the findings. My final set of concerns was around the question of the match between epistemology and methodology. In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the strategies and processes, which lead me to solutions for each of my research concerns as well as a description of the way this research challenged my own worldview and biases.

This chapter is organized in four parts, the first part introduces the research, and subjectivity of the researcher; the second part explain the philosophical framework; third part demonstrates the research design, methods and the process; and the final part introduces the participants, their work and the challenges, the questions and learning’s I had from the filed work, sampling and data collection methods, and the data analysis.
The Research

The main questions that lead me to this research are discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. Some of the additional questions that led to a deeper discussion of the different dimensions of informal work are briefly described here: In the context of informal sector work, a central (and complex) question for me is how work as an activity becomes highly gendered for women involved in the informal work thereby reinforcing a gendered division of labor. This led me to questions such as: What are the extra-local elements that influence immigrant women’s choice of informal work? How does work in the informal economy lead women to choose certain types of work that are home or community-based, and what are the reasons behind those choices? Is informal work the solution for the socio-economic struggle immigrants face in this country? What kind of learning takes place through informal work and is it transferable to other settings? Is this work transformative in nature or is it reproductive work that reinforces the gender inequality and maintains the invisible exploitative condition of the capitalist market? Can it be seen as an act of resistance and reveal agency among women who are deprived of choices by the dominant class and culture? Or is it a way of accepting the ideology\(^\text{15}\) of a 'normal household', where women look after the household and find ways to substitute income by doing work in the informal economy? My practical aim is to shed light on the growing number of women who work in the informal economy (Losby, et al., 2002; Schneider & Enste, 2002; Reinhart, Job & Braithwaite, 2004; Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995), and how their contributions to the household, community, and State are recognized. In addition, this study will challenge the notion of gendered work, and the factors that contribute to this work being either valued or undervalued.

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\(^{15}\) Ideology refers to the production and representation of ideas, values and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups (McLaren, 2007)
Subjectivity of the Researcher

My first concern in this research was my role; I wanted to ensure representation while being mindful of the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants. To do this, it is important that I explain my particular positioning within this research and how it shaped my research focus. I came to this research project with a variety of experiences in terms of the different legal statuses I have had in Canada, such as a student, temporary worker, and immigrant. These experiences positioned me well to conduct this research. In addition, as a woman of colour from Asia, I was aware of my subjective identity, as both an insider and an outsider, in relation to the various aspects of my study. In addition, my work with Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL), the CURA project, as well as my work with women and my international experiences, brought observation, authenticity and practical knowledge that aided me well. Until I started working at my community development job, I was not aware of the depth to which immigrants struggled in this country. This work provided me with the opportunity to facilitate, and at times take part in, some of the women's informal economic strategies for survival in Canada. I have come to realize how gendered the economic and informal activities that are led by women are and how some of the women struggled to get away from such social organization in their homeland, but are now forced to go back to the very nature of work they chose to reject. While I was able to observe and be a part of some conversations on this topic, I have not actually lived through the experience of working in the cash economy nor was I aware of how or why one takes up work in the cash economy rather than in other types of precarious work. Furthermore, I had no knowledge of professional regulatory boards or credential-testing systems for professionals in Canada. I have observed and listened to many stories about the types of work women did prior to immigrating and the work they
currently do now in Canada. In some ways, being part of many of my friends’ and their families’ journeys makes me an insider. However, examining it from a research perspective helped me unravel the complex dynamics of women's work and the ruling relations that are at work in creating or recreating places and choices for immigrant women in urban Canada.

My lack of experience in the area of the cash economy in a developed nation, and lack of experience with professional regulatory boards and training services, made me an outsider in this research, as I did not understand how learning in different contexts is not valued and is seen as non-transferable; prior to conducting this research. My particular position with respect to immigrant women and their informal activities that I used to observe and facilitated at my work place informed my research. However, I needed to hear the stories of women settling in urban Canada, including their experience of transnational migration, work, and their struggles around labour market entry, to understand and develop a framework that contributes to all women seeking a positive change. The research benefited from its link to the work of the APCOL (CURA) project where many overlapping themes are being explored. This project provided me with the opportunity to do some work in the community using a pre-constructed research framework prior to the research and participant observation for this thesis. In addition, at the time I was in the community, I was able to use their data from eight different neighbourhoods in Toronto, which included some demographics of the target population.

Combining literature on Canadian immigrants and their labour market experience with studies on the informal economy and women's role in it, coupled with my own experiences and observation of immigrant women in urban Canada, prompted me to investigate this area further. I saw three possible entry points to this research: 1) from the context of the informal economy in the
developed countries context, 2) female immigrants and their labour market experiences, and 3) immigrant women and their experience doing informal work at home or in the community while managing their household responsibilities. I chose the third situation as my entry point, as this research takes a women’s standpoint to capture their views and experiences of work in the informal sector which leads them to explore their agency, and to discover the outcomes of informal work on highly educated and professional immigrant women. Furthermore, I wanted to examine it from a transformative learning perspective to understand if this work was transformative for the women involved or if it was reproductive, which would keep them as domestic workers with few choices for individual and social development.

**Philosophical Framework**

The philosophical framework I used was shaped out of my desire to find answers to the issues I raised earlier in the introductory section of this chapter. Harding (1987, p.2) helped to address one of my concerns when she made a clear distinction between epistemology (“a theory of knowledge”), methodology (“a theory and analysis of how research should proceed”) and methods (“a technique for…gathering evidence”). My exploration of individual and social dimensions of transformative learning frameworks in the third chapter assisted me with my epistemological inquiry. Whereas my theoretical framework helped me analyze the data, my methodology is largely influenced by one of the two main approaches used in my theoretical framework.

My methodology is informed by critical feminist anti-racist and adult learning, approaches to transformation. I chose to adopt these approaches because I created my methodology and methods of inquiry for this study with a worldview that people have the capacity to transform their perceptions and worldview and influence others in a process that can lead to a place where
people, regardless of their gender, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, have equal opportunities and social status and can be accepted for who they are. My strong desire to examine the possibility of transformative change that can occur through informal work led me to choose feminist approaches as the aim of feminist research is to create social change while striving to represent human diversity (Reinharz, 1992). The importance of contextualizing the experiences shared by the women in my study, and critical reflection on their everyday lives in the context of their social relations, will guide my analysis. Methods from the margins or feminist approaches in general emphasize the need for critical reflection and inter-subjectivity as two crucial components to understand the everyday lives of people who live on the margins and for the actual representation of their voices (Harding, 1987; Kirby & Mackenna, 1989).

In crafting my research approaches, I drew from various sources of feminist methodologies. For example, the work of Kirby & Mackenna (1989) informed my thinking on research processes and analysis. This particular approach helped me understand and treat my individual data for its unique place within the broader themes I was exploring. In their exploration of ‘methods from the margins’, they lay out five principles in which feminist methodology is founded upon: “1. Knowledge is socially constructed 2. Social interactions form the basis of knowledge 3. Different people experience the world differently, 4. Knowledge changes over time 5. Differences in power have resulted in the commodification of knowledge and monopoly on knowledge production” (p.26). In addition, my exploration of feminist scholarship revealed the various themes such as positionality, notions of difference, standpoint theories, consciousness raising, and praxis, as discussed in the works of Bailey, 2002; Carpenter & Mojab, 2011; Humphries & Martin, 2000; Tisdell, 1993, 1998, 2000; Bannerji, 1978, 1993; Davis 1986; hooks, 1989, 2000; Ng, 1989, 1996. I found many of these themes relevant to my inquiry of immigrant women’s
experiences and processes of change and they guided me with my data collection and also helped me with the representation of people’s individual and collective voices, allowing me to explore an appropriate way of telling their stories from their perspectives.

Another major reason I selected feminist anti-racist approaches to research is that feminist epistemology helps separate knowledge as a social construction experienced differently by men and women. Therefore, the knowledge created needs to be looked at from both perspectives in order to understand and challenge the existing order (Littlewoods, 2004). Furthermore, the aim of feminism as emancipatory praxis is key in my examination of immigrant women’s experiences and also in developing a context that addresses the unique challenges faced by immigrant women and their families in the process of integration. Black and third world feminist literature, for example the work of hooks (1989 & 2000), Das Gupta (1989), Davis (1986), and Ng (1989 & 1986), also helped me interpret and document the process of change experienced by immigrant women and provide a framework to articulate the findings without losing its originality and depth.

One specific theme I would like to highlight as having a significant influence on my methodology is the concept of standpoint. Rooted in Marxist theory, the feminist concept of standpoint provides an important epistemological tool to understand and oppose all forms of domination (Hartsock, 1988). Furthermore, Hartsock suggests, gendered division of labour forms the basis for such a standpoint. This was an interesting observation for me in my examination of change through a gender lens. Standpoint, as defined by Smith (2005) introduces it as within
institutional ethnography (IE)\textsuperscript{16} - the "standpoint" of a subject creates an entry point to discover the "social" (Smith, 2005). Standpoint creates a subject position for women in the public sphere and more generally in the arenas of political, intellectual, and cultural life. Both feminist and women's standpoints play unique roles in fighting for justice. The notion of standpoint is important in this study not only because of its potential for being foundational in transformative education practices but also for creating spaces for non-academic women's narratives and experiences to be told from their points of view. The different outlooks on standpoint theory explored in this study allowed me to examine more comprehensively different dimensions of my inquiry and the extra local relations/structures that influenced the everyday experience of women in their local context.

In summary, my methodology, and my methods are largely influenced by feminist approaches and my epistemological framework is a combination of two main approaches from transformative learning theories explored in chapter three of this thesis. In this thesis, I aim to narrate the experience and process of change from my research participant’s perspective and tease out themes that either contributed to or shaped those experiences. Feminist methodology helped me with the research design and method and transformative learning approaches helped me with my data analysis.

\textbf{Research Methods}

My method of inquiry is qualitative and collaborative in its approach as it draws from various elements of narrative inquiry and ethnographic approaches. In narrative inquiry, the researcher

\textsuperscript{16} The Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith developed the institutional ethnography approach out of feminist insights and first presented it as sociology for women. She later referred to the approach more broadly as sociology for people. Combining theory and method, IE emphasizes connecting sites and situations of everyday life.
engages in the lives of individuals and asks one or more of them to provide stories about their lives. The researcher then retells this information in a narrative style (Creswell, 2003). In ethnographic approaches, special emphasis is given to address the issue of power imbalance between the research and the research subjects (Smith, 1987). Ethnographic approaches emphasize the responsibility of the researcher to address the process of injustice in a particular domain or context (Madison, 2005). My choice of methods, such as interviews, focus groups and participant observation, was influenced by ethnographic approaches. Drawing from IE, it offered a way to capture the everyday experiences of people that reveals social organization and institutional orders, and takes account of their experiences in order to form knowledge (Marjorie De Vault & McCoy, 2006). IE examines people's everyday experiences and knowledge to explore ethnographic problems and extends the study beyond local knowledge to external parties and subjects. In general, IE starts from the local people's experiences to discover relations that rely on and coordinate their everyday lives, which is fitting to assess the experiences of my research population.

In this research, the extra-local informed by the IE element is comprised of the ruling relations which coordinate women's entry and choice of work in the cash economy and labour market access of immigrants in the form of licensing procedures or regulatory boards. The other areas of investigation focus on the process of change and potential outcomes of it on the individual and family as explored through women’s narratives. I define this as a specific type of qualitative design in which narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an action, event, or chronologically connected events (Creswell, 2013). In narrative style, one or two individual stories, experiences, and chronologically structuring the evolvement of those experiences and the meaning it produces are possible to capture (Creswell, 2013). Chapter Five
is a narrative account, as it illustrates the story of two women’s journeys to Canada and describes the events that lead them to their choice of becoming informal workers, their experience of informal work and the way it has changed and is changing their perceptions and lives.

Qualitative researchers should be good storytellers, and storytelling should be one of their outstanding strengths (Wolcott, 1994). Wolcott makes an important point when he talks about qualitative research and storytelling, as I believe storytelling is a powerful way of unveiling issues of injustice and oppression. Storytelling as a method of inquiry should help to uncover meaning embedded in the stories to make it transparent and simple. This helps the reader and the researcher engage in the story without preconceived beliefs and theories. The narrative inquiry method will help them to participate in this research in a personal way. In addition, as Wiebe (2010) suggests, retelling the story in the thesis will give the researcher text for further study. I used narrative style to discuss my data as it allowed me to preserve the voices of women and their experiences without much modification.

**Strategy and Research Design**

The field research I conducted had multiple layers to it but the central focus was on women's everyday life and work experiences before and after immigration. Other areas of exploration focused on women's work choices and the reasons that lead to these choices and the type of informal activities women got involved in at home and in the community. The first part of the research focused on how women chose informal work and discerned the types of work women are involved with in their neighbourhoods and communities as part of their economic and social survival in Canada. This helped to document the process of change in the context of economic and social integration as immigrants and how informal work shapes their roles in the community and in the family. The second part of the research was an examination of women's work
experiences in the cash sector. This examination helped to identify if women had to change their views on work/life in Canada. In addition, it helped to examine if they resisted change and showed agency or complied with the demands of the new country and culture, and whether or not they view change as a choice or a condition for survival. The third component examined how informal sector activities, specifically social networks and social capital, facilitate an immigrant woman’s journey through this process, and how it allows them to integrate into another culture and economy. In addition, it explored, whether women viewed this work as a barrier to exercise their skills and experience leading to downward growth. It also examined the role religion, culture and other social practices played in their everyday life/work experiences in the cash sector.

**Research Process and Participant Details**

In order to ensure that the identity of my research participants remain confidential, I have not specified the urban neighbourhood in which this research took pace. However, I would like to mention that it was important for me to choose this location, as the particular socio-demographic matched well with the participant criteria I had for this research; I had the opportunity to observe immigrant life and make connections with several community groups and people in this community prior to my student role. My involvement with the APCOL project also provided insights into the antipoverty strategies people have adopted in neighbourhoods like this in Toronto.

The first stage of this research study involved individual interviews with immigrant women who are part of the cash sector in Canada. There were 27 individual interviews with women between the ages of 30-45 who arrived in Canada between 1998-2009 and self identify as immigrants. Two are omitted from the subsequent discussion, as the legal status of the participants did not
match my criteria. Interviews took place between October 2012 and March 2013. Interviews were one on one, using semi-structured, in-depth, open-ended questions. The focus of inquiry was on their everyday experiences of life, their perceptions of work (paid and unpaid), life in Canada and the integration process, and their work experience in the labour market before and after immigration. Furthermore, my research explored the types of activities these women were involved with to supplement their family income or to find money for personal expenses and the reasons why they chose informal work over other types of precarious work.

**Interviews**

Twenty-seven women from eight different Asian countries participated in the individual interviews. One of the participant criteria was to find women who immigrated to Canada between 1998 and 2009 and self-identify as immigrants. The reason the time period and self-identification criteria were chosen was to trace the way immigrant women and their families changed over the years and to see if there were any particular advantages for women who have been in Canada longer, and vice versa. This also helped me to examine how the labour market and other socio economic activities may have changed for immigrants over the years. The timer period criteria emerged from questions such as: how did women who arrived here 10 to 12 years ago find the labour market? Did they find it was easier to adapt and integrate than someone who arrived five years ago? This time period helped me navigate change in depth as well as helped me to compare the experiences of more recent arrivals to women who were more seasoned in Canada. Furthermore it helped me to explore the possibility that women are more receptive to change as they spend longer periods of time here or if the opposite is true, that they are more resistant to change as they spend more time here.
Focus Groups

The second part of the research involved three focus groups composed of women who identified themselves as leaders in the community and are either doing some form of informal work at home or in their immediate neighbourhoods. Focus groups are discussions that are organized to explore issues using a collective activity that will help participants share experiences, concerns, and opinions (Kitzingzer, 1994; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). First, in the focus groups we examined if these women leaders viewed informal work as a way of showing agency and if they also saw the potential for transformation occurring through this work. In addition, we examined their view of work and what they see as possible outcomes of informal work in Canada. The second purpose of the groups was to explore the role of social networks that help women to develop ideas to market their skills for economic purposes, which lead to informal economic activities in the community or elsewhere. A third purpose was to explore why women chose informal work over other types of employment and how it shaped their role in the community and household and if they see it changing their worldviews, life values, or perceptions of work or women.

I conducted three focus groups with a total of nineteen women. The focus groups consisted of women from five south Asian countries (Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). Focus groups took place in November and December of 2012. In this study, focus groups served several purposes. Some focus group participants were part of the individual interviews and helped reach out to other women. One of the interesting observations regarding the make up of the focus groups was that I did not organize people into in any specific group, as there was no category or criteria for participation other than what was suggested initially for the individual interviews. My e-mails and flyers were basic: I listed a few dates and times I was available in the
community to meet with the women as a group. The first six women who responded from the community were women from Pakistan and Bangladesh and they suggested a time that worked for all of them, brought snacks with them for the meeting, and led a lively discussion (See Table 2). The second focus group consisted of mainly the most recent immigrants, again they were women who came to Canada in 2008 & 2009 and all of them, interestingly, had teaching/academic backgrounds and were volunteering in various community agencies. In fact, this focus group took place in one of the community agencies many of them volunteered with in their free time (Table 4). The third focus group consisted of a mixed group of women from all kinds of educational and work backgrounds (Table 3).

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation was also key, from the beginning to the final stages of this research; as Diamond (2006) suggests, in IE informed research, this method offers possible insight to the challenges of how to begin research in everyday life. Participant observation can open up the analytic lens from the individuals themselves to the co-ordination of their activities. Diamond provides an excellent example of participant observation, and how it can be a method of analysis to explicate local practices that link to categories and frames of institutional discourse, through about a hypothetical scenario where ‘Fern’ has a fur coat in her closet. He asks, "Where did you get fur coat, Fern?" Her answer details her journey from a rich home in the suburbs, through hospitalization, then a Medicare home, then the depletion of all personal resources, to accessing Medicaid services. This is an excellent example of illustrating the embodied activities of a person’s life.
In this study, participant observation was used mainly to observe informal work that occurred during special events and community events that I attended and I also visited few houses to observe women providing spa and other services to other women. Observation of women's work in the informal economy in the community gave me an understanding of their navigation of places, systems, and allowed me to observe the way the informal sector operates in an urban setting within an institutional framework. It also provided an illustration of culture, gender, and race structures that may influence types of women’s work and the sites where this work takes place. Participant observation provided me rich understanding of the context in which work activities took place and other factors that influenced the work, and provided me with valuable insights to underlying themes of class, ethnicity, and culture in shaping the organization of this work.

In both the individual interviews and the focus groups, there were participants who needed translation and sometimes group members translated for each other. In four instances, interviews were conducted in native languages (Malayalam and Tamil), which I translated to English while transcribing. Individual interviews lasted anywhere from thirty to seventy-five minutes. Focus groups were minimum 1.5-2 hours long. The majority of female interviewees came to Canada because of their families or through the skilled class category. There were four women who came to Canada as refugees and later on received immigration status; there were a couple of women who came to Canada as dependents on their spouses’ temporary work visas and later on applied for permanent residency. There was one exception in my criteria to include a women for the focus group: Aneeza was born in Canada and was sent to Pakistan for religious education

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17 Some related statistical details are in chapter one and two of this thesis
until she was in her teenage years; she then got married to an immigrant from the same country at the age of 18 and now lives in Toronto with her family- she views herself as an immigrant.

Except for two participants, everyone in this study had children ranging from a few months old to teenagers. The average number of children per family was two and all participants lived in two-parent households, with the exception of Lily who was a single mother. Eight of the participants lived in community housing or subsidized apartment buildings. Several of the families were welfare recipients and for those participants, that was their main source of income.

Table 1, below, shows demographic information about the women who took part in individual interviews and Tables 2, 3, & 4 show the demographics of the focus group participants. I did not include number of children in this list as age was already set in the criteria as between 25-45. This range was chosen because it is the set age limit in the immigration guidelines that allow immigrants to receive full points in that category designated by the department of immigration (CIC, 2009). As I mentioned earlier, the majority came through the family class and, with the exception of two participants (Lily had an adult daughter, Selma had two boys 16 & 18), everyone else had children below 13 years old, and one woman did not have any children.

Everyone lived in apartment buildings and in close proximity to schools, grocery stores, public transit, and religious places. The local schools and the community centres were the main public places used by all participants.

With the exception of three women, all participants from the focus group and individual interviews had, at minimum, an undergraduate degree. Seven people had professional degrees, including one PhD and one physician. In terms of formal work experience, except for three women, all participants had some years of formal work experience: three had worked from home
and all others worked in the formal sector. In one focus group, all the participants were teachers or professors. One participant continues to do what she did prior to her immigration. Eleven of the participants had some form of external work experience since their arrival in Canada. Most worked in precarious jobs as waitresses, factory workers, and child minders. With the exception of Lily, no one had full time work when they worked outside their home/community. This data resonates well with the findings of over representation of women of colour in precarious work (Carr & Chen, 2001; Vosko, 2003, Ghorashi, 2002).

**Participant Details**

Table 1: Demographic Information of Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto (Individual interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Previous job</th>
<th>Current Work</th>
<th>Formal Work experience in Canada</th>
<th>Year of immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meena</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Lab technician</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>B.Com</td>
<td>Financial analyst</td>
<td>Child minder/catering</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anju</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>B.SC</td>
<td>Dietician</td>
<td>Spa/catering</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumi</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Catering/Home spa</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suma</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Catering/child minding</td>
<td>Waitress/cook</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeena</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>B.Com</td>
<td>Govt. Services</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fouzia</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>College Lecturer</td>
<td>Tutor/Community worker</td>
<td>Factory (Garments)</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>B.A. (Diploma from here)</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>Counselor, Child minder</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anila</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Home Spa</td>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badia</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>Catering/Spa</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soumya</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>B.Sc.</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Home Tutor</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noor</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>M.Com</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Garment &amp; Jewellery seller</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadiya</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>Previous job</td>
<td>Current work</td>
<td>Formal work experience in Canada</td>
<td>Year of immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sameena</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rema</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suja</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>B.A. and Diploma in computer sciences</td>
<td>Computer programmer/travel agent</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>Deli maker</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>B.Ed.</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>Child minder/office assistant</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waheeda</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>MBBS</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jameela</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jemma</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>B.Com</td>
<td>Govt. Services</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>Factory work/waitress</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Teacher assistant</td>
<td>Catering/child minder</td>
<td>Factory work/waitress</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamala</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Training officer (Gov’t sector)</td>
<td>Craft/art/garment seller</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>B.Sc. computer science</td>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>Catering/child minder</td>
<td>waitress</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Demographic Information of Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto (Focus group 1)
Table 3: Demographic Information of Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto (Focus group 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Previous Job</th>
<th>Current work</th>
<th>Formal work experience in Canada</th>
<th>Year of immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meena</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Lab Technician</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>B.Com</td>
<td>Financial controller</td>
<td>Child minding/Catering/</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Garment selling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anju</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Dietician</td>
<td>Spa/catering</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rema</td>
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<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vijaya</td>
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<td>Community work/child</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>minder</td>
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<td>Banker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lakshmi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>B.Tech</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Bakery/pastries</td>
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Table 4: Demographic Information of Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto (Focus group 3)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Previous Job</th>
<th>Current work</th>
<th>Formal work experience in Canada</th>
<th>Year of immigration</th>
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<td>M.Sc.</td>
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<td>Dhanya</td>
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<td>M.Ed.</td>
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<td>minder</td>
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<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Child minder</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2008</td>
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Informal Work Categories

The kind of informal work the women were engaged in the time of interviews and focus groups can be primarily divided into two categories: community work and home-based informal work. A third small category I identified is informal work in established businesses. The home based workers operated their work out of their homes and their work was primarily in the areas of childcare, catering, home spa (beauty care), and ethnic garment and jewellery sales. Eight of the participants were engaged in childcare and that was the only activity they performed. Eight other women did catering along with childcare and several of them did many of the activities mentioned in Table 1 from time to time according to their needs and demands for their services. For example, Betty did childcare on a daily basis, and occasionally sold garments, while selling homemade pastries and baked goods when there was demand for them from neighbours or friends. Five women ran home spas with services ranging from beauty care to hairdressing. Two women did home tutoring for neighbour’s kids: Fouzia tutored in religious education and Soumya mathematics. While Soumya did home tutoring five days a week, Fouzia did it once a week for two hours. One participant, Waheeda, did tailoring on demand for extended family and friends. Three women sold garments as a primary activity and accessories on demand and for special occasions.

In the context of informal work in this study, community work refers to work participants performed for small honorariums or pay per service in the community/neighbourhood for groups or community organizations. The activities ranged from distribution of flyers, conducting surveys, and assisting in research activities to providing childcare during events, cleaning services, and doing community outreach. Thirteen women were doing community work in different capacities, ranging from once a week to twice a month or upon demand, for the last
number of years. Another category of informal workers were two women (Suma and Vijaya) who worked outside the community for cash: Suma worked as a waitress and cook in a local restaurant during the week and in a coffee chain on the weekends. Vijaya worked in a few places as a cleaner at night or on the weekend and during the weekdays, upon request, she provided childcare for neighbours or friends. In terms of work hours, the majority of the participants reported working around 15 to 20 hours a week, with the exception of Suma and Vijaya who worked between 20 and 40 hours a week. However, for everyone, the hours varied depending on the demand for services requested each week.

**Sampling and Data Collection**

In qualitative research, samples are selected with a specific goal: the objective is to gain deeper understanding of the topic/issue under study and the context in which this issue is played out and experienced by a carefully selected group of people (Maykut & Morehous, 1994). With the permission of my supervisor, I was able to conduct ten preliminary interviews prior to selecting my research participants. The preliminary interviews were done with women who I knew from my time in the neighbourhood as a development consultant. I contacted women who I came in touch with during events and special occasions who were providing services to the community. The local schoolyard became another connecting point for me to get in touch with many immigrant women as they picked up and dropped off their kids. This was done in September 2011 through July 2012. I started making field notes from September through March 2013. Due to the invisible nature of informal work, it was difficult to do a random sampling: there are no official records available to contact informal workers through any formal route. My initial time in the community and the contacts I made helped me to get in touch with potential interview participants; subsequently, ‘snowball sampling’ was used.
In snowball sampling, reaching one research participant or setting lead to reaching another, or interactions “snowball”: for the purposes of maximum variation and to get in touch with a difficult to reach population, it is a recommended strategy in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Maykut & More House, 1994; Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). My experience also confirmed this since when I tried other ways to contact people (for example, flyers that were posted in the community), I did not receive any calls. I was told that some of the women I was in touch with were told by their spouses, not to take part in the study as they were afraid of being reported to authorities as having an income while being on welfare. However, when I sent out e-mails to my initial contacts and asked them to get in touch with people, I received a tremendous response from people. I spent an average 20 to 30 hours a week in the community during my data collection period, attending many community events, and taking extensive field notes during each visit. I was also invited to go to other communities and neighbourhoods to interview or to conduct focus groups.

**Learning, Observation and Challenges During Field Work**

I consider the time I spent doing fieldwork equally as important as the time I spent doing coursework or writing. There were instances I experienced in the field that became defining moments for me, which articulated to me, beyond the academia, as to why and to what purpose I was doing this thesis. It was an enriching and challenging time for me as a woman to interview other women and be an observer of their activities in their communities. Although I was deeply aware of the power imbalance between me (as a researcher) and the participants, I was put at ease about the situation when, in one of my encounters with two elderly women, I noted the following:
Two older women approached me in the community centre today wanting to know what I was doing there in the afternoon sitting on the cement bench talking with all kinds of people who walked by. They asked me if I was trying to sell something or a marketing rep from the nearby mobile shop. When I said, no, they immediately asked if I worked for the local politician…. (I smiled but was feeling embarrassed, not sure if they were questioning my presence in their space). The conversation went on. When I finally explained my purpose of being there Lilith the quieter one of the two said, “My dear, this is good work, it is important, don’t feel shy telling people what you are doing, somebody has to take the pain of doing this kind of stuff so a lot of us could benefit from it”.

(Nov 19, 2012)

I was encouraged by this encounter and the lesson I took from this interaction, and some similar conversations I have had in the community, was that I was more concerned about my being in their space and my role as a student than simply being a person present and interested in exploring their situations with them and in search of a solution for some of their struggles. I realized the power imbalance I felt was more of my concern than theirs and some of my responses or reactions to situations were projections of my own apprehension about my role. I also felt the trust people had in me in sharing their experiences. A number of women expressed their expectation that I represent their stories and experiences for a better outcome for all immigrants. The particular research language, such as reflexivity and reciprocity, in many ways was possible because of the way my relationship with the participants became informal, and their view of me as a representative of their community helped.

There are two other incidents I find valuable to mention in this section: one male agency worker who self-identified as an immigrant and one male community member approached me asking to be interviewed. My field note entry that day read:
It was rather challenging to tell these two folks why I was only interviewing immigrant women, when they argued their experience was equally or more difficult as they have had better roles in their respective countries. Then one of them added, ‘in this country it is always women who get more attention and opportunity’.

I spent a lot of time explaining to people what I was doing and why I took this stance and at times it was tiring. I found it rather challenging to turn people away who wanted to be part of the interviews, as everyone had a story to share and that was important. Another overwhelming experience was several older women wanting to be part of this study, since they were also doing informal work for survival and rightfully believed their experienced and stories are as important as the younger ones.

A few people from my individual interviews, and all my focus groups members, were keen to learn what I was going to do with my study and how it was going solve the issues they shared with me. One woman in particular told me after her interview that she came to the interview and referred people to contact me believing that I would have solutions for problems she and others faced as immigrants in this country. I felt humbled by people’s trust and enthusiasm for my research, and yet I felt a huge responsibility on my shoulders. I had to be open in telling them that while I am committed to change, it does not solely rest upon me; change has to be a collective effort and requires a huge shift in perceptions, attitudes, and policies at all levels of the social system. Two significant things I learned from my fieldwork was the importance of keeping field notes and finding a balance between responding to questions and reacting to the answers.

There were a few instances where I was tempted to impose my worldviews on the participants since they challenged mine, especially my views on gender roles.
Learning from the Methods

Although I planned my interviews to be semi structured, after a few interviews, I became more conversational in order to foster a natural flow of information. I avoided using any complex language and used a simple, conversational tone in all encounters. After seven or eight interviews, I took a two week break from interviewing to investigate what I had collected and I found that was a very helpful thing to do as I was able to identify areas that I was consistently covering, and vice versa areas that I was not probing in order to generate insights to what I was seeking to find. As a result, I changed a few questions and words on my sample questionnaire, especially questions where I was attempting to understand how women exercised agency and made choices. This time away also allowed me to reflect on my own feelings in doing this study, my observations, and my role that lead to me writing many narratives.

Another challenge I had during interviews and focus groups was making decisions about how much I join in the conversations without losing my objectivity as a researcher and where is the fine line that separates me being part of their journey without infringing on their privacy and promoting or presupposing my stand. It was emotionally heavy listening to the stories and I did not do any writing for several weeks after completing the fieldwork. I listened to the audiotapes over and over and reflected on them for many days before I started transcribing the data. With the exception of two interviews, all the interviews and focus groups were audio taped. One interview was conducted over the phone but all other interviews were conducted in person.

I met women for interviews in their homes, in coffee shops, and in parks, and focus groups were done in two community agencies. There were some questions used as pointers and some common themes used in the discussions. All three focus groups were intended to have the same
themes for discussion however; each focus group had a lead theme that they picked. I found people were open and felt free to share their opinions and views and at times disagreed with each other in the group, although they were peaceful disagreements. Only a few mentioned that they wanted to keep in touch after my research was completed to see what the results were; others politely turned down the offer to receive communication related to the research after the fieldwork was done. Soumya, one of the participants had a response that was typical of the responses many others had who did not want to be in touch with regards to the research:

I am not a registered tutor here, so I better keep quiet about what I do, and I live in community housing so it is complicated, I wanted to share my experience with you but I don’t wish to be in touch as my husband won’t be happy to hear about it.

Another participant, Thaya, joked about being in touch: “If you do enough good work with this, I will hear about it so don’t have to take the pain of being in touch with me”. All the names used in this study are pseudonyms and extra care is given to change any details that may reveal the identity of the participants. Rich descriptions of these details are given throughout the thesis, and extensive interview summaries and field notes are preserved as much in order to maintain their original meaning, which is in line with the work qualitative researchers who value extensive accounts of the everyday experiences shared (Creswell, 2002; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

**Limitations of the Study**

This research study presents some limitations. It is time bound; a longitudinal study would have revealed if the changes or possibilities of change identified in the data are indeed transformative or more contingent in nature. Also, the occurrences of negative incidents related to gender, race, etc., tend to reduce over time and social networks evolve – a longitudinal study would show how
this happens for this population. I also wondered, when I was in the field, if there was an opportunity to interview the participants’ spouses or men in the households to hear their experiences and their processes and whether that could have helped me understand the duality participants created of their private and public lives when in fact, in many cases, their activities extended beyond the boundaries of their homes. When I completed my data collection, I wondered about the other actors in the informal work in the community, such as immigrant seniors, are they part of the immigrant family unit in which women are doing this work. How does the way change and learning occur in their lives and how does it create new learning or obstruct learning for people as a family unit? One of my goals for future research is to examine how much gender ideologies and patriarchal dominance in the household are changed over time through women working collectively and being exposed to alternative family and gender relations operating in the host country. These questions remain unanswered here and therefore limit this study in scope.

Another challenge I had was with the methodology or methods, I could not explain in my short encounters why I used feminist methodology or methods and the significance of this choice to the participants. The challenge partially was in the language of ‘feminism,’ which many of the participants had a negative idea of and did not connect very well too. I had to control my urge to correct someone or give a lecture on feminism during focus groups and interviews. I also found out after a few individual interviews that a more natural and honest connection/communication occurred when I put my notebook and voice recorder away. Thus in several instances many of the key data excerpts came from my last few minutes of the interview or after the first half of the interview. Another issue is that because I cannot identify the community in which this study took
place I had to choose not use some key observations and some information gathered from the community, which may positively or negatively affect the analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analysing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked (Creswell, 2002, p.182).

My data analysis started with transcribing the data verbatim and going through my field notes. I listened to the tapes many times, even after transcribing them, to re-examine if I had covered everything while transcribing as sounds, laughter, and nodes all had meanings attached to them in the contexts of the conversations. While reviewing the transcripts, I started to organize them into categories. At first, they were broad categories such a race, gender, class, religion, immigration, and informal work. There were twenty two general categories I identified in the first round of reading and then later on after further reading and reflection, I made them into eight specific categories such as learning opportunities, decision making rationales, perception of community, and work. While I was narrowing down the categories, I started selecting quotes and comments that directly related to my main themes.

Once I finished selecting the major themes, I started exploring the similarities and differences of the participants’ experiences and perceptions. I noticed that their perceptions were influenced by many factors such as culture, religion, education, and ideology, whereas experience was predominantly shaped by activities, structures, and value systems that were in turn influenced by beliefs and perceptions. The type of immigration status they held upon entering Canada had a
huge impact on their perceptions and how they viewed their experiences. For example, women who came here as refugee claimants had very different experiences from people who came through economic or family classes. It was even more different for women who came as dependents of their husbands through work permits.

Next, I started comparing the main themes with the accounts of individual participants; this helped me to examine and analyze individual vs. collective experience of the participants. In addition, it helped me to identify the process of change and the way it was approached by each participant under each category. The selected quotes assisted me in analyzing experiences and the way they shaped or changed individual’s perceptions of Canada and their place in it, their view of their education and work experience and their reasons for choosing informal work.

In the final phase I moved my eight categories into two sections that helped me differentiate between the process of change and the conditions of change and learning in the context of women choosing to work in cash sector and the way they viewed their futures in Canada. In order to explain the way the immigrant women in this study experienced change, if the change was gradual or immediate and fundamental, their view of work, and what they see as the future, I decided to include two detailed narrations in Chapter Five, including details regarding their journeys to Canada, their worldviews, and how they view the way immigration changed their lives. I use this chapter as the background and data for all discussion for the following chapters, which I organized thematically. All through the discussion chapters, I aimed to use their voices and took extra care to represent their meaning of their everyday experiences as they were shared with me. I view my discussion chapters as a carefully woven together mantle that represents the different dimensions of change experienced and lived by the participants of this study and may
echo the voice of hundreds who go through similar life changes in Toronto or elsewhere in Canada.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced my research, the worldview in which I approached my research, my methodology and methods, my choice of place, participants and the period they immigrated to Canada. I then provided detailed profiles of my participants followed by my struggles and experiences during fieldwork, and what I learned from the process. I did not view their work experience as individual phenomena but as a collective construction influenced by many social factors and systemic issues. All throughout my research, I tried to remain value free, yet there were times I felt being one with the participant of their struggle and it only helped me further commit to my work and motivated me to work extra diligently to represent the stories I heard in their voice as much as possible. In summary, the whole research process only worked to reaffirm my deep-rooted belief that this thesis is not just about my individual journey but a collective journey where I had the humble privilege and opportunity to tell the stories of these women on their behalf.
Chapter 5
Stories from the Margins: Narrative of Two Immigrant Women and Their Everyday Life/Work Experience Post-Immigration

This chapter is the first of several that provide discussion and analysis of the data that was collected. This chapter illustrates the everyday experiences of life and work of two immigrant women, mostly in their own words. My analysis of these experiences is minimal in this chapter, as the aim of this chapter is to narrate their stories in their own voices in a life history or life course style and to depict the nature of lifelong learning evolving from diverse experiences. My feeling is that the presentation of more detailed narratives in this way offers something that cannot easily be achieved by other means. It is a technique that offers a more contextualized and fully integrated life history oriented perspective on the data that emphasizes complexity and inter-connections. Thus, the presentation of these narratives is to serve as a key resource upon which to weave the discussions and analysis in the three chapters that follow.

Two of the interviews from my twenty-seven participants have been selected for this purpose. It was difficult to choose just two particular life stories because all the experiences shared in the data set as a whole were equally compelling, covered different dimensions of learning, and shed insight on the process of change that was experienced. Although the experiences I present in this chapter are unique, nevertheless in other ways they share many commonalities with the majority of the participants. Their experiences of transnational immigration, process of change and learning and informal work are common threads; their perceptions of this experience and life in general are the focus of this chapter.
The main objective of this chapter is to provide insight on the tremendous change immigrant women and their families go through after transnational immigration and the way they navigate this change. My purpose here is to situate the major questions and the differing experiences that will lead the analysis in this narrative: What learning occurs through these experiences? In what ways do previous epistemic, socio-cultural and religious experiences/traditions inform their current choices and experiences? Is the learning that occurs intentional and/or more emergent from the interaction with each other? What does this say about the capacity for transformative learning of individuals living on the margins? What are the possibilities for collective learning and change in such experiences? In beginning to lay the groundwork for answering these questions, this chapter also begins to illustrate how these women adapted to their new life circumstances, their strategies for survival, their future plans, and the contradictory nature of this process of change in their individual and social life.

This chapter is loosely structured to fit the two life accounts, as they were shared with me, but having said this the main themes of community, work, family, and process of change before and after immigration offer a basic structure to how the material is presented. Both “Rumi” and “Suja” (pseudonyms) had different starting points in their entry to Canada as well as to informal work; therefore, each of the accounts is organized somewhat distinctly. I begin by providing a brief introduction to each woman, including some socio-demographics, to start their respective sections.

**Narrative 1: Rumi, Pakistan, 1999**

Rumi is thirty-five, married, mother of three children (aged 8, 11, 13), and comes from Pakistan. Rumi provides beauty care services to friends and neighbours for a small fee and prepares special food like biryani and ethnic sweets upon request for special events. Rumi was sponsored by her
husband to come to Canada and became a permanent resident in 1999. Rumi’s husband had already selected their residence before her arrival and she has lived in the same apartment building ever since arriving in Toronto. It was a good choice, according to Rumi, as the grocery store and local schools are a few steps away from her building and the mosque her husband attends is only a few blocks away as well. Rumi never worked for pay before coming to Canada. Rumi had earned an undergraduate degree in history and upon graduating from university, did a diploma in beauty care. Although Rumi wanted to work, her parents never allowed her to. Despite this, she managed to do an internship for a few months prior to emigrating at a local beauty parlour near her home that was run by one of her relatives. However, during this period, Rumi’s parents started looking for a suitable match for her and they found a young man from Pakistan who was an immigrant to Canada. Their marriage was arranged and took place as soon as Rumi’s future groom could come to Pakistan. A few weeks after the marriage, her new husband left for Canada with the promise of bringing her as soon as he could complete her sponsorship application.

**Journey to the New Land**

A year later Rumi joined her husband in Toronto. Taking leave of all that she knew was a huge change for her. “It was a bittersweet time of my life. I wanted to join my husband, but I was scared to leave everything I knew behind”. Rumi’s two sisters and three brothers all lived in Pakistan and they were all happy to see her go off to Canada as they viewed it as a great place for their sister to settle down. Rumi did not speak any English and, therefore, did not participate in any outside activities upon arrival to Canada. Other women from Pakistan whom she met in her building and her husband’s few friends became her only connection to the outside world. Even
those interactions with the outside world were an infrequent occurrence however; Rumi’s description illustrates her struggle during this time.

I used to hide from people in the first few years. I felt ashamed that I didn’t know how to speak English and my husband [a taxi driver] was unable to take me out or join for any social activities, as he had to be available to go out whenever he got a call.

Rumi did not think she could make close friends with people from other cultures as she found them to be very different from her culture and practices. Still, she describes herself as friendly, saying hello to everyone who comes her way and finding herself communicating with people of other cultures for social and work purposes. The first few years, according to Rumi, were the most challenging years of her life. Importantly, she also believed that this was the time when she learned so much about herself; she had many hours to think about the nature of things and life.

A Glance Back at Life Before Immigration

Rumi is from a small town outside of Islamabad. She comes from a middle class family; no women in her family worked for pay as they all finished high school or university and all entered into arranged marriages. Thus, it was not to be any different for Rumi. Her parents believed in education and sent all their children to school. Rumi’s father, a businessman, looked after the family’s financial matters while her mother managed the household. Unlike her sisters, Rumi wanted to work right after completing her training as a beautician; however, her parents and brothers did not think that was a great idea and so they married her off. Although her family was conservative in their approach towards work and marriage, Rumi described having had a comfortable life growing up in her small town and never questioned the well-intentioned and organized life in her household and community.
I wanted to work. I think everyone should have an opportunity to work. My parents didn’t give me permission but I was not ready to give up, so I went to help out this relative as a student intern but it didn’t last. After few months I had to get married.

Reflecting and comparing her previous life in Pakistan to her present life in Canada, there are things Rumi did not like in Pakistan:

There was always load shedding\(^{18}\) and it was not so safe for girls or women to be outside after dark. Older people were always watching out for the younger ones. We [women] were always under somebody’s watchful eye, it was good to be protected but now when I think about it, it also makes you feel controlled all the time.

The life events in Pakistan that Rumi cherished so much included religious festivals, neighbours and extended family reaching out to one another, and the sense of community she had there. Changing social networks, giving up strong ties within those networks, loss of familiarity with the customs and cultures were the biggest hardships Rumi identified in her transition:

You didn’t feel different being there, everyone shared similar values, followed same rules and rituals. Being a Muslim or identifying myself, as a women of colour etc. didn’t exist there, it was part of my being, something I never thought [of] as different or separate.

\(^{18}\)Load-shedding - cutting off the electric current on certain lines when the demand becomes greater than the supply.
You never felt isolated; there was always people/family around you. If you needed something, you could go to cousins or neighbours, everyone always looked out for each other.

Would Rumi prefer to go back if there is an option? She would prefer not to, as she believes it is better for her children to be here and it would be very difficult for them to adjust to everything there. Her husband always talks about going back and starting a business there. She is not sure if this would be a great idea. However, there are times Rumi thinks that going back is a better option, at least to teach her children about the value of family, traditions, culture, and the importance of community, matters she holds as a high priority.

Life in Canada

Family and Social Life in Transition

It was like a bunch of people stranded on an island after a shipwreck, feeling scared, lonely, and kind of hopeless, not knowing where your help will come from. It is a different life.

There is no comparison to my old life, in some ways it was like you slept on another planet and woke up to another. If it was not for the few women I met during my first years I would have lived a completely isolated life here. […] The two things I found most challenging in my first several years were not being able to communicate in English and not having any of my family and friends here.

Rumi speaks English now but still does not believe she can communicate everything she wants or needs to in English. There is no comparison to anything Rumi had ever experienced in her past: “There is no such thing as social life when you don’t know the culture, custom, and
language of a place and especially when people around you also are faced with the same issues”.

She laughs about her wedding and the first years:

It is true that it is normal for parents to find a husband for you, but they are there to support you when you need them. Coming here [to Canada] after knowing him for few weeks was like coming to live in strange country with a stranger. He was nice and everything but my heart ached all the time. After a few days, he had to go back to work and I walked back forth in our bedroom for many hours, I thought I was going to go mad. Now I can Skype with our family back home, but back then there was no such thing. We all talked once or twice a week and that was it. I missed having family, neighbours, and community. All that continued until I had my first baby.

When the nurse came to visit me at my apartment after the delivery she touched me and asked if I was okay. I cried and cried and I couldn’t tell her how I was feeling. I missed my mom, my family. There was no one I could talk to and my husband was busy taking care of our financial needs.

One reason why I didn’t get out of my house was that I felt ashamed not knowing English. If anyone said hi to me, I put my head down and walked away.

After her second child was born, Rumi started going to the parenting center at the local school where she met many women from similar backgrounds and started learning about Canada and the people here. Eventually, Rumi started going to the local community center and started attending programs whenever they provided childcare. Rumi found herself spending more time outside her home after the first four years of her life in Canada. Rumi saw her life changing in a great many ways after the birth of her children. On one hand, it made her seek out others, forced her to find community among strangers, and on the other, it also made her aware of her new
responsibility as a woman, as an immigrant wife, and a mother to be a cultural bridge in this new
country that her children would know as their home. Rumi believes the arrival of her children
helped her to come to new conclusions about life in general and life in Canada.

**Husband and Children, Bridging Cultures While Learning**

When asked about how her husband and children view their life in Canada, Rumi said,

> For kids, this is their home, their friends, school, everything. The issue is not
> how they see their life here - the real issue is the two different versions of life
> they see at home and outside. My husband is very strict with them and wants
> them to follow our culture and tradition, but they don’t want everything to be
> so traditional. When they were small it was fine but now at age 11 and 13, my
> older two get mad. They find it hard to follow what we say because at school
> they get teased for it…

> One day my daughter told me she needed to have more freedom to do things
> with her friends and wants to dress up like the way everyone else in her class
> did. Now I have to get between my husband and kids because he thinks I am
> spoiling them but I see their struggle. It is hard for them to be living two lives
> at the same time. He will call in between runs to check if they are back home
> from school on time. If they are late, or have to stay for anything additional, he
> will call every few minutes to check to see when they are coming home.

> For my daughter it is a hard thing. She tries to follow her father’s rules when at
> home and act differently when outside. I understand her; I support her as much
> as I can. Even if I get his wrath, I still try to be the peacemaker between the
> father and children.

> It is not just me, I know many of my friends also go through the same thing.
> Some of them are more traditional and stricter than me so it is not an issue
> between husband and wife. But some of my friends are like me. They have to
constantly negotiate with their husbands on behalf of their children so they (the children) can act normally among their peers.

Rumi is a devout Muslim who prays five times a day and when asked if life in Canada changed her view on religion, she laughed and replied,

I think we are more observant and strict about following our tradition and religion here, more than we ever did in Pakistan. There you are with your own kind, you don’t feel threatened. Here, if we don’t practice it and stand up for it, people try to push you away, and children won’t learn the importance of religion in their life. My husband was not that religious in Pakistan, from what I know, but now he prays five times a day. He says it is necessary to preserve our religion and culture, because here there is no respect for anything.

However Rumi insisted that she is not over-religious and does not believe that controlling or judging people based on religion is right. “I believe every religion and culture has something positive to it”. Although her husband follows a strict esthetic code that identifies his religion, Rumi does not follow to the same extent, although she always wears traditional women’s dress.

In response to questions about Rumi’s husband’s current occupation, whether her husband looked for a job in his field and how he became a taxi driver, Rumi replied,

Life is hard for him, also. He also had to change and adjust to make a living here. That is why he talks about going back home all the time. I don’t think it is a good idea since the children are better off here. They will struggle if we go and life is not that simple there anymore, either. We have been away for so many years and it would be hard for him to get back to his job as he has been out of it for more than fifteen years… Here, he looked for a job in his field for three years. He was a chemist before coming to Canada and was hoping to get a job in the same field but after three years he gave up. As he was desperate to get a job (he is his parents only son and felt pressure from them as well), he
decided to get his taxi license to become a taxi driver as there was opportunity for that. He makes good money but he is not happy. That is why he wants to go back. He says we can start a business there and live well. With this taxi driving you have no schedule - you go whenever you get a call. There is no night and evening, it is all depends on when you are needed. We cannot plan anything with this kind of job.

This is the big difference I see about work [the labour market] here compared to Pakistan. Here, there is no weekend as there is no regular job for people like us. It is work all the time or nothing. Our life revolves around work and for women it is about children and school.

With such a schedule it is hard to plan anything either. We hardly ever see anyone as family and that is why my group is such a comfort for me.

When questioned about whether she had made friends from outside her own community or people she had met in the women’s committee (the majority of whom are south Asian), she responded,

I wouldn’t say I have very many friends outside my community [the Pakistani community]. They are more like acquaintances [people in the group] and others I see in the neighbourhood: they say hi and I say hi, that is it. There is no real relationship with anyone. It is different here, people are okay with saying hi and how are you, they are not looking for friendships or relationships.

When asked what she thought about the notion of community, friends, and culture, she said:

I guess when you come out of your own culture and community; you can’t expect to have everything be perfect. We have to make sacrifices. Hopefully for our children it will be different. There are too many differences to adjust to ([or] reconcile) to have real friendships and relationships. At first, I thought it
was just me feeling this way but after being in the group now, I know many immigrants like me feel that way too.

English is a big issue when you can’t speak the language. It only makes your feelings worse. We have to learn everything from the beginning. In a way you are learning to live again here.

Perceptions of Work

Rumi expressed her strong desire to ‘work’ and considered that as part of an important part of her life. Rumi did not believe women should be confined to the boundaries of their household. In terms of her desire to work, even when she found herself in a difficult situation with her husband and with her family prior to marriage, she found a way around that and partially succeeded. Rumi’s response to the question if she looked for work since her arrival revealed the complexity as well as her way of dealing with the issue at hand.

I wanted to work but my husband didn’t give me permission. I cannot work without his permission… I went for a food handling certificate and that allowed me to do some things with my new friends in the community. As long as I was there when he was at home and the housework was done, he wouldn’t say much about me being outside - that helped a lot….

Now my kids are full time in school and I am bored. I want to do something with my cooking and beautician skills. I enjoy doing that kind of work… I need to work; all I need is a place to do my work.

Rumi was able to utilize her connections especially getting together with other women from south Asia, which helped Rumi to come up with a plan to use her skills. Rumi also became a role model among women in her community in her way of dealing with difficult decisions and
managing it amicably. She found herself becoming stronger by befriending more women like her in the community.

Joining this group [women’s committee] was the best thing that happened to me in my entire time in Canada. I met lot of people and learned of other cultures. It gave me the opportunity to speak in English. Now that I am able to communicate in English, even though I don’t think I have perfect English, I can manage speaking and I no longer shy away from conversations.

A local businessperson offered a space for Rumi to do beauty care whenever she had a client. Rumi asked women to make appointments with her a day or two in advance so that she could book the small office space in the business center. It is free of cost and Rumi does not have to worry about her husband getting mad at her for running a business. Rumi meets three to five clients a week in the space and finds this space very convenient, as it is only a block away from her apartment.

It was a perfect situation, it was a miracle. I was at this place for an appointment and during the conversation; I talked about my passion for beauty care work. They told me that they have office rooms not being used and I was welcome to use the space. I didn’t tell my husband, and I was nervous at first but my friends encouraged me so now I go there 10-15 hours a week and it costs me nothing to be there. I am so happy.

In response to the question about what she did with her money and if her husband ever asked for it, Rumi replied:

He never asks me anything about what I do outside the house. He doesn’t ask me where I went. He tells me time and again he doesn’t want me to work and I should be happy with what he provides. He makes enough money for us but
with this money (from beauty work) I can do whatever I want. It makes me feel that I am also doing something valuable not just a housewife. I buy things for myself; I buy things for my kids. Most of all it makes me happy. I feel life is worth living and I no longer feel lonely.

When asked if she ever felt that she was disobeying her husband’s wishes and if she felt other women from her culture talk about it, she chuckled and replied:

I don’t think I am disobeying my husband. I am there when he is home. My house is clean, my kids are happy, and I am not dropping any of my responsibilities at home to do this. It is my passion and it gives me life. I don’t give him an opportunity to talk about it. When he says something discouraging, I pretend not to hear and it works out fine. You don’t know how happy I feel inside as I am finally doing something I wanted to do. I don’t worry too much about what others think. I only talk to those who are friendly and nice. I don’t stand for gossip so I never hear what others say about me. I struggled so many years alone, I can’t be bothered anymore.

As to the question of what her children and family think of her work, Rumi said, “They are so proud of me. They know it makes me very happy and my kids get an allowance from me to do the things they want to do without asking their father. It is a win-win situation for all of us”.

The Process of Change

Life, Women and Work Perceptions After Becoming an Informal Worker

Rumi in her reflection of work, women and her choices indicated the need to work and to keep learning, and wished other women did the same. Rumi’s reflections speak of the change and learning she encountered in this long and hard process of immigration in her life as well as her view on the importance of work in an individuals’ life.
I see my life changed over the years. The first four years were very hard, lonely, and painful. The following six or seven years, I didn’t have much time, I was busy taking care of my children. My first child was two-and-a-half years old when I started going out. I started going to the parenting center and met lots of women in the same situation as me. Many didn’t speak much English so it was a learning time for all of us.

Rumi saw the process of change she went through in various phases presenting new learning’s and challenges for her. She also recognized the need for action and identified locations in which she can further her interests for example, Rumi joined the local parenting center and learned the first steps to ‘mothering in Canada’. “At the centre, they taught me how to be a parent here in Canada…what food to give to the children… and lots of things like that. I would say that was the first turning point for me”. Rumi’s work choices and plans also followed as time progressed especially after her kids started school. Rumi is so grateful for her friends and all other acquaintances that came into her life as she believes it was God’s grace that she made all these connections and they are helping her to move towards a path that she has always wanted to go.

I knew enough women who were going through the same struggle that I was. We started ‘walking groups’, after the children went away to school, started doing things outside our buildings, volunteering at the school, attending ESL classes, and so on...I wanted to do something productive with my time. I still felt I was not using my skills. So I started doing baking and a little bit of beauty work (eyebrows and facials) with my group. Soon it picked up speed and others started contacting me. Knowing my husband wouldn’t allow me to do anything at home, I had to find other places to do my work. By God’s grace, it all worked out.
Rumi believes people in general are much happier when they are able to work and contribute towards the well being of others. Rumi believes women should not be aiming to only be housewives because that is not going to be a satisfying life. “I am much happier now. I am learning new things, new skills, and new ways to reach out to people. It is almost like you are developing a business. In a group, I won’t stand out. I wouldn’t need to worry about confronting people who are negative about it”.

Women have to work. If all become housewives, we would then make our children that way too, as if we don’t have a life of our own. It is too bad women are not getting out of their homes and finding things that are interesting to them. It is hard, I know, but they have to find a way to come out. Settlement workers and people running programs here should find a way to help women to come out. It will help not just the women but their children too. It is good for the family.

Rumi believes paid work is directly connected to dignity and self respect. She sees that it increase her confidence and provides her with new learning opportunities.

Work gives dignity and respect. It is not like you are doing the housework that is expected of you since nobody thinks about it twice. But when I do something for pay, I feel inside that I am contributing to the household also. I know my husband is working hard and this makes me feel that, whether he approves it or not, I am doing my share to make life easier.

This work is increasing my confidence. I am not afraid to go out and meet people now. I managed to deal with my husband’s opposition to me working. It is all about learning to negotiate and resisting the pressure, it is about making a place for yourself. To me, it is not just about money because it is not a lot of money but it is about how I feel about my life, my role.
Rumi also thinks when women are working it is double day for them, as they are constantly adjusting household labour and other work. However, she believes it is still better for women to work than stay at home and be invisible. She also thinks it is important for their daughter’s to see the importance of this. For that she believes Canada is a better place for girls.

Yes, it is hard. You have to do everything in the house before getting out. I cannot ignore my responsibility as a wife and mother but it is worth all the hardships. A woman has to adjust to so many things, but that is the way things are. I don’t know if it is wrong or right. It is the way things are. I don’t think it will be the same for my daughters and that is why I want to stay in Canada. I know they will have more opportunities and chances in life.

Rumi also pointed out the positive and negative of cash work:

Cash work is very different from regular work. Others don’t see your work, there are no regular hours, and people call you when they need you but I don’t care about all that. To me, it is a way that I can exercise a little bit of freedom. This is something I have dreamt of ever since I finished my BA. It was a long wait as I had to wait more than 10 years to make it reality”.

**Future in Canada**

Rumi was asked about her future plans. Does she want to continue the same way or does she want to expand? Does she think it is making a difference in her life and in the lives of others?

Rumi believes Canada is a better option for them despite all the difficulties her husband is having finding employment in his field and lack of regular work time etc. “As I told you, there is always that conversation about going back to Pakistan. My hope is that we won’t, I think my kids will be happier here. I am also happy here now that I have more freedom here”. Rumi hopes to make her
work into a full-blown business and hopes that one day her husband will change his mind and support her in her ventures.

If full-time it isn’t possible, I would like to have something a little bit more regular. Now I work maybe 10-15 hours a week. I would like to have more hours, maybe 25-30 hours a week. Finding customers is not a problem. I charge only three dollars for eyebrows and 20 or 25 dollars for facials, so women will come to me as it is not expensive.

It will be possible for me to do it as a business with or without my husband’s permission if there is a group of us doing it. I am thinking as this committee [the women’s group she is involved in] becomes stronger, that may be a possibility.

It is making a difference in our lives. I am speaking not only for myself. All the women I know that are doing something in the community are much happier than people who are not doing anything. It is an outlet for us to have a social life. Otherwise, what life do you have here other than your husband and kids? You don’t have anyone to talk to, you don’t see anyone. This is how you meet community and feel like you belong somewhere and to something.

There is competition among us. I know that, but as long as you are doing good work and it is affordable, people will come to you. The thing is there are a lot of people who like this type of service in their community, so it is beneficial for both parties.

Yes, in my opinion it is hard work but it is making a difference and it is a way for women like me to get out and feel that you are part of bigger community, as there is none here unless you try to make one.

Several themes from Rumi’s initial few years in Canada resonate with two main themes discussed in the individual perspective to transformation and in the discussion of social capital.
and networks initially in this dissertation, and these are important to highlight in a preliminary way here. The first one is change leading to reflection. In Rumi’s case, it is obvious that her isolation, her observation of the culture, and changes in her private and social life led her to a place of reflection. In Rumi’s case, learning and change lead to discourse where she started seeing the possibility of creating home and community when she started forming relationships with others in the neighbourhood. In her dialogue with others, she learned of the differences and commonalities between their experiences and was able to articulate what she gained from this dialogue with them. Further, Rumi’s process of learning and change is also evidence of the human capacity to make more out of any situation than simply adapting to it. According to Rumi, life is hard for her and her family with many difficult adjustments yet she found herself moving beyond to create a home and community in which she believes is transforming herself and the world around her.

**Narrative 2: Suja, India, 2007**

Suja is 39 and came to Canada with her family in 2007. Both husband and wife worked in the Middle East for ten years before immigrating to Canada. Suja has two children - a boy (9) and a girl (12). At the time of the interview, Suja was catering for small parties and neighbours. Prior to immigrating, Suja had worked as a computer programmer for a British company in the Middle East, and also in India. Suja acquired a bachelor’s degree in computer science (B.Sc.) from India and started working right after graduating from college.

**Life Before Immigration**

Suja was born and brought up in Pune, India. After marriage, Suja and her husband decided to move to the Middle East where they found jobs in their fields. Suja’s husband worked for the travel industry and Suja for a British insurance company as their programmer. After the birth of
their first child, Suja took a break from work to be with the child. Suja had plenty of support with her children and found her life rather simple and comfortable prior to immigration. “I had a maid, but I wanted to be with the baby so I took time off from work. It worked out well. Both of my children were born in the Middle East. My mother was there both times during the birth and we had a full-time maid to look after the household”. Suja and her husband made the choice of coming to Canada for their children and found the process long yet were happy with the outcome.

We decided to move to Canada for our children. We thought it was the best option and many of our friends were doing the same thing. It took only a year and a half to process our immigration application compared to some of the people we know who applied from India - it took them more than four years to get their visas. I won’t say it was an easy process, even after we sought help from an agent for a hefty fee. We had to go through so many tests, proved that we met the criteria for age, education, etc. To qualify for immigration we had to show so much money in our bank account. Eventually we got everything and received our visas to Canada. It was a feat, we were very happy to come….

Suja found her life changed drastically since their arrival and found it very different from what they expected. “Yes, everything is different here; we didn’t expect it to be the same. I have been living away from home for many years now so moving was not difficult in that sense. It is far, but I have my husband and children here”.

**Life in Canada**

Suja was confident about her language skills and work experience. She did not look for training programs and started applying for jobs within the first few days of their arrival. Through friends
they found a school for their children, a child minder (when and if needed) and everything they needed to settle in to Canada.

We arrived in the summer time, everything looked green and beautiful. One of our friends from back home picked us up at the airport. We stayed with them and moved to a house they rented for us after a couple of days. They helped us to apply for social insurance numbers and everything. We lived in that place (in the west end of the city) for the first couple of years.

We started applying for jobs right after our arrival. My husband got a job in his field within two months after arrival, that was God’s blessing. I know many people didn’t have that luck when they came here. Suja’s husband works for an international airline as their travel agent.

I got a job at one of the upscale grocery chains. I worked in the deli department for two years. It was a nice job but it was hard. I had to quit the job to undergo surgery - they called me back afterwards but I said no. They will take me even if I go today.

As we continued our conversation especially on the topic of race and work experience, I asked Suja about her work experience in the store.

I worked in the deli section. Whatever I made sold like hotcakes, as there was high demand for my stuff. That kept me all the more busy there, they didn’t like me even taking breaks. I think standing long hours and working crazy like that probably is what made me sick. I had to undergo surgery on my back and I have had issues with my leg. One thing after another I finally had to quit.

Suja found the work experience she had, a difficult one to accept or forget. At first she thought it would change over time soon she realized it would change only if she quit. She thought of the whole work arrangement as a set up for exploitation.
It was part time; they never make our jobs full time. There were many women like me new to Canada. We all worked very hard. Even if I wanted to quit that was not an option, we all had to survive. I was stuck at that job; the other women also felt same way. Because I was fast at my job they gave me more work. It didn’t matter how fast you finished your part of the work, they (supervisor) will ask you to do something else like cleaning or shelving - there was no stop to it.

They liked me and wanted me to stay there for a long time. They raised my pay but they wouldn’t increase my hours, it only meant more work for the same hours. It was like showing a kid candy and making them do what you want them to do. Nobody complained, even if we complained it was only going to be used against us. Whoever complained was let go. I knew we were not going to win against the management.

I never took leave and always came in to work even when they called at the last minute (they wake you up early morning or late evening to tell you, you need to be in early). My usual work time was between 6am-3pm or some days I started at 6:30am. I left the house early and the baby sitter took the kids to school and picked them up from school. By the time they came back I was home, so in that way that timing worked.

They know we are new here and they know we are so desperate to work so they gave all bad hours and everything [work shift and responsibility]. They will give you four to six hours of work and give you all the work… it was never an easy thing. Even if you were there five or six days a week you never got more than 20-25 hours of work. It was the same for everyone in my group.

At her work place Suja also became aware of her racial identity and how it impacted her personally and found other immigrant women of colour also going through similar experiences. Suja constantly referred to ‘we’ when she talked about her and other
immigrant women’s experiences of otherness and referred to other workers as white and ‘them’ and strongly believed that they are having a privileged status with reference to her work.

There was a clear difference between white Canadians who worked in our department and us Asians. Even if they [white Canadians] stayed an extra few minutes after their break, there was never an issue. If we were ever late even for a minute the supervisor would call immediately.

The white folks who worked with us took longer breaks than us by being on the phone and took smoke breaks every half an hour. None of us women smoked [immigrants] so it became an issue for us, because if we had to take even a minute for something important, our time would be reduced and it was on our record. It was a double standard; they were one group and we [immigrant women] another.

Suja also identified women working double days and explained it as a given nature of women’s life. Suja strongly believed her work was affecting her health and causing her enormous stress that eventually led her to quit to get help.

It was not easy managing everything. I worked like a machine in those two years. As soon you come home from work, you have the kids, then cooking, cleaning and everything…until I went to bed at 11:00 or 12:00.

I think all this stress started affecting my health. At work I knew they were exploiting us but couldn’t say anything. There was so much pressure inside, so much anger. Then I saw others also struggling the same way so I knew it was not just me. If we ever showed any kind of displeasure they would fire us. They liked my work and me but even then it was hard.
Suja coped with all the negative experience by viewing it as God’s will in her life and believed it was not hers to take an action against the employer. Suja trusts that one day God will reveal to them [the employer] their wrong doings. Suja’s husband wanted to complain about this but she discouraged him from going in that direction.

He told me we should go and give a formal complaint to the authorities, but I don’t want to do it. Let God deal with those people, I don’t want to kick anyone in the tummy, I am sure they (the supervisors) will learn one day of their wrongdoings.

Even if we complain, what is the point? We don’t have the power, we are nobody in this country, we are new, we don’t have the money, we don’t know anyone who can help us in such things so it is better keep quiet. Anyway we came in order to be successful here so we have to go through all this. It was not easy for anyone so why complain?

Maybe God didn’t want me to work like that, so I got sick. I didn’t have to worry about the expenses, at least medical care is free, and that kind of service you don’t get anywhere. There are some benefits here you don’t get anywhere else. So I am thinking of that time positively.

Suja thinks it will be different for their kids and is hopeful the hardship she went through will pay off. According to Suja, if immigrants keep a positive attitude towards living here then it will be better. Suja certainly hopes life for her kids will be different and she is very happy with their school and other activities they are involved in. All through the interview Suja showed a positive attitude and enthusiasm to talk about even things she could not bear but the extremity of her struggle was easily identifiable when she said:
I don’t wish such suffering on anyone, even for enemies. I knew that place was making me sick but I couldn’t quit because we needed the money. I stayed as long as I could but then one day I couldn’t stand it anymore, the pain was that hard.

**Informal Work**

Suja’s choice to work informally again revealed her strength to move forward and find ways to get back to social life. Suja made the choice to do catering partly by chance:

After surgery I couldn’t do much and we had to move from the house we were renting. We wanted to go somewhere where there are lots of people and children; it is through friends that we found this place; the church played a huge role in deciding the place.

We didn’t know anyone in the community but we like it here. We met a lot of nice people at church, the priest is nice, and it was a positive move for us.

Several months after the surgery I started getting involved in the local school events where I met lots of women, some were part of this women’s committee. They were organizing this big event to reach out and market some of their skills to the wider community.

It was at this women’s event where Suja tried her cooking skills for the first time in Canada. The event was a huge success and she connected with many local groups and agencies that day and started her catering work from that day on. At the time of the interview Suja was getting a minimum of two to three orders a week and was happy with it. She also started serving food for the local clergymen once a week and they became a great support in expanding her network. She views this as a way to give back to the community and does it religiously.
Suja thinks informal work has many benefits but has negatives also. She does not describe cash work as equal to formal work. When talking about full time work she refers to that as a job, whereas cash work is referred to as something she does as a way to get by until she finds a job or money to start a business.

I knew how to cook and loved doing it, so it was an easy choice for me to do it. My husband is okay with me doing it too. If we can find enough money and find an appropriate space, we will think of starting a business of our own.

In selling food you see, there is no racism. If people like your food they will order it from you. When it comes to food it doesn’t matter if you are brown or black or blue. Teachers from the local school and agency people all order food from me.

You are your own boss, nobody is bossing you around, I can make it on my own time. If I don’t want to take one order I can turn it down so there is a lot of flexibility with it.

Suja made a clear distinction between informal work and formal work. Suja also pointed out the positives and negatives of this work. According to Suja her informal work is an option if her other plans do not come to fruition and she does not think it is a bad choice.

The difference between doing this work and a regular job is that in this (cash) work you have the freedom and flexibility but nobody sees why you do it or how you contribute to the community or your own household. The hours are not counted - it is kind of invisible to your own family also as I am cooking every day and someday I am doing a little bit more than usual; that is how they see it. But it is not that simple. I have to shop for it, plan the menu, prepare
things in advance (there is so much work in prepping) and lots of it is at night so my kids and husband are not disturbed.

There is a lonely side to this work. You can work as much as you want but there is no recognition. In a regular job you have certain hours, you bring a paycheck home, there are tax benefits and so on… with this you can’t expect any of that. I met a lot of people at the women’s event and they are my biggest clients. The same people tell others when they’re looking for somebody to cook for a birthday party or some special event or when they want some special food on a regular day. It works out fine that way, all word of mouth. I have a good list of clients.

I have people from all places ordering food. I think everyone likes Biryani and fried rice with butter chicken - I get most of my orders for that. I think I help some people in the community by doing this work. If I get a good job I will take it, not this kind of job - a real job. Otherwise I will continue with this cooking… I am looking for a job but it is hard to get a job these days you know. But I will keep trying. For people who came with lots of money it is okay but it is hard for everyone else. I have to make so much, and sell it. Still, I was working and earning money and was helping my husband.

Suja believes in informal work there is no place for racism and it is a way to connect with the broader community and make friends from other cultures. She believes her work as caterer helps create social cohesion in the community and create awareness of other cultures, food and places.

**Perception of Women’s Work**

Suja’s was asked about her perception of women, their role in the household, their work and so on and her responses revealed her experience as well as culture, and ideology that shaped her perceptions of women and gender roles.
Cooking is especially for women. It comes with you when you are born, and men are not experienced in cooking because they are always outside.

Yes, household work and children are women’s responsibilities; that is why it is hard. But life is hard for women especially when the kids are small. Here (in Canada) it is more difficult because you don’t have anybody to help, and you can’t afford to hire somebody to cook and clean for you. That is a huge difference - and no family support either. I think life is better for women here; women can go anywhere and have many opportunities to learn and grow if they want.

Suja thinks she and other women need help with their chores in the household and in their informal work for a healthy balance. Suja finds her connections in the community are quite supportive of her in establishing her catering business. Suja also asserted that women should work and it is a balancing act to manage household work and paid work.

Yes, women do need some help with their work. Here in this community you have some network; this community is quite helpful you don't get that support anywhere else.

Yes, I think women should work. They have to learn how to manage housework with outside work. Some husbands help out but if you want to really do it you shouldn’t wait for help. If I hadn’t gotten sick, I would have continued with that job because at the end of the day I was bringing a pay cheque home - that is what matters.

Yes, when we work there is more respect. I don’t see this work as making a difference in my status; I don’t think anyone cares about what I do. I feel respected; I don’t see it as a lower standard job.
Quality of Life and Process of Change

In response to what Suja thought of the quality of life and the change she experienced post-immigration she replied:

For children’s education it is good to be here. Some things are definitely good, but life is a struggle here, especially for immigrants like us. People don’t have time, everyone is running after money, people are working two three jobs, there are no regular hours. Sometimes it feels like everyone is working around the clock but at the end of the day nobody has any savings.

The money I make is what we save and I use that for my personal expenses also. Whatever my husband makes goes for family expenses like rent and food.

The benefits you get here you don’t get anywhere else. As for culture I don’t find that to be as much an issue - anyway we are with our own crowd. With others it is more like hi and how are you, no real relationship. I don’t think they are looking for one either.

It is difficult here but it is good also with all the benefits and freedom. Nobody bothers you - I guess there is good and bad in every place and culture. Children are happy here - there is no pressure on them to perform more or study all the time and there are lots of activities for them.

At least 70% are struggling; it is hard for everyone who comes here.

In this country you don't get normal hours. You don't get 9-5 jobs otherwise you work all through the week with no weekend off.

Only after you come here do you realize how hard life is here. Some people go back. Some people go back and work in the Middle East again.

Suja referred to Canadians as “white” throughout the interview. She viewed herself as different from Canadians and referred to herself and others as ‘immigrants’. In her expression of ‘we’ and
‘ours’ she pointed out the similarities of the struggles people like her experienced in Canada.

I don’t think it is the same for Canadians at least not that much. They already know the place, have community networks, and when they look for a job they have people to contact. We have nobody, everyone (immigrant) is struggling but from the church I meet some Canadians, they are nice. In this community all immigrants are struggling hard. There are many families struggling here, both husband and wife are not working so it is hard for them.

Suja also pointed out the importance of community and networks outside her home and the lack thereof in her new circumstances.

It was a change in terms of work experience, now I understand how it is to live without community or live in community without depending on any relationship. Your family is your first and last support. It is different but as I said it was a choice we made and we will live with it. I know many think about going back but I don’t think about it.

Suja thinks she is going through the motion of changes as required and does not think of it much as she views it as pointless at this time in her life. “I don’t have time to think about how I change or what I think about things - I am busy”.

**Resolving the Issue**

According to Suja, addressing employment barriers is the first step to better immigrant life in Canada.

If they (immigrants) are given the jobs or opportunities for training in their field that will make a difference. For women, I believe childcare and job security will make a difference.
Women can know what other women are going through, so good luck with your work [wishing me well as we conclude the interview].

There are many similarities between Suja’s life and those of the other participants of this study. Many of the themes explored in the immigration literature also resonate with some of these experiences and life trajectory. The key themes that surfaced in this particular narrative are the complex, epistemic, socio-cultural processes that shaped Suja’s worldview, which she used to separate her private life from her public life. A well-accepted social construction of gendered roles, ideas of class, an ideology that is imbued with patriarchal and religious structures and processes is very evident in this narrative. From a social perspective, this narrative also reveals the racist, gendered labour market conditions that are exploitative of such workers and take advantage of their particular position in this society. One specific theme that stands out in Suja’s narrative is the way she approached exploitation as God’s will. A detailed exploration of this particular situation and the relationship between the oppressor and oppressed in a religious context can be found in Freire’s (1970) work. Freire’s discussion is especially valuable when exploring the possibilities of transformation among people who are marginalized by their situations and coping strategies – someone we see mirrored in the above narrative. Suja’s narrative is also a revelation of the alternative role informal work presents for people who are pushed out of the formal market place or make the choice to quit due to unjust circumstances. Both Rumi’s and Suja’s experiences and their perception of those experiences as presented in this chapter in many ways provide a close account of the challenges to and possibilities for transformation for informal immigrant workers who are the focus of this study. In a broader context, they also provide a way to understand the life changes that take place as a result of transnational migration and globalization. Furthermore, they reveal the social-economic and
cultural changes and the way social capital and networks impact these changes.

**Summary**

Suja’s and Rumi’s stories speak to a range of diverse experiences and life situations, as well as some important similarities. In both Rumi’s and Suja’s accounts, it is obvious that religion and spirituality play a central role in their perceptions of life events. The role religion and spirituality play in their lives is also evident in their choice of the community where they want to raise their families. In their unique ways, they illustrated two sides of the religious and spiritual approaches to life, and the role spirituality plays in the everyday life of people. Spirituality is a theme in the transformative learning theories of Freire (1970) and many others such as Dirkx (1998) and Cranton (1994). The possibility of transformative change that occurs through dialogue and reflection is identified in both narratives, though more so in Rumi’s narrative. Rumi reveals the possibilities of transformative learning and change in her individual and social life situations—for example, her response to her work choice, her interaction with her husband and children, her acknowledgement of learning potential and collective action in her networks; whereas, in Suja’s narrative the learning potential lies in her informal work and interaction with her customers. In both cases, it is obvious that events and experiences that lead to learning were always in relation to the other and the interplay of pervious, experiences, traditions, networks and culture.

In Rumi’s life, loss of her social networks and decrease in cultural capital are what made the move to Canada extremely challenging. Economics did not seem to play a significant role in Rumi’s life in terms of her choice of becoming an informal worker or other choices she made in life post-immigration. For Rumi, it is her social and cultural circumstances that affected her so much that she had to find a solution to survive the change. Rumi’s choice and Suja’s choices
contrast with each other. For Suja, it was the search for a better economic and material life coupled with her desire to re-join the labour market that led her to finding work in the grocery store. However, certain changes in her experience at the grocery store led her to take on cash work instead.

Another significant difference in the two women’s accounts involves their view of work and their relation to work. Both connect work to income but perceive it differently: Rumi views her work as dignified and as a solution to her challenges as well as an important type of meaning making for her identity and her being. For Suja, informal work is primarily a supplement for economic survival, and it will change only if there is a possibility of creating a full-time business. Otherwise, Suja’s preference is to work full time in a formal job. Things get further complicated in the ways in which each woman deals with her various internal and external roles. Both seem to be submitting to their prescribed gendered role, as the prime caregiver and domestic worker within their family/home lives, however, Rumi seems to persistently challenge the patriarchal norms and breaks away from the rules put in front of her. Rumi believes much more will be accomplished for women if everyone works together, and foresees her daughters to be living a much more independent life. On the other hand, Suja does not seem to challenge the dominant gendered and patriarchal ideology; she believes domestic work, and care giving are a woman’s primary responsibility and nothing is going to change that. Still, Suja adds a contradictory note when she comments about how every woman should ‘work’ and find her own standing and that she also hopes things will be different for her children.

These narratives are examples of individuals whose worldviews are deeply influenced by epistemic, socio-cultural, economic and religious practices as well as embedded within complex
power dynamics. However, they also give a glimpse of individual agency in the face of adversity. The learning that is described is not always intentional, but learning is a strong theme in both of their lives nevertheless. Moreover, both Rumi’s and Suja’s narratives also present the possibility of collective learning and change regardless of the individual’s place, role, and socio-economic situation in society. The contradictions within and between these experiences and the way these women approach them also present a complex layer to the discussion of the transformative potential of informal work in this study. A detailed exploration of all the themes identified in these narratives as well as in others found in the data set more broadly is discussed in further detail in the upcoming chapters in relation to the theoretical framework and literature reviewed for this thesis.

Thus, the narratives presented in this chapter provide a way to enter into the lives of immigrant women who are working informally in urban Canada. We glimpse the nature of their work, their social lives, and the circumstances that led them to informal work. These narratives also point out the extent and scope of change that individuals go through after immigration, and the narratives provide insight into how the two women negotiate their way internally (in the family) and externally (in the community) to integrate into a new society and culture. In summary, these narratives present examples of women’s ways of negotiating their space and role in the community and family, of practicing agency, and of their experience as an immigrant woman and informal worker. They provide an important lens through which to view how participants experience change, whether this change constitutes a fundamental shift in their worldview or more of a normative/adaptive change to get accustomed to the new culture, country and economic circumstances.
Chapter 6
Immigrant Journey: The Process of Change and Learning
From the Everyday Experience of Life and Work in the Newfound ‘Home’

This chapter will provide an analysis of aspects of the everyday lives and work experiences of the study participants. I will also examine how their previous life, previous work/economic experiences, and broader worldviews relate to their current practices and challenges, and how each of these, in turn, plays a role in the choices that participants come to make. An examination of these experiences point toward the multidimensional aspect of the changes the immigrants of this study and their families went through after transnational immigration. One key objective of the analysis in this chapter is to examine how far these experiences may lead to learning and transformative change, while another is to explore the different factors, such as those related to race, gender and class, that contribute to or hinder the process of learning. In this chapter overall, the interviewees’ experiences are analytically treated to uncover the underlying themes that form the basis of change in a participant’s life perspectives and the ways it is portrayed and implied in their everyday lives.

The in-depth accounts of Suja and Rumi in the preceding chapter contribute to this analysis. These accounts point towards the complexity of experiences for individual women in their private and public lives, integrated and dis-integrated over the course of life. The points I make in this chapter benefit from reflection on the complexity and inter-connections across the life course that Chapter Five was meant to highlight. This type of perspective has assisted in analyzing the internal and external desires that are formed by the previous experiences and expectations; experiences and expectations that are guided by various other social relations and
systems, such as traditions, culture and religion, and the contradiction it produced for people in their everyday lives. There are three themes that came out as central in the preceding chapter that, in my view, make a particularly important contribution to the analysis in this chapter: changes in the family life, social and cultural capital, resistance to the hegemonic values of the host society; and the use of personal agency to take charge of oppressive situations.

We will see that the way some participants shared their stories indicate a conscious choice to treat their experiences as a set of isolated, binary elements; many women in this study struggle to keep private and public dimensions of their lives separate in order to maintain control over the impact of change due to transnational migration. Therefore, in this analysis, we will see that the individual life and process of change in the private space is often placed in contrast to the social life, as a key feature of their learning. One of the purposes of this analysis is to demonstrate the different phases of change that, the immigrant women in this study tended to go through after immigration, and in turn to develop tools to better recognize and understand the complexity of these processes. To create a more systematic portrait of the changes, challenges, and contradictions, I categorize the findings below thematically. I confirm the ways in which immigrants go through tremendous changes in their private lives as well as in their broader social relations as a result of transnational migration. The changes, in many instances, initially appear to be negative. However, I have found that interaction between the individual and their social relations form learning experiences and enable people to make conscious choices. In many cases these learning experiences and decisions suggest something quite positive, emancipatory and transformative.
The findings discussed in this chapter reinforce in many ways what previous research indicated that women are more impacted by the changes associated with immigration than men (Ng, 1989; Maitra, 2011). Post-immigration, women are often the leaders in managing the social-cultural transitioning of the family in the private sphere and in the community. The reason women are more impacted is because they are the ones who are expected to make changes and adjustments to the domestic sphere to uphold and sustain the internal expectations that are deeply influenced by the gendered, patriarchal, religious, and cultural ideologies. Despite the life altering changes in their private and public lives, we see in this study and elsewhere that women often work extremely hard at maintaining their domestic (private) life with the aim of diminishing the impact caused by migration to a new country. They do this, in part, by keeping an imaginary divide between what they consider private/individual on the one hand, and what they consider social/public on the other. Although they sometimes appear to let go of their individual aspirations and dreams, in this study quite seldom do they seem to view this loss as a permanent situation. Most often it is viewed as simply a difficult phase in a longer process with several phases or stages. The participant’s perceptions and acknowledgements of this type of multistage process of change and their hope in the future is the basis of my argument of the possibilities of transformative learning and change in this thesis.

One of the sources of transformative learning potential, it seems, emerges from a well-integrated/successful life-view participants have of their future lives in Canada. The complexity of how the participants perceive a successful life, and the norms that inform such a view, are embedded in the expression of their desires to be part of the broader society. Another example of transformative change, although contradictory in its result, is based on my observation that the women involved in my research seem to make use of virtually every learning opportunity that
comes their way to keep themselves updated and to learn more about their host culture and practices to reach their social goals. Their learning, in this sense, appears voracious. The majority believes that learning and skill training are central to their success in Canada and are willing to make extra efforts to learn and re-train themselves. At the same time, however, in keeping with Mojab (1999), this is a procedural outcome of the knowledge economy that likely does not treat all knowledge and skills as equal.

As a subsequent part of my argument, I emphasize the extremely limited, real (as opposed to rhetorical) supports offered by the Canadian government for the creation of a smooth transition and integration of immigrants to Canada. Transition is shaped by powerful expectations for immigrants to become good Canadians by adopting hegemonic cultural, social, and linguistic practices of an idealized Canadian -- that is, an idealized portrait of the white, educated, middle-class Canadian. This is reflected in other studies as well (e.g. Maitra, 2011; Li, 2003). However, I found, further, that amongst these immigrant women, we frequently see their expectations and desire to create a better life in Canada depend on their willingness, adaptability, and active commitment to change to fit this norm and this often unfolds in unexpected, and often unrecognized and misunderstood, ways. Thus, what we begin to see is that these normative expectations of change can sometimes pose a serious challenge to the meaning and effectiveness of the settlement policies and training programs set out for new immigrants by the State. Along the way, these types of challenges help unveil the racialized, gendered, and class-based dynamics of formal and informal labour market practices. What we see is that these are issues that, as researchers such as Guo (2009), Shan (2009) and Maitra (2011) have pointed out, are linked to hegemonic cultural and economic processes embedded in the functioning of capitalism.
This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1) explores experience and change from an individual perspective that impacted private domains of life, which is largely focused on impact of changes in networks and social capital. Section 2) traces experience and change in the social context (changes that are associated with social relations such as in economic, social, cultural and political positions). Section 3) summarizes the key findings as well as the issues, explores questions this analysis poses and provides a preamble to the next chapter on cash work. I would like to note before presenting the discussion that I look at change and experience vis-a-vis simultaneous action and interaction that influences life perceptions, learnings and choices of immigrant women and their families. Specific experiences that lead to engaging in cash work and the learning that occurred in this process are the focus of the next chapter.

Section I:
Finding Home And Community Among Strangers: Change of Networks, Redefining Community, and Loss of Social Capital

All participants in my research considered immigrating to Canada a major change in their lives. The majority was excited as the new country showed so much promise in all their advertisements and on their immigration websites. For some, it was a choice made for them by their spouse or a family member and thus at the time the decision to immigrate to Canada did not carry any particular significance nor did it seem to have an impact. The commonalities between the Asian women immigrants in my research were the similarities and common practices involved in the immigration process and in the broader level social identification characteristics, as explained in Brint (2001). The majority identified the change after immigrating as life altering and requiring much out of them.
Changes in the Family Life and Composition

More than half of the participants came from a joint family system where parents and grandparents were part of the everyday life. In instances when they did not live together, they still lived within short distances of each other. The biggest change noted after immigration was that, for the majority of participants, not having family or siblings nearby meant a complete lack of kin/kith relationships. Not having extended family also meant lack of emotional support and strong ties. Even with the few who had siblings or other relatives in Canada, they could not rely on their support since they also had similar struggles. Women felt this change more acutely since they were the ones who often stayed back at home to look after the household and children. For participants with younger children, the biggest change in this process was the lack of help and support they would have had with child rearing and practical wisdom of raising children from their parents, grandparents, or elders in the community. Many said that was a loss and a gap from both ends, Mina (India) described this,

Here I always feel that I am not doing something right with my kids, the way kids are disciplined, their food, everything is different from what I am used to, and to bring them up the way I was brought up, I need support. I lack what my mom and granny had, I need people to discuss and ask questions when I need support right here and now. It is difficult not having anyone to turn to for that kind of advice and knowledge, for that matter anything that is to do with my life, it is like living on an island with our husbands and kids.

Many participants identified the processes, dynamics, and implications of redefining the structure of the family from a joint family in many cases to a nuclear family that resulted in a lack of familial support or family capital as a huge change and source of challenge. According to Betty (India) and Sameena (Pakistan), not having family capital and support with parenting is often
one of the prices people pay for coming here. Lack of social capital and fear of judgment from others (Canadians, real and normatively imagined) was noted as other negative impacts of immigration. The change experienced in the everyday life arrangements in the private domain is closely linked to changes in the social capital and networks, discussed later in this section. One other topic identified by many participants was the confusion around the question of what community and belonging in their newfound home meant for them and for the host society. Rumi’s struggle in the first few years in Canada, as seen in the previous chapter at length, speaks in some depth to this issue of community and network in the new country, and the impact of this on women in particular as they come into the country as dependents through marriage.

**Community Life**

Participants’ experiences, understanding and observations of the notion of community changed drastically after their arrival in Canada. It is not the virtual community or an abstract network that is analyzed here, but communities and networks that are lived, concrete and functional, as well as geographically and spatially bound. While they call their immediate geographical area their community, they feel it is deeply divided into ethnic lines, and, importantly for us here, these divisions will be reconciled only if there are opportunities for interaction outside their homes, which is often not a choice since they tend to be busy inside the home. The only exception for this is what Wellman (1998) identified as personal communities or fragmented networks that are often the default option for women, children and seniors who are at home. As we saw in the narratives of Rumi and Suja, for many participants, their spouses working many jobs and various times during the day and night, made it hard for the family to join in anything that contributes towards community building outside their home. For women who are home, there are a number of reasons they find it hard to mingle with other racial and ethnic
communities at large. For some, it is language and other communication barriers and differences that hinder the process. For others, it is their responsibilities at home that are too overwhelming to allow them be a part of anything external. For many, this sense of lacking community is also a result of cultural differences and expectations from the host society. They tend to believe these expectations force them to choose uniformity in their everyday lives. The desire to keep the private life intact and separate from the community life partly derives from wanting to resist the expectation of a standardized life lived according to the norms of the host society, that in the end does not positively recognize them in any case. At the same time there is another contradictory sense as well: they also believe the community life that they find among each other is limiting, as they view it as separate from the mainstream culture and social life. While forms of local community life assists them in managing their internal expectation of keeping their language, traditions and religious practices within their personal communities, it seems their involvement in it also limits their access to the outside world. The notion of community is complicated and multifaceted – and contradictory. As Jameela (Pakistan) articulated in her view of community:

Community is there, but it is separate from the rest of Canada. We remain in this four blocks, many have not seen anything outside these four blocks, some choose not to, for some there is no access to anything else, it is complicated the idea of community here… it is one thing to say we are community but on the other hand we are fragmented and isolated from everything (Jameela, Pakistan).

The geographical location of their community allowed people to be in touch with a certain community with similar needs and situation. Many of the participants suggested it is comforting to meet people of the same ethnic origins and religious or cultural beliefs and viewed them as their primary resource to fill the gap in social and cultural capital. However, they also see it as a
limitation and barrier that is created out of their new social and economic situation. Thus, it is seen not as a choice, but as the only option available to fight isolation and social alienation. According to some participants, this particular situation not only limits their options to learn and to be part of the wider Canadian community, but also enables them to enjoy the benefit of a cultural capital they believe exists and is beyond their immediate and familiar community setup in the host country. This also contributed to the feeling of otherness they feel from the broader community. Participants pointed to employment and education as tools to break this barrier and to create new communities that are more inclusive of differences. Social networks and social capital are integral themes that help assess how participants experienced life and community in general since their arrival. Similarly, their perceptions of Canadian community, culture and what they consider a mainstream life are also strongly influenced by the changes they experienced in their networks and community life.

Changes in Networks and Social Capital

What was described as change in the family system earlier in this section and the changing perception of the community are indicators of change in networks. Granovetter (1973) explains this changing relation in networks as the moving of ‘strong ties and weak ties’ (see Chapter 2). In applying these types of concepts to the research data we see that prior to immigration the boundaries of family and community ties were taken for granted by many of the women interviewed, and both were considered sources of strong ties by the participants. Family and community were the first and last place of support and understanding for many that lived in close-knit communities back in their home countries.
I did not know anyone when I came here; I made my first two friends after two years here. I met them at the community centre; it was kind of awkward to start making friendships like that with strangers. At that point I was desperate to have somebody to talk to, you know it is a lonely kind of experience the only person you see every day and night, is your husband. When kids came along it changed, but then I realized how much I miss home and family… there no longer exists any kind of strong support, everything is new, just like the weather here (Jemma, China).

Shared cultural and religious traditions, language, educational attainment, economic and class relations marked similarities, not differences, in understanding what was considered family, community and neighbourhood.

Jemma, Rumi, and many others shared the same sentiments when they talked about their home country and the relatives’ support they left behind. Participants’ accounts of the loss and lack of network indicates the loss of the social and cultural capital due to their transition, which Putnam (2000) identifies as a growing phenomenon, especially in North America. Drawing from Hanifan (1916), Putnam (2002) asserts the importance of social capital for development and change. In transnational migration, such as in the lives of the participants of this study, we see the significance of cultural and social capital for people, necessary for a sense of belonging and social mobility. Beyond these general observations, I argue that for the immigrant women in this study, we see additional layers of complexity; layers in interplay with a range of other factors such as race, class, and socio-economic and cultural differences that influence their transition to the new country, and these dimensions are not typically accounted for in the more general conceptualization of cultural and social capital.
Even to develop meaningful relationships that are supportive, you need to be in the wider network of people who knows this country, its culture, basically need to be part of the mainstream otherwise we will remain separated from everything, yes, we have a community here but that is not what is going to help us become successful and find ‘home’ here (Maya, India).

People who probably can help and are settled well here, when we meet them the conversation usually begin and end in simple greetings. I used to think it was something to do with my approach or attitude but over time, I learned it is a common experience. I don’t how to change it (Jasmine, Pakistan).

Maya’s and Jasmine’s narratives are similar to a key point that was discussed in the focus groups as well: the majority of the participants find that their connections in the community and networks are limited. According to the focus group discussion, many immigrants in these communities struggle because their social networks are limited and these networks often do not provide the support they expect. According to a number of participants, they meet people in their immediate circle who are also immigrants struggling and learning to integrate into the new society and culture. Others whom they consider as established are not as accessible or as open as they wish; often, they meet these individuals who seem to be established at events or in public spaces such as the community center or school. However, their connections with them most often begin and end with “Hello” and “How are you?” Wellman (1998) provides a partial explanation for this situation, where, in urban areas, due to space and other constraints, public interactions are moved to intimate private gatherings. Bannerji (1995) gives another possible reason for such interaction when she talks about racialized and gendered identities in the public space as gazed upon but not necessarily engaged in a conversation. Many participants talked about those
negative encounters they had experience in public spaces where they were either stared at or were ignored. This made them apprehensive of approaching people to make connections.

A key point here is that these negative experiences make people believe it is probably not possible to network informally with Canadians, and to some degree, in Canada. There are, it appears, hidden barriers to network formation even in the case of opportunities for regular contact and mutual experiences and concerns. People do not entertain the idea of strong ties as they see a clear divide between immigrant life and experience from the Canadian cultural, economic and social life that they consider mainstream. Some of the contradictions that are identified in these experiences, as well as in participant’s perception of successful lives, derive from this notion of a mainstream life that people wish to join. In the focus groups, one of the solutions participants suggested for changing this situation was to create an opportunity to meet/interact/work with people in intentionally created settings, such as educational institutions, training places, and formal work situations. Thus, the power imbalance, which is perceived as the biggest barrier for networking, becomes less significant and not intimidating. Furthermore, this creates an opportunity to experience cultural differences and practices in a positive and less discriminatory setting.

The complex aspect of networks that is revealed through the experience of participants is the seemingly auto-exclusionary dimensions of the networks that they are involved in after immigration. Although the participants feel they are part of some local networks, according to many, these networks do not allow them to be insiders, but keep them away from becoming insiders: interviewees described subordinated inclusion in this sense. The meaning and usefulness of networks appears to be a distinctive, and a distinctively othering experience for
many immigrant participants of this study, especially in meeting their external expectations of a successful economic and social life in Canada, which ends up being a principal source of the framework of othering in this case. On the one hand, inherent to the vision of a “successful economic and social life in Canada” is the immigrant as other, and on the other hand, the driving force behind these external and internal expectations is largely informed by their previous life circumstances and social cultural attributes compared to their current experiences. They sustain it, as it is the only connection they know that keeps them visible in their own community settings. Granovetter (1973) provides a way to understand these layers of networks through his typology of relationships, and Putnam (2000) assist to explore the purpose for which these networks are created and the factors that influence them. Examining these community networks beyond the elements of social support and emotional ties also reveals the political, economic and social mechanisms that are at work and influencing how these networks operate. These broader social mechanisms and the influence of race, class, and economic relations in shaping the functions of these networks are crucial in this.

Networks are a macro-level theme that changed significantly for the participants. In addition to the discussion of networks in earlier chapters, I would like to point out a few of the important points that are relevant to the topic of social transformation. Networks aids create new strong ties and help resist changes that are not seen as necessary. As a result, people are able to exercise their agency for their own reasons and purposes. Networks open new ways to explore the world from inside, allowing learning and change to be an incremental process. They aid people to be at ease with the in-between space they occupy. A serious limitation participants identified is that, unlike their pre-immigration networks, these networks do not assist with upward mobility in terms of economics or employment.
Changes in Material Life Arrangements: Finding a Home in the Match Box and a Village in a Block

I used to live in a house with many rooms and a big courtyard. My relatives and friends all lived in the nearby areas. I knew everyone from kids to older people…. Now look at me: I live in a two-bedroom apartment with my children and husband. We all share one room…. My big courtyard is replaced with long corridors and the greenery is replaced with gray carpets and matching paints on the wall. It represents my new life, well kind of old now, I have been here closer to a decade in the same place, same building (Jasmine, Bangladesh).

In Jasmine’s description, she conveys significant changes in her life after immigration in terms of material life conditions. Jasmine’s sentiment and explanation of her living arrangements echoes the majority of participants’ spatial arrangements as well. Prior to immigration a majority of the participants lived in houses, some in smaller cities or villages and a couple of them lived in the Middle East in high-rise buildings but of much better quality and with more space. Learning to live in a cramped space and not knowing the neighbours were two of the major hurdles that interviewees like Mina, Jameela and Jasmine had to face.

For many, living arrangements also represented what they left behind and the gap is an example of the disparity between their internal expectations and current economic and social reality. Except for Mina, no other participants have lived in a ‘house’ since their arrival, and Suja for a few months upon their arrival in Canada. Mina and her family used to own a house but had to move out when her husband lost his job. Two of the women’s families have moved out of the neighbourhood they lived in since being interviewed for this thesis; one of them had lived in community housing with her husband and three children for more than eight years so moving was a positive change for her family.
I think the biggest change for me, in terms of moving here was I no longer live in a house and here, there are no neighbours come by your door to share a produce from their yard or children calling out from across the road to play cricket on the street. These buildings looks like neatly arranged matchboxes. I guess now I know we take many of these things for granted until it disappears right in front of your eyes. My husband and I often talk about how we can make a difference, yes, life is hard but we should be able to do something to break the wall between people. I don’t know what I should do but I want to change it so desperately, this is not the way to live (Kamala, Nepal).

You see these pictures they are from my backyard at ‘home’, now you see this apartment, it is one bedroom, I can almost hear my neighbours through my walls, I have to shush my children all the time. But you know what, now this is life here and I will try my best to make the best out of it for us because it was a choice we made (Mina, India).

Kamala and Mina described two major themes that are associated with their new life firstly the changes in material relations and secondly changes in social relations. The changes in the spatial arrangements described in Kamala’s and Mina’s account once again indicate the multiple levels of change participants have to go through upon their arrival and continues to be the reality of their lives even after several years of being in Canada. One reason for these changes is the difference in urban and rural arrangements for living space, and another reason is affordability of the space in an urban centre like Toronto. Material living arrangements also reveal the way social relations organize an individual’s life and activities with respect to a certain place or area. These material arrangements are also directly connected to and produce an outcome that impacts the social capital and types of networks people are able to actively access.
Kamala offered a view that resonates with both Putnam’s (1995) and Jacob’s (2002) analyses of disappearing neighbourhoods in North America where neighbourhood kids do not interact with each other anymore. For immigrant women who live in this type of community, it is a stark realization of disappearing human interaction that is replaced with concrete buildings where their lives are getting fragmented. For many, this is one of the first struggles they want to address as women, because they find themselves being contained within these defined and limited spaces. This also points out the divide that exists between races, classes, and cultures within an urban setting that is perpetuated by the physical environment of the individual.

We used to have a car and a driver to take us to and from work, now we don’t own a car, let alone a house. These are one of the many changes we came to adjust ourselves as part of moving here. But I must tell you, I don’t mind the hardship as long as it gets better as time goes by and you know you come to think of these things differently, it is a lot of change and learning, new ways of living life. It definitely makes me aware of dependency on such things, here life forces you to be independent, which is not a bad thing (Bhanu, Sri Lanka).

There are a number of significant analytical points in the participants’ accounts of change in their material lives. On the one hand, it reveals significant barriers to transformative learning, though possibilities and potentials are detectable as well. For example, Bhanu’s changing perception of independence as a result of not having a driver and a car points out not just adaptive capacities human beings have but also of the creative nature that seeks to find meaning in that experience. According to Freire, it is this type of observation that makes humans separate from animals in their capacity to transform and make more of their life regardless of their life situation. On the other hand, these accounts also reveal the interplay of many elements that form social relations that coordinate the everyday experience of people, as explored in the work of theorists like Smith.
(1987). These accounts also call attention to the multidimensional aspect of change and experiences that are deeply influenced by socio-cultural set ups prior to immigration. What Mezirow (1978, 2003) calls a ‘disorienting dilemma’ leading to reflection resonates with these experiences; however, in the context of these women’s experiences, there are multiple dilemmas that require various approaches to address them adequately. A comprehensive examination of social relations from an individual perspective is necessary to discuss the multifaceted aspects of these experiences. Although the abovementioned changes can be examined through the lens of social relations in the social context, I want to discuss this in the context of the private (and privatized) life as an influential factor and as a direct outcome of immigration. In the next part of this section, I discuss the changes in social relations especially in relation to culture, education/learning, labour market and class. Here I treat these changes not necessarily as a direct result of immigration but as a result of a socio-cultural and economic setup embedded with colonial, racist and classist attitudes and fuelled by a market economy.

Section II:
Changing social relations after immigration

All participants experienced a dramatic change in their social relations after immigration. The major themes that came up in the individual interviews and focus group discussions with reference to social relations discussed in this section are: cultural and social practices, language, class, race, and education/knowledge. This section focuses analytically on the interconnectedness of these various factors that produce these experiences for people, as well as the way the local and the extra local lives produce and reproduce social experience in particular sites leading people to disorienting dilemmas and disjuncture, which in turn create a base for learning with the possibility of transformative change.
The theory of social relations (e.g., Ng, 1989; Smith, 1997; Wimot, 2011) in this analysis supplemented to uncover the power dynamics imbued with social differences based on race, class, gender and hegemonic cultural practices in participant’s lives. The way participants experienced change after their arrival in Canada appeared to reside in their private lives; however, they also noticed that change, in many ways, is a collective experience that originates from their social set ups. This was discussed in the focus groups, where the majority talked about changes in class and race relations or first becoming aware of such social constructions and the way those constructions impact people. It was the first time these women found themselves in a situation where they were the ‘other’ class and race. The contradictions of class structure appeared dramatically different for them from one location to another, as they became aware of their class position in the new social organization. This resonates with an argument Armstrong and Armstrong (1990) made regarding class as a base to understanding change, as it is contextual and relational. A common inquiry from participants was about how they can fix these “deficiencies” that separate them from the mainstream society, especially in relation to cultural and race relations? The notion of mainstream culture, mainstream society and people is a key theme in this analysis; the underlying motivation behind this notion of a “mainstream” life largely comes from the fact that their social relations changed significantly in that they now feel othered in the new society and culture. Therefore, according to many participants, becoming part of the mainstream society will erase the invisible markers that they believe alienate them from the rest of the society. For some, joining the mainstream is the next phase in their process of integration to this new country. While all participants shared in the experience of a change in their cultural, social, and economic relations, the majority believes they will overcome this one
day. They hoped it would change once their job and language prospects improved. Rina (India) described the change as follows:

My life changed right in front of me, I expected that there will be some changes for a time period, but not for years on end… I did not expect that way I talked and looked would matter when it came to getting into a job, I feel there is something wrong, something needs to be fixed, but I do not know what…how is it that I am of no class now, there is no class here in the community, everyone is struggling, everyone is suffering from having an accent or wrong religion or culture…(Rina, India)

Rina is an example of how the notion of class and the desire to become part of the mainstream became a strong focus of participants’ lives. The concepts of ruling relations and disjunction help us to understand the layers of this experience and the way people become aware of it (Smith, 1987). Rina, in her experience of this change, identified a disjunction from what she believed to be her experience and her reality, which made her question the experience, and search for solutions. The findings also suggest that participants’ experiences are highly coordinated by external forces (both past and present) and these ruling relations shape the process of change in a way that it makes individuals feel as the other, where their identities, cultural practices, education and experiences are devalued. In a society, class relations define an individual’s place in the society, whereas immigrants moving from a higher category of class to a working class category or, in their own words, no class status (Jasmine, Bangladesh) this experience was a negative change for them.

**Cultural and Social Hegemony**

Another significant change immigrants experience is in their social and economic positioning and cultural landscape. Almost all of the research participants viewed themselves as separate
from the mainstream culture in Canada. Fouzia (Bangladesh) explained this dilemma when she explained how she feels about fitting into the cultural context: “Ha ha, that is a joke, A crow is always a crow. No matter how much it tries to become a peacock, it will not become one”. For many participants, hegemonic cultural and social views feel oppressive, as it demands them to act, express themselves, and appear in a particular way. Often, those expectations made them feel that their own culture and traditions have no value or are inferior in the host society. For example, many of the participants from south Asian, predominantly Muslim countries, feel they are constantly attacked for wearing a hijab or other traditional clothes. Selma (Bangladesh) had to leave her job at a well-known pizza store when the management asked her to remove her headgear. Selma’s is not a lone experience.

Many of the participants shared experiences of discrimination in the broader community. Another area where people felt discriminated against was in using public transit - many of the Muslim participants commented on being stared at and feared by others and at other times, witnessed people moving seats in public transit to be far from them. People from Hindu traditions mentioned being treated differently by service providers because of their names and their bindis. This experience of exclusion made participants believe their culture and traditions are viewed as the other and are not valued here. It is the diminishing nature of use-value in social terms that move people into certain spaces within the community--it becomes especially obvious when they are juxtaposed in the broader society and culture. In contrast to the concept of ‘use-value’ in Marxian terms, the lack of value participants feel reveals the hidden layers of social relations that affect individuals differently in different contexts. Furthermore, the way these social relations compromise the exchange value of the worker’s skill based on her social location.
According to a majority of the participants, there is hierarchical order in which immigrants are treated based on their names, traditional wear, religious practices, and country of origin. Fouzia’s and Selma’s comments give examples of that hierarchy. However, many are ready to change their names and to remove anything that would identify them as originating from certain countries in order to seek acceptance and find a job. Even so, some participants were not sure that tactic would work.

I will cut my hair, change my name and start wearing formal Canadian clothes if somebody can promise me a job. One of my husband’s senior colleagues mentioned at a work party that our names, accent & so on are the reasons people [immigrants] do not get beyond the interview stage to land a job (Maya, India).

Sometimes staff at some agencies treat my friends and me differently because we wear bindis: they think we are refugees on welfare, taking advantage of the government system. It is sad to be treated that way, but I need their support to keep my small jobs, so I keep going back (Vjaya, Srilanka).

Participants identified themselves and others of colour in their neighbourhood as immigrants and referred to white or people of European descent as Canadians, which is an example of Ng’s (1986) definitional statement of immigrant women as racialized subjects of colour and Li’s (2003) analysis of the notion of immigrant as social and political construct. In addition, Vijaya and Maya convey the exclusionary nature of social practices within an invisible colonial landscape that places certain cultural and ideological practices above, or in opposition to, the other. Bannerji (1995) addresses this issue of otherness as experienced by immigrants in developed countries who are expected to adopt the western hegemonic values and argue for alternative approaches to address this gap. The experiences shared by the majority of immigrants
also exemplify what Giroux (2013) describes as a process to become the subject of the cultural capital of the white middle class, which is devoid of the lives, identities, and expression of other groups.

Participants’ experiences with regards to cultural, religious, and social practices and norms challenge the multiculturalism policy of Canada (1971) by showing that it does not uphold what it promises for its people. It also reveals a colonial nature of social set ups that force people to change according to the hegemonic social practices. Experience and change are related in this process. Another major theme that came up within the context of culture and practice, however, was the distinctive issue of language.

**Language, Deficiency and Employment in the Colonial Landscape**

At first I thought being able to speak English would be good enough, that it would help me here to connect with people. Now I think learning to speak like Canadians is what will help me. You get more respect and acceptance, even among your friends, when you speak like a real Canadian (Maya, India).

In focus groups and interviews, language was identified as one of the major components that helped with inclusion. A majority of participants believed their language skills are adequate to manage life and work here. However, they do not have the confidence that it is good enough for them to move forward as Canadian accents and expressions are favored and valued when it comes to social and labour market participation. In probing further, it became apparent that for many, the ability to speak or write English was not the issue-- to them, the problem was how they speak it and express themselves. They did not believe their English language skills would get them anywhere as long as there was an expectation to speak like Canadians.
The majority of the participants had attended some English as a Second Language (ESL) or related training and mentioned one emphasis in the training was to speak like Canadians. This experience made them question their language skills and reinforced the general belief that the deficiency lies within the individual when it comes to social and cultural integration, which also impacts the economic integration. Thus, it was the individual’s responsibility to address the gap, whether it is language, religion, or culture. These experiences are not necessarily enforcing change in the individual, but are creating an expectation in these individuals that they need to be ready to change, or be excluded. These experiences also confirm what Li (2003), Li & Li (2013) argues as the expectation and assumptions in which integration discourse prevail in Canada, that is, successful integration depends on individual’s human capital and desirable change to Canadian norms and practices.

Immigrants come to this country with the hope of finding better jobs and economic well-being. While applying for immigration, they are led to believe all is well here and it is simply a matter of getting the legal documents to get them settled. There is a vast body of literature-examining immigrants’ labour market outcomes and experiences, training and education, and precarious work arrangements (e.g. Man, 2004; Ng, 1986, 1989, 1996; Shan, 2009; Maitra, 2011; Guo, 1999, 2010, 2013). In this analysis I am not discussing the labour market experiences and outcomes in depth, as the particular focus of this analysis is the way employment outcomes and experiences challenged participant's perceptions and provoked new learning’s in them.

Participant’s practical responses to employment outcomes are similar to what others have discussed, however, except in relation to cash work in the next chapter.
Out of the forty-four participants, only four had never worked, formally or informally, prior to their immigration. However, three of these women have a university education and are employable in their field of education. More than half of the research participants have applied for at least one job since their arrival. Eight of them have gotten some form of work in factories, restaurants, or grocery stores. At the time of the interviews, only one remained in the first job she had gotten after immigrating. However, when her husband lost his job and the family had to go on welfare, she had to come off the payroll and work for cash. With the exception of women who came to Canada through refugee status, one of the main priorities for all the study participants and their spouses was to find employment in their field of experience and education. Three of the participant’s spouses found entry-level positions in their own field of training or education.

Experiences of harassment, workplace exploitation, health issues, and racist attitudes made all but one participant quit from a work place. Except for Suja, no one was aware of the rights of the worker or labour laws in Ontario when they immigrated. Even when others told them to complain, they did not think they could afford to go that route for fear of losing their only source of income. Suma enjoyed her work in the restaurant field and found it comforting to have a place to go to outside her community. When her husband fell ill, she had to quit her job that was in the evenings and early mornings to find a weekend job. This meant she had to work the same number of hours for a lower pay. The issue of having to pay tax and the fear of authorities finding out that the family had extra income diminished when she chose to work for cash.

Women, along with their spouses, found labour market rules and regulations repressive and at times a major reason for some to explore their options of returning to their home countries. However, the majority said that overcoming the obstacles in the labour market has strengthened
their resolve in resisting the urge to give up. The following excerpt from Fouzia (Pakistan) reflects the majority voice of participants.

I came all the way from Pakistan, leaving behind everything I know, my job, family, everything. It is sometimes hard to imagine that you are learning to walk like a baby here, no job, no friends to help you get one, but you know what, this is not the end of it. I will not give up, I believe we can make a better future here, with hard work and determination we will be able to overcome all that is pressing us down. If my husband and I do not get to do it, our children will, I hope so.

Jasmine (Bangladesh) added further how each one resists the urge to give up:

I tell you, we have hope, hope that tomorrow will bring the best, and we have hope in our children, in their future, there is always something to look forward to… these experiences will not bring us down…yes there are hard days but the overall sense of hope we feel keeps us walking.

For some of the participants, being unable to work in a prestigious bank, hospital or university, like the way they used to work back in their home country, was a life-changing experience. The way they used to think of education, and their experience lead them to believe a huge gap exists between what they know and should know to lead a successful life in Canada. This also makes them think twice about their worth in a Western market place and the way race, gender, and class contribute to this experienced worth. According to many participants, there are multiple ways they analyze this experience in their life. On one level, they view this as a change in relation to race and class creating an imbalance of power and difference in their social life in the host country. On another level, they think of their lives as gendered, women who are responsible for the domestic sphere, which restricts them to the boundaries of their home and community. There
is a concern for one’s place and role in the new country. They also acknowledged that this experience is teaching them to think of work, class, and privilege differently. While many participants with professional experience saw this as a devaluing of their skill, education, and prior experience they also view this gave them an opportunity to look outside themselves to see what is happening to others. They saw it as a collective, binding experience as women, immigrants, and people of colour in a dominant white space. The acknowledgement of their collective experience as women in this space reveals the simultaneous thinking processes occurred individually and collectively. The duality of this process of thinking and reflection helped juxtapose the experiences of race and class on the margins with normatively guided individuals who were in the centre in their prior contexts. The process and experience has then provided an important analytic variable that demonstrates the polarizing effect of marginalization on individuals and groups depending on their social and economic context. It reveals the underlying patterns of a social organization that are demeaning and mark people as deficient in a racist and classist market place. It also leads people to challenge their worldviews and assumptions and find solidarity amongst themselves which can potentially lead to collective organization and action.

Participants generally shared solidarity and found this experience both oppressing and liberating at the same time. For example, Dhanya and Bhanu, two of the participants, shared in the focus group that this whole immigrant journey and labour market experience changed their way of looking at class and the types of work women do inside and outside the home.

I do not look down on any work anymore, all work has value, we are not to treat people based on their education and job…it is wrong to create such a false division…maybe this place is helping us to realize it. This is not to say what is
happening here is right or fair but to say it is helping us also to think of our own judgments on others…(Rina, India).

It is hard and unfair and at times I am angry; but at the same time it is making me think of my own attitude. Now I think of the people who worked in our fields from the lower castes, their situation was bad and I never thought of that as injustice before…but now I feel that is unfair too…sometimes, this is how we learn in life (Bhanu, Sri Lanka).

There were a few others in the focus group and in the interviews who found this process demeaning and shameful and did not share the same views as Rina and Bhanu. They saw it as a corrective social and economic mechanism that they have to put themselves through and give their best to learn and train themselves to adjust and adapt to be successful. They view social problems as part of every society and do not believe the issues are theirs to fix. There was a clear divide in how participants viewed their experience in the light of race, class, and gender relations. For some, they are the normative features of society therefore not to be challenged. For others, it is the violation of their basic rights. While recognizing the symptoms of a broken system and oppressive society, they are also carefully reflecting their role in contributing to that system and their prejudices on such issues.

The employment outcomes and experiences of the participants show a downward mobility of immigrant skills and education in the labour market. Participants suggested areas where governments can create more inclusive regulations and training opportunities and made numerous suggestions to improve the employment situation. Some of the participants believe inclusive regulations for better employment outcome will help them worry less about economic needs and having less to worry about will allow for more room to explore the society and culture
of their host country. According to some participants, economic participation is the first step towards addressing other issues they face. For example, some believe having meaningful employment brings visibility to their otherwise invisible status. A strong emphasis was placed on the need for creating placement opportunities for people in their field of education and experience instead of seemingly random language and skill training that was gearing them towards low-end service jobs. People are aware of their precarious and difficult situations and are willing to work towards changing them. The underlying message many conveyed was that individuals and their families need to adjust their internal expectations to manage the external expectation that they be responsible for their success or failure and therefore try their best and improve themselves until they succeed.

From the various discussion points on experience and change, my major finding was that people are continuing to hold on to their plans and dreams despite negative experiences and unexpected changes. However, I would like to draw attention to the variety of ways people approached these plans and dreams. For many women and their families, one of the main goals is social and economic integration and creating a better future for their children. Fouzia, Rina, Bhanu and few others want to see their economic and social situation improve; not just for integration, but also to challenge and change the oppressive situations they experience and observe in the broader community. For Rina, it is to meet the personal goal of finding suitable employment in order to be independent and not to be confined to the domestic space just because she is a woman. Jasmine (Bangladesh), on the other hand, believes the only way she could prove to the host country that her education is not inferior is of value by getting back to her profession. Participants differed greatly in how they viewed their plans and dreams for the future but shared the exception that they all wanted the best for their family and children. However, it is important
to note that many strongly believed social change would be necessary to address other problems they face in the host country. Dhanya (India) explained, “I don’t want us to go back to our grandmother’s time, once life is a bit settled, women should try to get back on their feet. We should not allow people to look down on us because we are women of other colour”.

A major draw for applying for immigration was better employment prospects and opportunities. However, once here, that seems to be the hardest thing to achieve. Despite this, the participants have remained positive and found that this is a learning curve. They point out that their perception of work, what gives meaning to life, and strength to accept difference and diversity, are viewed as positive outcomes of this experience. What this reveals is the individual’s capacity to view and make positive choices, actions that Freire (1970) and Gramsci (1996/1929) define as individual’s capacity to act on their will regardless of their social and economic position.

The complex nature of this experience also reveals the way agency and agentive participation is displayed differently by individuals in various situations. Immigrants are trying to integrate by adjusting themselves to meet the expectation their new socio-economic situation presents, and this is where they are using agency for survival. They are also using agency to sustain their plans and dreams for the future. Thus, agency is not to be counted on merely for survival. Furthermore, they acknowledge their role coming to Canada in which they were active agents in choosing this new social reality. The narrative from Suja that was outlined in more detail in the previous chapter was a typical example of the complexity people feel in their new lives and the way agency and agentive participation become key in how individuals respond to their situations and make meaning of their everyday lives. Lily (Philippines) explains the complexity of this situation:
I made the choice of coming here, it was hard, I had to learn tons in order to fit in…there were things I didn’t like but it was my choice and I promised myself that I will make success. You know, I got a job and everything was going well until the company I worked for replaced me with new computers and technology they practically didn’t need me any longer. Can I blame them, when they have machines to do the work, a much cheaper option? But I still have hope to find something, even if it is not in my field. This also means that now I am enrolled in a course to try my luck in social service field.

Lily’s statement is an example of a worker resisting the oppressive social conditions by retraining herself. However, the other side of it is that training and education become a purposeful tool that meets the changing needs of the capitalist market. This may be one of the contradictions that a lifelong learning process poses in the capitalist economy. Another aspect of this process is some of the participants tend to view their inability to get work as a deficiency within themselves and seek remedies to correct that. This also requires agency and yet, this only addresses systemic issues forced and projected upon them. This is where the capitalist, free market economy has successfully ingrained its core message to all subjects seeking its assistance: that it is up to the individual to compete to succeed or fail; this message tells them that the systems and structures have nothing to do with their failure, it will be all based on how fit they are for the competition. There is also a tendency to ignore other internal and external factors such as race, class, and gender or to overlook the possibility of how they coordinate this process. A dilemma many of the participants expressed, with reference to experiences of trying to access the labour market, was the question of knowledge and education and ways of knowing in the broadest sense. Rina asked: “What is considered good and useful knowledge here, what are the gaps in our knowledge, and the confusion around hard skills and soft skills?” While agency is
key, this theme also shows what Shan (2009) states as the fundamental contradiction these experiences produce for immigrant women in the market economy.

**Changes in the Way of Knowing - Knowledge**

Labour market experiences and related outcomes only intensified the questions around what is considered education and knowledge among participants. The ontological and epistemological debates around knowledge and ways of knowing have historical and theoretical foundations to them. In the context of the participant experiences, I draw widely from adult education and anti-racist feminist studies, such as Goldberger (1986), Freire (1970), Mezirow (1978, 2000), to discuss some of the practical ways of understanding the subject. For many of the participants coming to Canada, it meant utilizing and expanding their skill sets and previous experience in order to settle themselves. Every participant expected a learning curve with the change in moving from one country to another, as it is a new place and has a culture with its own traditions, ways of living, and so on. According to many participants, what they did not expect is how deeply they would be challenged in what they know and how they know it and that that knowledge would be of less value in the host country. For some, the solution was to find a way to express what they know differently thus they do not have to erase what they know but re-imagine it to fit the new scenario. Women who spoke about changing their appearance and fixing their accents and so on, see it as a way to get through the door, not necessarily as conforming to the mainstream demand of the host country and market. The complex façade of this process means that sometimes it may make people appear to be passive agents, simply adapting (or coping). I would argue that this interpretation highlights only one part of their plan (tactics; as opposed to strategy).
It is one thing that they tell you, that your education and experience are not good, but then they should be able to give you an opportunity to get what you need to become a skilled physician here. I used to think I had the best education possible from one of the best in my country but then that does not even get me through the door to observe how things are done in the hospitals here (Jasmine, Bangladesh).

On the other hand, Betty (India) found herself lost when it comes to knowledge regarding parenting and disciplining of the children:

It is a totally different expectation that I get but what I do not understand is, how come people here think they know everything better than us? As if what we know and have lived in our lives is not equal to what they have here, as if there is something wrong about how we live our life, teach our children? I will not buy into that, I am sure there are things to learn from here and there are things that we can offer to the society here as well. What we know is not less or more, it is all equally important (Betty, India).

For Jasmine (Bangladesh) and Betty (India), this devaluing of their knowledge meant unlearning a lot of things they knew as women, mothers, and professionals. As a family physician with more than ten years of experience, Jasmine never imagined that she would have a hard time finding employment in the health sector. Once she realized all the hurdles around becoming a licensed practitioner in Canada, Jasmine became willing to acquire additional education or training. However, she found herself once again at a disadvantage in that she could not find a placement to practice with another experienced physician. The key difference to note in Jasmine, Lily and Reena and many other participants’ approaches to retraining and education was to them it is a practical response to an unjust situation. There were a couple of participants who believed their education and training was not good enough and therefore, in their opinions, everyone had to go
through some training prior to getting a job. The differing views these women presented also reveal the ways in which agency is used differently by people and the influence of worldviews in their way of applying agency to their situation.

From Class to a Classless Position

The previous discussions indicate the labour market experiences, language and the questioning of knowledge all make these difficult changes for immigrant women and their families. From an analytical standpoint, this is also where individuals started experiencing class as a category that created difference that Bannerji (2011) state as the social relations that are imbued with power differences are exemplified in the form of class relations. Class becomes a category in which participants position themselves to understand and make sense of their experiences and change in their social set-ups. From a Marxian perspective, as people become aware of their class status they start looking into ways to transform it (Ollman, 1978). Many of the research participants used the term class to compare their previous social position to their current one:

I used to have people waiting on me, things taken care of for me. My friends and I joke about it now; here we become the maids and masters of our homes and life (Jameela, Pakistan).

[Speaking of her community] There is no such thing as class here everyone is of the same class and position, everybody is struggling (Kamala, Nepal).

I could see around this room we all come from a higher-class background, every one of us, educated, worked in our countries, had a decent education, I never thought of that as class status but as part of my existence. I no longer think that way, I am aware of our position now (Fouzia, Bangladesh).
Although participants mentioned that they have no inclination towards acquiring a class status, comments on their own change in status and standard of life tell a different story. Most of the participants compared their previous experiences with regards to class to their current status and started identifying a change of their class position within the broader social organization. Among their peers and family in their home countries, they did not think of themselves as belonging to a particular class since they were not challenged with that issue. What it indicates is that people become aware of class, which Ollman (1978) describe as a social relation; class-consciousness means social and economic conditions in which identification of class interests occurs (“or can occur”). My studies shows that as the participants went through this change in all areas of their life, they were challenged on numerous levels about their identity as a particular ethnicity, a particular religion, women of colour and so on. My participant observation and some interviews suggest that, in some cases, individuals use class as a category to measure their success in Canada depending on their time of arrival. Although individualistic, the ways in which class is viewed as one criterion to achieve success here has significant implications when examining the possibility of transformation. While the common social ties and interests that bind immigrants together in this experience can serve as the basis of collective change, if people can rise above their individual interest, social and economic change and transformation is possible (Ollman, 1978). Class, ethnicity, gender ideologies, and religious status are some of the complex dynamics people deal with internally, among their neighbours, and within internal networks. The dynamics of gender, race, and class are present in their day to day interaction with institutions of power, service providers, educators, potential employers, and so on. This, according to Marx, is the manifestation of different class dynamics that keeps the people in separate groups (Ollman, 1968). It will be valuable to examine this for second or third generation Asian immigrants to
understand how this class relationship changes through economic success and at what level it influences the cultural and social relations.

Section III
Experience and Change Possibilities and Options: Summary

What do these changes and experiences mean for the participants and what are some alternative ways they find answers to the issues that cause their lives in Canada to be difficult? The findings suggest the broader themes of gender; race and class categories are strong influences in their everyday lives. These women’s stories also reveal the complex interactions between the host society and the society of origin that are embedded within the larger context of global capitalism and patriarchy. The choice of immigration and country of destination reveals the hierarchical order in which the capitalist market operates and presents itself in the global market. Canada is one of the top countries of choice for many who want to immigrate as skilled, family or economic class (CIC, 2009). What people are not aware of when they are making those choices are how their individual markings of ethnicity, cultural values, and gender play out in an old colonial landscape that limits entry to the marketplace based on pre-set values and categories. The social marking based on colour is cited as one of the many institutional barriers professional Chinese immigrants faced in their trying to access the labour market (Guo, 2013).

While many expected the nuclear family system to be in place in the host country, in reality they found that incongruent with the individualistic nature of the culture. The individualization they experience in the host culture makes them doubt the possibility of increasing their social capital in the new country. In addition, they believe as long as they are separated from the mainstream, there is little room for negotiation to change or influence change in the host country. Women find it particularly distressing as they are the ones left behind to manage the household and children.
without any support. The decreased social capital and networking capacity also contributed to their feeling of separation from mainstream. This particular situation is an example of a gender specific outcome of the current social and ideological practices.

Many immigrants who considered themselves as part of the higher class in their home countries see that class status disappearing as soon as they arrive and are baffled to find that in their new country, they are now of working class status. The findings suggest that gender, race, and class factors play roles in their personal and social lives. A woman choosing to stay home while her spouse looks for a job is a typical scenario in this community and many expressed it as a normal internal expectation.

Participants did not make immediate connections from the above difficulties to racism since they considered many of their experiences as isolated incidents happening to them personally. The focus groups conducted for this study were eye-opening experiences for many as they shared experiences in the open and realized their experiences were not unique: many have similar experiences or knew others who had experiences of name calling and poor treatment by community agencies based on their appearance.

People found their religious beliefs and practices also impacted how they were treated in social situations. There was a debate among participants about whether there is a hierarchy among various religious groups, and some strongly believed belonging to particular religious traditions, such as Christianity, has certain benefits in Canada over other traditions. For example, participants who identified as Muslims or Hindus argued that Christian participants were favored when they did activities in the broader community, access services, or look for employment. Similarly with gender roles, there was mention of women from certain Asian countries having
more freedom than the other participants and whether this was a good thing for women and their families. While gender and race were obvious themes that derived from the data, they are complex and multilayered in their social and cultural constructions and processes. The gender ideology that is mixed with patriarchal ideology and directed under culture and religious values created a blend of complex social construction to unravel. Race also brought an interesting dynamic among participants: during the focus groups, some unknowingly placed their ethnicity and culture above others. What this reveals are the underpinning values and structures that dictate individuals’ private and social space, where the actual issues of gender, class, and race are buried in the midst of these conflicting views or in a totalizing view of these experiences.

Tracing immigrant women’s positions within the Canadian society allows us to trace how race, gender, and class have been constructed throughout Canadian history (Dua, 1999).

Women tend to have to bear the brunt of the issues faced by immigrants generally as they feel it is their responsibility to manage the home and find alternative ways to bring economic stability while at the same time managing their children’s lives. Most of these women were working prior to immigration and now they are stuck at home; they lament their loss of the ability to be an integral part of the social space. They see cash work as one of the ways of re-entering the space yet do not see it as providing access to space beyond their community and networks which are geographically bound and separated from the cultural and social capital of Canada. A big question that came up in the interviews and focus groups was what it means to be “Canadian” and who can be a Canadian.

What it means to be a Canadian is an interesting and ongoing discussion among many participants and their families. My findings suggest that participants separated the legal
citizenship from what it means to be a ‘citizen’ in Canada. According to them, being an independent citizen in Canada means they have the opportunity to create, to contribute to, and be a part of the Canadian society and culture, similar to their experiences in their home societies and cultures prior to their immigration to Canada. The only exception to this was the participants who immigrated to Canada because of political struggles or war related reasons in their home country (4 out of 44 participants came under refugee status). For many participants, becoming a Canadian to the full extent of their expectation is a far away dream since they are struggling to maintain their individual/private needs in terms of finding employment, recognition of their education, skills and their social mobility. Many immigrant women and their families feel alienated by their social situations. They believe change will come when they are able to alleviate the marginalizing conditions of their personal and social lives. The majority of the participants do not believe they will ever be a Canadian, although many have citizenship. Underlying issues related to race, ethnicity, class, and culture also play a huge role in this question of citizenship. Rosaldo (1997) suggests a solution to this issue when he argues for cultural citizenship. This directly relates to change and experience people have with regards to managing their internal expectations.

In women’s accounts of the changes and experiences of immigration, they identified an increased awareness of their location and role, in the private and social spaces. Participants do not think of themselves as passive receivers, nor as an oppressed group, who need help to move out of these situations. Findings suggest that they are actively embracing a double position after becoming

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19 The right to be different in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language with respect to the norms of dominant national community without compromising one’s right to belong in the sense of participating in the nation state’s democratic process (Rosaldo, 1997).
aware of their roles in their new class and in the citizenship-making process. The main rationale for this double positioning is to maintain the internal expectation of family, culture, and ideology while continuing the journey of finding home in Canada while keeping out all that does not fit in their worldview until it makes sense. It also serves to resist change without causing chaos for their children or family. Examining it from a transformative lens suggests that these changes are not necessarily transformative in nature but the choice people make to move forward needs to be examined to understand this process and its outcomes if it opens up possibilities for agentive participation, transformative learning, and work.

My interview data and participant observation notes suggest that their experiences made them rethink their role as women. While they have to forego their professional lives except for in the example of Rumi. To embrace the new domestic lives, they are finding ways to break out of the monotony by entering into informal work arrangements. They see this not only as a means to earn some extra money but also as a way to exercise their agency and stay connected to the outside world. For many, it is a way to show their determination in the face of adversity and be a pillar to their family and children. Learning also came out as a strong theme that changed the perspective on these changes and provided a way for new alternatives to emerge. Because of being able to reflect on what is happening in their lives, make changes to control negative outcomes, and take charge of the situation, participants showed tremendous will and perseverance.
Chapter 7
The Contradictory Role of Informal Work in Immigrant Women’s Lives

The findings in the previous chapter indicated that the women interviewed in this study are constantly negotiating their positions within the receiving host society. These processes often place them at the margins of the society, culture, and economy, which makes their experience of changes multidimensional and complex. In this chapter, I focus on an important alternative strategy - informal work - that the women participants developed to address the challenges that come as a result of these changes- informal work and experiences especially in their socio-economic positioning. Informal work has many positive and negative implications for these highly educated immigrant women. My findings indicate there are often two equally compelling reasons that pushed the participants to find and/or develop work within the reach of their communities; first, cash work helped them to address some financial needs, and secondly, in the participants’ view, informal work is a vehicle to establish connections and relationships in their social life.

Drawing from these findings, I argue that informal work is foundational in creating a new immigrant service sector in which individuals become racialized and gendered subjects on the periphery of the capitalist state with its inherent colonial tendencies and practices. However, I would argue that making plans to find options to address this struggle also indicates active and conscious choices with contradictory motives. Contradictory mainly because of the nature of social relations in which their lives are coordinated and organized by a capitalist society and market. Thus, it is hard to see choice as above the market relations, rather it is both contained and
not contained by the system. For this analysis, I have separated the informal worker from her activity and further dissected it by examining the decisions she made in the face of her experience of a change in socio-economic relations. This allows me to argue the contradictory proposition that depicts the creation of a service sector, which is making active choices about work and making incremental changes in their social relations. Another common account from the participants that supports my claim of this active choice is that knowing informal work is keeping them in the lower end of society, yet they are still hopeful that it is one of the phases of integration in the country and culture. It is in some ways, they see their sacrifice as an investment for a better future.

To explore the potentials and possibilities of, as well as barriers to, transformation occurring as a result of this work process. Furthermore, to develop an analysis of informal work beginning from the standpoint of immigrant women such as those participating in this research, I examined the everyday experience of informal work and then the social relations that coordinate this work. This is because an analysis of informal work will show the ways in which work as an activity becomes integral in meeting the needs of everyday life that are interconnected to other social systems and processes. In discussing the change and experiences in immigrant women’s life post-immigration in the previous chapter we have in fact begun to unveil some of the underlying experiences, needs, and forces that led to informal work. In this chapter, it follows now that we can look at specific reasons, outcomes, and types of activities of informal work and I will argue that potential for change and transformation is inherent in all productive activities in which human beings choose to engage. The particular examination of informal work by these women reveals the conscious choices individuals make and enact in their everyday lives, individually and/or collectively, which lead toward change and learning. My aim is that this analysis will help
identify the main themes to examine the possibilities and challenges to transformation and learning; an argument that I develop further in the next chapter.

Section I
Creation of an Immigrant Informal Worker: Major Reasons for Cash Work

Participants identified several reasons that lead them to informal work. The three main reasons cited were financial need, social isolation, and their gender-specific care-giving role in the household. A detailed exploration revealed there were many additional factors such as women’s perception of work, and their search for meaning and purpose in their new social and economic reality, that also influenced their choice of seeking out informal work. In addition, however, we can also see a distinctive interplay of many underlying facts such as gender, class, and loss of networks, which contributed to the choice of work. In much of the literature I reviewed, poverty is identified as the major reason for informal work (e.g. Carr & Chen, 2004; Losby et al, 2000). A recent study done in Toronto also confirms this as the case in occurrences of immigrant informal workers (Wellesley Institute, 2013). However, it is crucial to pay attention to other equally significant issues participants pointed to as their reasons for choosing informal work as they reveal that particular social relations and social constructs informed and, at times, forced their choices.

Using informal work as an analytical variable provides a way to understand social relations and the evolving nature of the relations of production that vary from context to context. In the case of these participants’ lives, transnational migration served as the basis of change in the social and economic class and ideology – also influenced by patriarchy, culture and religion, which likewise directed their choice of activities. But, I argue that by examining the connection between social
relations and the choice of informal work, we can also see that there is a possibility that this choice may serve as a transformative one that could restore neighbourhoods and increase social capital.

Gender and gendered work are integral to understanding informal work as part of the new social organization that coordinates the lives of immigrant women. It is clear that this social organization of production and reproduction (informal work) is perpetuated by the capitalist mode of production in which the factors of race and gender are creating a new class status for these women. In the capitalist economy, the location of market production is usually outside the domestic sphere and women's work is generally restricted to the domestic sphere, almost uniformly unpaid (Hennessey & Ingraham, 2007). In this particular situation, men (the spouses of the participants) engage in production outside the home and their work is done for wages. However, through their informal work activities, women are able to add more value to their work, paid and unpaid. The exploitative and inferior nature of household work gets reinforced in this situation and women, by the design of the social processes and structures, become the ones who tend to take on the role of the precarious, informal cash worker. “This is an opportunity for me to make some extra cash and to meet new people. I don’t have to compromise on my house chores or children’s needs” (Noor, Pakistan).

Noor, like many others in the study, found she is able to balance informal work with her other needs and responsibilities, which makes it viable and attractive. The difference for immigrant women in this situation is that although they viewed caring and household work as their primary responsibility. Prior to immigration this was a shared role with other domestic or extended support, especially in situations where both husband and wife were also part of the formal
market. Here, the situation is different as the racialized, gendered nature of State regulations and other controlling measures prevent them from entering the formal market (See e.g. Guo, 2009, 2013; Shan, 2009). Their location of production becomes domestic and informal in nature with limited exchange value. However, they find their income from informal work gives them a little bit of power for negotiation even if that power is invisible and not counted in the formal system. Therefore, as much as informal work choices are part of a theory of gendered work imbued by the patriarchal ideology and culture – engagement in informal work is also a direct outcome of a more broadly gendered market economy. The contradictions here, in other words, revolve around the unpaid household work in which there is often not much room for negotiation. However, when similar work is produced for exchange value, women gain a voice for negotiation with their male counterparts in household chores and responsibilities. For example, several participants reported that their spouses started to help out, both more and less, at home when they started their informal work activities. In these instances women were pleased, viewing it as signs of bigger changes in the future.

Participants with small children, viewed childcare and other household duties as their prime responsibilities so informal work seemed to be the most viable option for them to manage their time and commitments at home. The type of informal work activities (such as child-minding or beauty care in the home) that participants undertake also indicate that they often select work that is compatible with their other responsibilities they have at home. Participants’ perception here resonated with Phizaklea & Wolokowitz’s (1995) argument that the chief reason for growth in informal work by women is their responsibilities for unpaid work in the domestic sphere. With the exception of only one participant, all others believed that the caregiving role in the family and managing the household was a woman’s major responsibility.
The discussion around women’s perception of work, gender roles, and patriarchy was complex and contradictory on multiple levels. In some instances, the participants argued that, “an ideal women means someone whose time and effort are primarily committed to her children and husband” (Jameela, Pakistan, Focus Group discussion). Most shared the view that designated them as the cultural and moral power of the family whose responsibility it is to sustain the values that are important to their ethnic and religious traditions. However, in the same conversation, many of the participants expressed their desire and hope that this will change for their children, especially for their daughters. In fact, many in the focus group believe that it will change for their children and so their additional role is to prepare them for the future. Similar complexities are noted in their views of their spouse’s role in the household post-immigration. In their new set up, they wanted to view their spouses as the main breadwinner of the household. This may be because of the insecurity immigration brought upon them, which makes them want to hold onto what is comfortable and familiar in order to maintain normalcy. Another dimension, as Ng (1989) points out, are the new domains of life where the whole family is struggling so the women’s interests are eclipsed by the interest of men. With the exception of three participants (a single parent, and two whose spouses were receiving disability benefits), all the participants’ spouses were working outside the home. It is important to emphasize that participants mentioned that they chose informal work not based on this ideological perception but based on their material and social needs. While the choice to work is not based on an explicit ideology, the type of activity chosen by the individuals indicates that it is nevertheless influenced by the ideology of what women’s work entails. The contradictions that arise from this double positioning are discussed further in the next section though in the words of Soumya and Linda the basic point is introduced nicely:
I needed to do something, it is depressing to be inside this apartment all day, every day. Doing something helps me to be in touch with people and helps us with our financial situation also (Soumya, Srilanka).

Here we have to change professions; you can’t expect to do same things you did back in your country. It is a sacrifice many immigrants make by coming here, it is for our children’s future. As long as we go with that understanding, it doesn’t feel that bad…for women informal work is an easier option because then they don’t have to worry about childcare (Linda, Philippines)

In fact, interviewees like Soumya, Linda, Rumi and many others portrayed how cash work presents them with opportunities and meets their needs in their limited situations.

It is these and other statements that lead me to propose cash work as a possible entry-point where some particularly consequential learning occurs that may potentially result in significant changes in people. When drawing this conclusion, I am aware that informal work is a survival strategy; however, many of the participants see it as much more than that. From a transformative learning perspective, when someone makes a plan to address issues affecting them, they are making choices; making those choices and plans reveal agency. The women who have extended networks or have family in Toronto and have grown children view informal work only as an economic means of survival; this reflects the findings in other studies that depict cash work as a means to survive poverty (Losby et al., 2002; Carr & Chen, 2001).

Perhaps one of the major contradictions highlighted in this analysis, however, is found in the powerful gender dynamics that were a defining feature in women’s roles even prior to immigration, even while a newly emergent situation for these women here is race and class that played a huge role in their new social and economic situation. Much of the literature reviewed
on informal work tells us that community or home-based informal work is highly gendered with women engaging in historically gendered labour that was part of the use-value production (Amstrong & Amstrong, 1990; Carr & Chen, 2001). Economic instability that arises from not having access to the formal labour market places the participants and their families in precarious positions with limited options. Changes in class and racialized identities create further imbalances for the marginalized gender in their current social and economic space. Most, if not all, of this is confirmed in this study. However, based on the findings, a significant reason for choosing informal work, among women in urban sectors in developed economies like Canada, is individuals’ need for community and increased social capital in an environment that persistently denies them in distinctive ways. In this sense, my findings indicate an important avenue for future studies on informal work.

What are the details underlying this claim? Beyond what we have seen already, we also see clearly that participants described themselves as isolated from their neighbours (a process that is in many ways more complex than it seems), isolated from the formal labour market, and isolated from mainstream society and culture. There are two ways to look at these forms of isolation in their context: being defined under a new class structure that results in alienation from the market place, as defined by Marx (see e.g. Meszaros, 1970) and isolation from broader socio-cultural experiences and opportunities. For many immigrants, not having access to the labour market and not having their education recognized means less or no value in their social and economic life, a fact that firmly positions them in the new precarious working-class stratum. This also means alienation from the market, from the social location of production, and the mainstream social life. While alienation is a defining feature of life for all class groups under capitalism, the point here is that, at the concrete level, this alienation takes on unique forms for immigrants.
In addition to social and economic reasons, participant’s networks, languages, accents, and negative experiences at workplaces all play a role in choosing informal work. Suja’s and Rumi’s experiences post-immigration are cases in point: the lost kin/kith relations and class status affect people in their everyday life post-immigration leading to informal work. Earlier studies of informal work suggest the significant role of networks including kin/kith relationships, which coupled with unemployment issues play a powerful role in the rise of certain types of informal work (see e.g. Harding & Jenkin, 1989). In a significant way, social networks are influential in the development and expansion of informal work. Women met other women in local agencies, at schoolyards, at community centres, and so on. For example, Sameena started her catering business when she had her neighbours and friends asking her to make her delicacies for their children’s birthdays or holidays. Having networks within their own groups in this particular way allowed them to establish and share a sense of identity, respect for one’s own culture, and preservation of their native languages, and this proved advantageous in a way that was otherwise, seemingly, almost entirely (and somewhat mysteriously) elusive. The drawback of these networks is that it does not allow them to go beyond the boundaries of the community. This is because community formation started along the ethnic and cultural/religious lines; the participants suggested this could be a stumbling block for further expansion or exploring other options.

The underlying themes of community and sense of belonging are shaped by shared affinities and social identifications; in the absence of those shared affinities and identifications people feel lost (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman, 1998). According to the majority of participants, the isolation and alienation they experienced was also influenced by how their culture, traditions, and community are viewed in contrast to the customs, traditions, and culture in the host society. These feelings
are intensified by the unwelcoming gestures and negative experiences people have outside their homes. “Just knowing it is okay to be ‘me’ when you walk out of the house gives a sense of security and belonging, here we don’t get that, if your neighbour says hello, that is a surprise” (Sandra, China). As much as the feeling of lack of community is of loss of kin /kith relationship, it is also that race and class isolation perpetuate the feeling of “otherness”. For example, culture, traditions, and sense of community prior to immigration represented power, privilege, and a sense of belonging. The absence of these factors made participants aware of the new social dynamics in which their race and gender define their ‘value’; the struggle for regaining ‘value’ may emerge from understanding this loss of value, which they identified in relation to class. A need for restoring and preserving some of those traditions and cultures seemed to be an important task people believed to carry on to resist some of the devaluation and discrimination they experienced based on their colour, religion, and so on. One of the focus groups (2) discussed this in length and how they viewed it as a political issue:

We do things of our culture and traditions more religiously here, not because of its importance but because that is all we have left in making a life here. Difference is not a bad thing but here people have an issue about our colour, customs, religion and everything. It is fear; if we don’t show them they will be forever afraid of us…

According to a majority of the participants, when they started thinking of alternatives for their socio-economic needs, their cultural upbringing and socio-economic climate influenced their proposed plans. While most of the participants did not feel they were being judged on the basis of their work, they suggest informal work is not something they would have chosen back in their countries. They previously viewed informal work as an option prescribed to people who were in
a lower class of their home societies and had low levels of education and material well-being. This is in sync with the work of Carr and Chen (2001 & 2004) where they discuss the significance of informal work in many Asian countries and among women in lower income strata. Participants recognized that they have different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, however, they view their collective experiences and work similarly to immigrants of colour from different parts of Asia.

Yes, we all are of the ‘other culture and place’; here there is no Indian and Pakistani, we are considered as one group, one identity, all clumped together as if our individual place cultures do not matter, what matters is our colour that differentiate us, I think once we are able to establish our roots here, then maybe we will be able sort this out and regain our lost identity, it [sameness] is not something we chose it is forced on us but I can see how it will change when we are more settled (Jameela, Pakistan).

Some participants cited language as a main reason why they chose to do informal work; language also influenced who became members of their networks. For many, the issue was not about their ability to speak English but their inability to speak like "Canadians". Many found working from within the privacy of their home or in the immediate community less intimidating because there is no expectation to speak with a Canadian accent. Jemma and Sandra (China) shared an experience they had in the factory that they strongly believe was due to their language issue.

Our supervisor changed our work stations a few times without asking us or telling us; sometimes it happened when a new apprentice came when they speak better English and younger than us …he moved us instead of giving them the place available, it went on for a while…it used to frustrate me so much. One day I told him it was not fair…he was surprised that I spoke to him, but I quit not so long after that… (Jemma and Sandra, China).
This quote reveals not just the issue of language but also a complete lack of respect and autonomy these participants experienced at work. According to Jemma, aesthetic appearance and age also become underlying factors in shaping the workplace experience. Fear of challenging authority in the workplace is also evident in their experience. Another participant commented on how, in her workplace, she felt that they, “were all put behind the walls. All the people at counter were younger and fairer looking than us, spoke more like people here. I understand it is better for the business probably, end of the day that is what is important to them” (Suma, Sri Lanka).

Workplace exploitation, harassment, and issues of welfare dependency are some other factors that lead participants to choosing informal work. A secondary labour pool is created out of these highly skilled immigrants because they are easily available and searching for opportunities to more successfully integrate economically and socially. Nine of the participants succeeded in acquiring employment outside the community. All but two (Suma and Fouzia) complained of some form of harassment by their employer or co-workers that eventually led them to quit their jobs. Except for Suja (India), who worked for a major grocery chain, nobody was aware of their employee rights or workplace safety rules. Therefore, the incidents, which lead them to leave their jobs, did not get challenged nor did they receive any help for the mistreatment they faced. Suja, on the other hand, knew recourses were available but did not think she had the capacity to challenge her employer. She accepted this treatment as a norm for new immigrants since she had seen others like her also go through the same things. The incidents of harassment and exploitation were a strong factor in the accounts of a majority of the participants who had worked formally previous to taking up informal work.
He [her supervisor] would yell at me in front of kids and other staff, there were many days I felt ashamed of myself having to go back there but when I thought of all our needs at home, I couldn’t walk out. He treated me like I was not a person; I used to have nightmares about it. I hid it from my family; I didn’t want my husband to worry about it. But one day, I couldn’t take it anymore and I told him, I am quitting… and never went back, I have no regrets that I left. But nobody told me at that time it was not acceptable and he was breaking the law…(Kamala, Nepal)

At the coffee shop, the manager would shout in front of customers if we were a bit slow in making or serving, there was no consideration even when she knew I was pregnant. She knows there are many waiting for an opportunity so it didn’t matter if we stayed or not. Long hours of standing and being putdown in front of other people were hard and I am happy that I can choose how and when I do my work (Selma, Bangladesh)

Kamala, Selma, and Suja’s workplace experiences resonated with many others’ informal work experiences. Participants’ accounts of harassment are alarming and are a serious concern that needs to be looked into further with research and action. The most recent human rights tribunal of Ontario’s settlement awarded for three immigrant workers in Toronto also suggests the participants of this study are not unique in having been treated this way, and that it is a widespread issue (see The Star, 2013). In the face of job scarcity and discrimination in the workplace, cash work is often a more lucrative option than a low wage formal equivalent (Cooper & May, 2007).

The studies that have focused on informal economy tax evasion and welfare fraud are unavoidable in the discussion of how informal work is viewed from a State accounting perspective (e.g. Marcelli, William & Jossart, 2010; Enste & Schneider, 2002). One of the
negative effects of informal work is the perception amongst women in the study as to how it is perceived; in this data, typically, people want to hide that they are engaged in informal work.

This study revealed the importance of categorization and the reasons that lead to informal work as factors in mediating what leads to avoidance of paying tax and working for cash while on welfare. Four reported that they choose cash work because of their inadequate welfare cheques. One of the four participants left her formal work arrangement and engages in informal work to sustain the income from welfare. For two other participants, their husbands had illnesses that forced them to stay away from looking for work but because they had to have some income to manage the household expenses, informal work ended up being the only option due to flexibility in scheduling or being outside the home. Only two participants out of forty-four stated that they do informal work to avoid taxation. Tax evasion did not emerge as a serious theme in the discussions, although some participants clearly requested anonymity and were afraid to be found out by the authorities since they are on welfare or live in subsidized housing.

*Types of Informal Work*

The informal work the participants of this study performed varied according to their individual situation and needs. According to participants who did informal work catering and child minding, these were the easiest options for them to accommodate their own childcare and other household responsibilities. In some cases, women worked both as caterers and in childcare, increasing the scope of their work and income. Betty and Mina, for example, did both catering and childcare whenever there was an opportunity to do so since their need for sustainable incomes from these sources were significant. People who did community work also performed various forms of all the informal work previously listed, in addition to community outreach, assessment, and planning for local agencies or groups that serve the community. Community
work was the most preferred form of work among participants who were eager to find employment in the formal sector: they see it as an opportunity to link their work to the outside world. However, participants also cited community work as the least regular.

Some types of informal work are more regular and predictable than other types. For example, participants who worked as tutors had regular hours and regular clients. It was a similar situation for women who worked as cleaners or waitresses - they had more predictable hours since they tended to work during late evenings or on weekends. Women who worked in catering, sewing, beautician work, or selling of ethnic garments and jewelry had almost no control over their work hours. The lowest paid category of informal work identified in this study was childcare. Child-minding rates varied between three to five dollars per hour whereas community workers made minimum wage, or an equal amount in honorariums, and tutors made between fifteen to twenty dollars an hour.

As reported by participants, tutoring tended to be more respected than some other types of informal work and had fierce competition between men and women. Tutoring was respected partly because teaching is seen as a revered occupation in many of the participants’ home countries. Catering was considered the most laborious work as it demands significant time and attention to detail. Moreover, women who worked in catering often had to adjust their work time to their husbands’ schedules and other responsibilities, which added more stress to their informal work. For example, I learned that a few months after interviewing Noor (Pakistan), she was forced to quit working in catering as the demand for her food grew beyond her ability to keep up with the business and this caused tension in her family. She made the choice to quit her
informal catering work to focus on her family, and hopes that one day she will be able to open a small restaurant somewhere in the city.

The influence of gender roles that tend to be reinforced in the domain of private life are visible in the women’s choices of categories of informal work and struggles they have in maintaining the work. It was obvious from the participants’ accounts that they viewed some work as superior; Jasmine shared in the focus group how surprised she was to find a former colleague working in child-minding who was once a well-known neurologist in her home country:

At first, I couldn’t believe somebody of that much of education and experience will choose to do child minding. But the way she approached it made me think of my own prejudices about it. Yeah, even if it is for a time being now this is a choice and an option when there was none. It is disrespectful to think of this as a lower job (Jasmine, Bangladesh).

From observing the interactions of the participants when speaking about their choice to engage in a particular category of informal work, I noted that their perceptions of work in general and women’s role were often challenged. Importantly, discussing informal work made them aware of their own prejudices and reservations when it came to choosing certain types of work over others, especially when it is performed for pay. This reinforces what I observed about internalized perceptions of work as a class category that separated people in their social life prior to immigration – it has become the basis of their new social situation where it becomes a unifying factor and choice. Because of the lessened proximity and access to formal work, I would note here that they tended to feel they are all in one social and economic class post-immigration, regardless of what type of work they engaged in. Despite this class unification, some participants viewed the same type of work differently based on whether it was done inside
or outside of their home. For example, community workers who did child minding at events hosted by local organizations viewed that as superior to childcare work that women did at home. According to some participants, the reason behind such attitudes is that, when performed outside the home, they believe the marketability of the activity is enhanced and its value for the worker is increased because it externally validates their expertise. Once again, this reveals the institutional power that organizations have on people whose lives are marginalized by their situations— they hold the belief that connecting themselves to an institution will increase their social and political agency and marketability.

**Section II**

**Informal Work Outcomes and Implications for Asian Immigrant Women**

The far majority of the participants tended to view the outcomes of informal work as largely varied and highly contradictory. During the interviews and focus groups conducted for this study, participants espoused varied views on what types of benefits the outcomes of informal work provide. For some, the motivating outcome was money, however that motivation was not necessarily connected to the financial need of the family but connected to their individual freedom and desire for less dependency on their spouses for their personal needs. For others, the outcome of informal work they found beneficial was that it was a safe way to learn about their host country and establish new connections. “It won’t make you rich but it really helps you when you are kind of new in the country” (Zeena, China). Zeena’s comment echoed many others’ view on informal work. The majority of the participants considered their informal work as a meaningful experience in Canada. The financial and social components of informal work were identified as significant motivators, more so than other outcomes. The reason that these outcomes
were identified as being more important than others was because they also addressed personal needs in a dignified way and it made them feel important and respected (focus group 1).

What is often viewed as ”women’s work”, when subject to analysis of class relations, has been historically problematic and informal work magnifies this problem. The activities performed remain the same but their status changed as soon as it becomes waged labour, which according to the women increases their capacity to influence change within their household and community, even though they are performing the same tasks as before. Some argue that this change in viewing “women’s work” is the manifestation of capitalist society in which women are marginalized and exploited by the market, here, in a new way (e.g. Amstrong & Amstrong, 1990; Hennessey & Ingraham, 1997). However, it can also be argued that this type of work is alternative labour and making a choice to take action to control the oppressive social relations by doing informal work that, as identified above, is highly personal in nature, and is performed with objectivity. As Sawchuk (2008) argues, change, if it is to occur, has to be made, in practice, individually and collectively with individual actors, which in the case of these women, means making choices to be visible, to sustain, and to move forward.

While analyzing informal work through a use value/exchange value lens, a unique aspect emerges: in cash work, value is produced through abstract labour because it is juxtaposed with the formal labour market arrangement, which according to Allman (1999), is objective and personal. Although the nature of use value production is shifting in this exchange, it is not formalized to the extent that people are treating each interaction in a capitalist mode, which would potentially increase the social capital and strengthen the networks within a community. While in a slightly different context, Sawchuk (2008), in his definitional analysis of value
production, examines this contradicting nature of use value and exchange value in paid work.

Allman (1999) furthers this in her argument of “suppressed and repressed forms of life” that exist within capitalist societies: that if they collectively engage and organize to resist the system, they have the capacity to bring forth social change. Another analytical point Sawchuk (2008) makes in relation to paid work is that, relevant to this discussion, the potential for transformation and change that is inherent in all work activity is created in sacrifices. Sacrifice was a theme that came up many times in individual interviews and focus groups in relation to why people continue to endure the hardships related to informal work and why they choose to engage in work that is of lesser value compared to what they used to do in their home countries. According to the participants, these sacrifices are a price they have to pay to ensure a good future for them and for their children. This is not to say the other oppressive dynamics that are present are not acknowledged; it is in their acknowledgment of that oppressive situation that they are seeing this choice as a sacrifice and option.

The women in this study reported that they appreciated the opportunity and freedom that informal work brought them and, for some, even if it only brings in a small amount, it still represents value, confidence, and a glimpse of hope for the future. Being able to buy things for their children or being able to send some money to a parent or relative back in their home country are also considered positive outcomes of informal work by many participants. Supplementing the family income through this work lessens the burden of not being able to do adequate activities with the children.

Another component participants pointed out as central to their choice of engaging in work is the opportunity to network among community members and neighbours. For some, the people they
meet through this work are the only doors they have to the outside world, to break isolation, create new friends, and meet their neighbours. For example, Soumya (Sri Lanka) described the beginning of informal work as a defining moment in her life:

> It was the u-turn in my life, I was at a point in my life I saw meaning in going forward, no family… no friends during or after my pregnancy, all I saw was the unfriendly nurses who visited me once in a while and looked at me as if I was an alien… I didn’t have anyone to share my pain with, they [hospital] never told me what happened. Everything started getting better when my neighbour asked me if I would tutor her child afterschool….

For Soumya, informal work opened up a world of hope and is now providing a regular income for the household. Home tutoring not only took away her loneliness and depression, it provided her with a network of people she could connect with if she needed support. Now, when she gets out of her building, she does not feel that she is alone in the world and that nobody cares; she now feels that people know her, respect her, and value her opinions and attributes, which she found were lost during an illness and the events that unfolded after that. Her dislike for Canada and its culture slowly disappeared as she met more and more people. Soumya expressed that she wants to continue with informal work as long as she can. She does not want to look for other work nor does she believe she can find work that can satisfy her needs outside the home. For many women, being part of the informal work also meant a meaningful way of engaging in community life which in turn provided them with an opportunity to make sense of their lives and the changes they experienced after immigration through mutual dialogue and reflection with other women who are engaged in similar work or with their customers. Kamala (Nepal) describes her experience with this process:
As we revamp our life in the new place, this work creates room for negotiation with my husband on housework, opens up dialogue with my neighbour on our life in Canada…it helps me to think of our lives, our ideas and views on life and work in general…it gives meaning and purpose to our everyday life.

A majority of the participants did not view informal work specifically as a life-changing experience but an activity that reinstated their sense of purpose, made them visible in the community, and improved their otherwise diminished presence as a valuable worker. “It gives me a reason to get up in the morning, kids are in school, husband is hardly home, this work motivates me to get out and be active” (Selma, Bangladesh). This also reveals the contradiction of informal work as being, on the one hand, formally invisible and, on the other hand, enhancing visibility for the woman who does it. Informal work in the household and in the community is often not separated from wage free work, but the work specifically, in the case of these women, is their channel to the social world and is instrumental in their keeping a presence outside the household. As we saw in the case of Kamala, informal work created a specific kind of visibility to what she did and she was able to negotiate with her spouse and engage with her neighbour on a new level.

For many participants, by being engaged in some type of work that was not simply deemed housework, this meant that they felt a sense of freedom, flexibility with time, and gave them status within the family. For example, for Kamala, Rumi, and Suja, informal work meant freedom from various oppressive situations they faced in their private and social lives. For some, informal work meant flexibility to engage in something that was purposeful without sacrificing their other responsibilities. The stories and experiences of the women in this study indicates that the commodification of household labour brings value to the worker. Although deemed informal
and precarious in nature, this added value provides a way forward for many who are involved in informal work (Carr & Chen, 2004; Losbly et. al., 2002). For the majority of the women who worked prior to immigration, becoming a financially contributing member of the household meant regaining their lost status as a ‘worker’ due to immigration. For many, this also meant increased status among their peers and friends. The in-between status of the informal worker provided certain benefits: on one level, they became part of the hierarchy, and on another level, their presence presented a challenge to the hierarchy. Their ability to spend money increased in small ways and their dependency on their spouses for purchasing small items diminished.

Unlike their work in the formal sectors prior to immigration, for many, the money that came from informal work was at their disposal, even if they spent it on family needs. Maya (India) explained this difference, “Before the salary, went to our family account and I never got to see it; I would ask him when I needed money. Now he doesn’t ask me how much I make or what I did with it… he knows the money is not spent on anything for my luxury…so in that way it is a better arrangement”. What Maya presents here is an example of the complex patriarchal and gendered power relations in which money is the central factor in exercising authority over women who are otherwise socially and economically independent due to formal employment. However, in these new socio-economic arrangements, women’s income is not seen as a threat to the male authority in the household and this new reality allows room for dialogue. According to Maya and many others like her, informal work allows for a subtle way of regaining autonomy in the household and they believe it is a good starting point from which they can reorganize power relations between husband and wife in their new social contexts. Maya’s description is also an example of the complex, multilayered gender relations in which culture and ideology are also significant factors in maintaining the hierarchical relations of gender and patriarchy.
Mirchandani (2003) argues this as an outcome of women’s position in hierarchical structure of the society that reinforces gender difference.

The incremental change in the experience of dependency reveals yet another shift in the patriarchal household with regards to material relations and control of money. Another aspect of the change in material relations is men’s attitudes regarding women’s income from informal work. Although the income from informal work assisted families, according to many participants their husbands did not care too much about what they did with it or how much they made, as exhibited by comments the participants reported, such as “It is your money, your business, you do whatever you want with it”. What this shows is how men in a patriarchal household do not see this work as competition since the nature of informal work allowed most of the participants to remain in the household. Additionally, they seemed to view the new socio-economic reality as a shared burden, and so whatever little the participant brings in matters even if she spends it on herself. While this can be depicted as stereotypical and a negative attitude from men, in this case, women are able to make use of this opportunity for personal benefit and are able to negotiate responsibilities and manage expectations the way they choose to manage them. For many of the women, informal work offers the additional benefits of increased autonomy within their households and private domains in terms of material relations.

**Disadvantages of Informal Work**

For the participants who were part of the formal labour markets back in their home countries, informal work is not useful in terms of their career development or growth. In fact, they reported that participating in informal work can diminish their chances of ever being employed again. They believe informal work creates a gap between their previous profession and current work
and the distance between these two types of work is huge and hard to fill in order to regain professional status. On the other hand, they also point out that this work is better than staying idle at home. Another major concern women had regarding the downsides of informal work was the lack of growth/expansion opportunities; unless there is infrastructure already in place for making their work into a full-blown businesses or social enterprises, there were few places for their informal businesses to grow. Framing this in terms of their class status, no growth means lessened social and economic mobility within the broader community whereas becoming a business means sustained growth and class mobility for the entire family unit.

While informal work helps bring visibility in terms of the participants’ connections with other women or with their neighbours in the community, it is often not recognized as work or experience by the larger society/economy, or even sometimes by their partners, since they tend to be at home. This was especially true for people who did child-minding and home-based catering. Invisibility of the work is also a concern for people who are hoping to get back to some form of formal work outside the community, as they fear they cannot put the experience and learning gained from informal work on a resume or job application. This invisibility adds a further burden to their double day of work, which is part housework and part informal work with no clear boundaries between the two. The comments on invisibility of work came mainly in relation to outside work where outside (formal) workers have the characteristics of a worker with clear time lines, rules, and regulations.

Isolation from the wider society was another disadvantage participants noted. Linda (Philippines), who worked as an office assistant in her first few years in Canada, articulated these changes in work situation as a ‘vicious circle’-- people are forced to stay in and go round and
round in a circle. While for many informal work is a clear break from the isolation and loneliness they felt in their private space, it also caused an invasion into their private space, since informal work is often done in the household. This dissolution of boundaries only increases the contradictions women experience in this change of relations between private/public and visible/invisible work. On the one hand, it freed them to mingle and meet new people and on the other hand, it forced them to remain within the confines of their own networks and communities, without many options to get outside of them. Wage exploitation and competition were other issues participants associated with informal work. Betty (India) points out how she lost a regular customer due to fierce competition with a neighbour:

“I used to make roughly two hundred dollars a week and then one day she [her client] came and told me that she found someone else who will do it for hundred fifty… there is no loyalty, no commitment on both parties in this work, people come and go you could never depend on it as the only source of income.”

As we have seen in Betty’s case some types of work are more affected than others in terms of competition and wages: childcare is an example of a type of work where the wages are already low and are lowered further by the fierce competition between people engaged in informal childcare. The competition among the workers is felt more acutely by new workers than by seasoned informal workers in the community: for example, participants who had immigrated more recently had to face more competition than people who had established roots in the community.

The participants’ reasons for choosing specific activities over others were often dictated by the types of responsibilities they had at home and often chose work that would accommodate the needs of the rest of their families. Like the reasons that lead these immigrant women to informal
work, the choices they made between types of work also have many layers and also have different implications for the women, their families, and for the broader society. It is important to note that most of these women were part of the formal labour market before immigrating and they possess great human capital in terms of high educational credentials and work experience. Those special skills and education are being underutilized or not used at all in this translation of job and circumstances and this may be the biggest disadvantage of informal work.

“Work is about self-respect and dignity; it makes me feel good about myself” (Rumi, Pakistan). Rumi’s comment echoed many of the participants’ perceptions of paid work in general. However, it is important to note that Rumi and other participants do not view housework or child-rearing as ‘work’ but as an activity that is required or expected of them in order to continue with their daily lives. The majority considered their responsibilities at home as customary and obligatory activities of a woman, mother, and wife. They viewed work that is rewarded monetarily to be the type of work that gives dignity and respect, regardless of the type of work.

Another point that is important to mention in the context of informal work is that participants did not tend to construe this (informal work) as employment; indeed, as noted earlier, the links between informal work and one’s qualifications and/or resume were likewise typically absent. They made a clear distinction between informal work and employment. To them, employment meant having an employer and the possibility of consistent work hours, regular income, and other standard procedures formally attached. Although not all perceived informal work as inferior to formal work, the underlying sense was that it is ‘lesser work’ compared to formal employment; they tended to place it just above housework.
The informality and the view of informal work as a strategy for survival (e.g. WEIGO, 2002; Carr & Chen, 2004) might be one of the contributing factors that made the participants view informal work as different from employment. Regardless of the lower status they perceive as attached to informal work, the majority of the participants see this opportunity as an excellent avenue for them to be less dependent on their partners and to be contributing members of the household in the short term. Their recognition of informal work as allowing them to be a contributing member of the household and be less dependent on their spouses points out another reality the majority of participants found themselves in after immigrating to Canada: due to the inherent sexism and racism in the inaccessible labour market and capitalist economy, their financial independence and freedom was confiscated, thereby making them dependent on their spouses which in turn reinforces gender roles. While both Creese (2007), and Galabuzi (2006) point out that the increase in racialized workers with limited voice has an effect on the Canadian economy, I argue that the formal/informal and private/public divide emerges in this research as requiring additional attention in relation to a more comprehensive understanding of gendered/racialized work.

The way these participants organized their work and schedules around their spouses and children’s schedules, the location in which they preferred to provide the service, and in some cases, choosing who their customers were, are important indicators that this work may be a direct outcome of a capitalist neo-liberal economy. However, informal work also poses a challenge to the capitalist market in the ways it produces and reproduces work and sustains itself. Many are aware of this potential duality of this work but choose to go forward with informal work to sustain the family and to create space in a society where they feel they would be otherwise not
accepted or seen as equal. The necessary organization of informal work in their domestic spheres indicates the pre-capitalist arrangement of the worker and his or her connection to the means of production. From a material feminist point of view, the division of labour that occurs as a result of structural (e.g. biological) and super structural (e.g. legal, ethical, and ideological) factors significantly influences the immigrant woman’s role in this social organization of informal work (Giminez, 1997).

Despite immigrating from a wide variety of countries, the participants’ experiences as immigrant women of colour, their social location, their new class, and immigration history all bind them to a marginalized group that is impacted by their gender, race, culture, and class in the broader society. The idea of marginalization is crucial to observe here as it can be described as an affect from the hegemonic class and cultural set up in the Gramscian sense, where one group and their practices are in the center of mainstream society, forcing others to the margins. From a Marxian standpoint, the experience and organization of informal work in the domestic sphere is a by-product of the market economy. In this process, social location of production becomes an influential factor in shaping the class of the worker. In the realm of immigrant women’s informal work, I argue a new and complex class sub-group is being created. The new class sub-group being created is a form of the precariat: an immigrant service sector below the working class whose work is not accounted for by the state. It also reveals a continual process of the connected activities women are involved in to sustain the domestic sphere of production while also supporting the demands of the external market through their spouse, who is also a peripheral worker in the market economy. In this process (becoming an informal worker), women are able to push the dependent role instilled in them as a result of immigration and partially regain their
independence. Informal work allows women to challenge the tacit position of the dependent and creates room for negotiation in terms of sharing household chores and other responsibilities. Simultaneously, the contradiction of women’s work and the inequality between sexes also gets reinforced in this process.

In capitalist social formations, in which social classes are reproduced and have different locations in the productive process (Gimenez, 1997), this process has serious implications for the nuclear families in urban centers. In this case, women not only have specific roles in the production and reproduction of services but a very particular location in which their work takes place. On one hand, it keeps them in the domain of their household supporting the capitalist market though their spouses, and on the other, it keeps them in the peripheries of the host society by the location and choice of work. Informal work produces oppression and freedom simultaneously and continues to be the inherent contradiction of informal work. While the gendered perception of informal work is one dimension of this process, the location of the work speaks beyond gender. The location in which informal work takes place creates fodder for a racialized and gendered service class that is almost completely invisible to the mainstream.

The location of production has many interpretations in the Marxist frameworks (see the work of Giminez, 1997; Benston, 1997). In the context of immigrant women, the importance of the location of production creates special outcomes, one of which has to do with people’s internalizing the experiences of racism and harassments that they encountered outside of the informal framework. As marginalized individuals and communities, they feel the ‘otherness’ and separation from the main stream, which keeps them inclined to remain in their location. The locations in which they do their activities gives them a sense of belonging and place of
understanding, since there are shared experiences and identities there. This existence at the location of production also creates a contradiction for immigrants in their desires: some of them expressed their desire to leave the community and recognized the way it keeps them from doing things that are not considered traditional or culturally appropriate. However, they choose not to leave since they do not have many options to turn to or know anybody out of their current network who could aid them in settling down elsewhere. This change is possible with adequate income but for that, they would also need networks that would support them in acquiring jobs in order to better their financial prospects.

Examining the participants’ accounts of their perceptions and experiences with informal work and its outcomes was theoretically illuminating and practically challenging. In almost all stories shared, there was an obvious acknowledgment of their own double positioning with respect to their view of work: their actual need and active choices verses their submission to their current situation. The different dimensions of this work, such as formal / informal, paid/unpaid, visible/invisible, legal /illegal, are all areas where theoretical analysis can be done. The racialized and gendered nature of informal work in a class context within a culture with a colonial history makes it all the more pertinent to study. The narratives regarding informal work as presented by the participants made me aware of the challenges of theorizing difference and experience from an Asian immigrant woman’s point of view.

Section III
The Theory of Informal Work Among Immigrant Women

After analyzing the participants’ accounts of informal work I have drawn two conclusions. Firstly, informal work is driven by the capitalist market agenda but secondly, it is also driven by women’s active and conscious choices to move forward and address the barriers they face in the
host society. The labour market is the main attraction for many to apply for immigration, as it
purports to make available solid jobs, along with healthy, safe, and open environments, a good
legal system, and culture (e.g. see CIC, 2009). However, immigrants immediately learn that it is
neither straightforward nor easy to gain access to the labour market as advertised. Not having
access to the market creates havoc in all aspects of their lives. They had hoped to recreate their
lives from back home and manage the changes brought on by immigration by depending on the
job prospects they thought would be available upon their arrival to Canada. For immigrant
women, competing for market access is an even more arduous and complex task than it is for
their male counterparts, due to the culturally entrenched roles of mother, wife, which takes over
all other priorities they have in comparison to their spouses. Similarly, for many participants,
their husbands’ finding a job is the top familial priority, while the women manage the children
and other responsibilities. Ng (1989) explains this as “our (immigrant women’s) interests and
experiences are subsumed under the interest of immigrant men”.

The theory of informal work in this analysis is shaped by the examination of why immigrant
women tend towards choosing informal work. It may appear that the most common reason that
lead immigrant women to cash work is directly or indirectly shaped by labour market outcomes.
However, a detailed analysis indicates it is only a strategic step towards a multilayered reasoning
process in which individuals subtly challenge and push their way to remove the barriers that are
stopping them from achieving their goals. On a surface level, it can be viewed as driven
primarily by a social and economic strategy to survive but there are many underlying issues and
interconnected factors when it comes to choosing to engage in informal work, such as the
women’s role in the home, gender inequality, economic need and so on. Hennessey and
Ingraham (1997) point out this production of life as a systemic process that takes place through a scheme of related activities.

Ideologies, culture, and social structures also play a significant role in women’s choice to engage in informal work. Historical materialists argue that women’s oppression and its connection to capitalism are not just a class struggle; the experience of the participants in this study also suggests the same, rather that it is a struggle that has historical roots in the form of patriarchal norms and racist ideologies of the state (Hennessey & Ingraham, 2007). I use this framework to uncover the influence of capitalism in people’s choices to move to Canada and the outcomes of that choice. This allows us to trace the movement of capital from one location to another in search of more profit. It is important to note the capitalist market shapes the choice of the worker in this process. At times, the workers are choosing to follow the market and at other times are indebted to follow the capital by crossing borders to benefit from it. However, this is a complex process, and the experience and changes immigrant women and their families go through exemplify this.

Often in the new job market of the host country the worker’s fate is also shaped by their gender, race, and class status. The findings of this study suggest that the worker (in this case, immigrant women) is made to believe the deficiency lies within themselves in the form of language, culture, customs, tradition and so on, when they are unable to access the formal labour market. While women’s oppression is fuelled by capitalism (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997), in the context of informal work I would like to argue that women's conscious choices to move forward and exercise their agency in navigating this experience of oppression also operates in the reality of capitalism. Thus, I posit that informal work as not just capitalist production of victimization and
oppression, but also as a symbol and tool of human will and capacity to act upon their will. The participants are aware of this contradictory position and how it is expressed in the views they hold about informal work. For some, informal work is part of their long-term plan and consider it as separate from their household work. For some others, it is an extension of their household, and they do not see it as separate. The fact that some types of activities are valued over others also exemplifies this contradiction of opinion the women have about the categories and nature of work they do. In some ways, it is contradictory in its output because, the choice to engage in informal work is significantly influenced by the external relations and highly gendered in nature, whereas on the other, it is also viewed as an objective, personal choice that helps to find solutions to their personal and social dilemmas. However, I argue that since it is a conscious choice women make, it displays people’s ability to have transformative agency in the midst of chaos. Furthermore, I argue that when people are able to come to an active choice in the midst of chaos, they show agentive participation. Because an individual’s agentive participation is part of this process, I believe this merits careful consideration when addressing the issue of marginality and poverty.

**The Contradiction of Women’s Work**

As a professionally trained social worker who does informal community work in the neighbourhood, Jameela shared how she constantly feels conflicted by what she is supposed to be at home and outside: "Life has two parts in my view: family and personal life it is separate from our social life, yet it is one, that is the issue we women face" (Jameela, Pakistan). While she is able to do community work and be part of many leadership activities geared towards women in the community, she feels her leadership with the women is only possible when she is outside and with others. At home, in her private space, she does caregiving work and household chores
dutifully. However, she often sees her work extended beyond the walls of her home through her children or husband. Informal work choices make it even more complicated because the work is often performed in the privacy of one’s home, but the production is for those outside the home. According to Jameela, this needs to be navigated carefully in order to claim the right balance of what is private and public in the realm of informal work.

Informal work is not a choice that is made quickly to fight poverty but a carefully thought out strategy to adjust expectations and challenge norms. In all three focus groups, women expressed interest in collective action and shared work to increase their capacity to exact change as a group and to stop internal conflicts. For example, one of my observation notes read: “There is a group of women from variety of background sharing a platform to sell garments to home baked cookies, women, children and all”. The community events I attended showed group work and collective organizing among women. Women celebrated every opportunity that came their way to get together to sell or help sell and make things. I learned that three of the participants from this interview have started working together to cater lunch for a software company near their homes, their husbands support them with delivery and shopping, and are very pleased with the way things are going. For many immigrant women, informal work is not the end of the process of immigration but the beginning of establishing a home in the host country. Immigrant women are aware of the particular location in which they are placed in terms of production and the struggle to break down the barriers this particular location has created. These circumstances are creating a new immigrant service class and the associated informal work creates potential outcomes for people marginalized by their circumstances.
Implications of a New Immigrant Service Sector

Informal work creates a service-oriented, gendered sector that reinforces the representation of immigrant women of colour as domestic workers with no particular skills, education, or interests. This is partly due to the invisibility of informal work from the accounting system of the State and also due to the fact that women’s mode of production occurs primarily in their domestic spheres. In such cases, women and their presence in the capitalist economy is that of domesticated subjects who produce use value to support the growth of the capitalist system that oppresses them (Hennessy & Ingraham, 2007). Much of the research among immigrant populations also reveals the trend that their skills and education are being underutilized, the majority in the service sectors of the economy, and many in the lower strata of the labour market (see Ng, 1986; Maitra, 2011).

The notion of belonging to a new immigrant sector has huge consequences for highly educated immigrant women and their families. For example, stratification of the informal work sector beyond economic lines will create an invisible geographical boundary within urban settings that push people further to the margins as racialized and gendered post-colonial subjects. This immigrant service sector status reinforces the stereotypical immigrant identity as being inferior and unfit for market competition—because their skills and education are not recognized in the broader society. Due to this invisibility and rejection of their skills and experience, immigrants’ human capital will further deteriorate since it is rarely used and not expected to be used to build the host society. This deterioration tends to be worse for women due to gendered market rules and perpetuates their roles as primary caregivers whose place is in the domestic front. The question of the accessibility of citizenship becomes debatable among the service class, as they are unable to be productive and contributing members of the host society in market terms.
A question I asked in the context of this proposition of the immigrant’s service sector is the question of social change: if informal work is considered substandard work can it be the basis for change? After careful consideration, my answer is yes: not because of the activity itself, but because the processes and decisions that are made by the individual participants in choosing to engage in informal work make me argue that it can be a basis for change. Viewing the choice to participate in informal work as a small, yet significant, way immigrant women are challenging the social relations in which they find themselves allows us to see the opportunity it creates for informal learning and shows us that this is a way to think about change and the potential for transformation. The desire for joining the mainstream has different motivations: to regain lost power and privilege, and to enter processes where differences are made more visible, where challenges actually result in incremental change in the host society.

Summary
This chapter illustrated the ways in which immigrant women established themselves in the community through networks as well as their reasons for choosing specific informal activities over others. Discussion of the positives and negatives of cash work provided insight to the gendered labour relations that are constantly negotiated and idealized in the privacy of individual women’s homes and how that transfers to the social space through discourse where ideologies and practices get created and deconstructed on a regular basis. In this chapter, I presented how these immigrant women’s choices and strategies of life, work, and worldviews in Canada are shaped by the history of their experiences in their countries of origin. These women’s experiences of informal work revealed the complex interaction between the host society and the society of origin that are embedded within the larger context of global capitalism, colonialism
and patriarchy. Agency, resistance, and learning are some of the common themes that came up constantly during the discussion of informal work and they are explored in chapter eight.
Chapter 8
Marginality, Change and Learning Among Immigrant Women: Possibilities and Challenges for Transformation

We have the capacity, we should know how to move forward to change the social situations we are in, it is different from home, I don’t think a protest or demonstration would change the issues, we need to do something more than that (Focus group 1)

This chapter presents the possibilities and challenges to individual and social transformation for immigrant women in Toronto, inclusive of the role played by informal work. The previous chapters analyzed immigrant experiences from the participant’s accounts of their personal household, community, formal and informal work lives. Earlier chapters discussed the data and focused on three overarching categories: experience, change, and informal work post-immigration. Chapter Five provided us with an in-depth account of two participants’ experiences of change post-immigration and the way they approached it in a life history style description, which I then used regularly to inform my discussion of data in later chapters. Chapter Six outlined the experiences that participants tended to believe were abstract happenings in their everyday lives. This demonstrated the interconnectedness of their experiences and the relation of that interconnectedness to broader themes of gender, race, class citizenship, networks and so on. Chapter Seven explored informal work as an option and choice in relation to participants’ labour market experiences, social and economic integration, and learning. In Chapter Seven, I also discussed the notion of class as a category that shaped individuals’ perspectives of success. Additionally, I explored people’s awareness of the broader social organization such as gendered and racialized work. Examining the experiences, choices and changes of the participants
throughout the previous chapters, I argue, allowed me to draw a picture of the complexity of transnational migration for individuals and highlight the diversity, as well as shared themes, of these experiences. My observations and recording of the diversity of experiences and the learning these processes provided enough material to discuss the possibilities and challenges to transformation for individual immigrant women in this study and, within limits and with due caution taken, more generally.

From the standpoint of the participants, the possibilities of, and barriers to, various forms of positive transformation occur through various learning processes they encounter in their life/work situation. I have argued that we need a theory of marginality and agentive participation in order to develop an understanding of the variety of experiences people have in their marginalized positions, experiences which, I claim, ultimately contribute to the possibility of transformative change. I try to contribute to this theory by highlighting the ways in which participants exercised their agency to address the issue of marginality in distinctive ways. Based on my findings, it should be clear that marginality is not a result of individual deficiency, but of a deficient system and process that conditions an individual’s capacity to construct a trajectory of transformation, and exercise their will, in relation to their colour, class, gender, ability and so on. Though, as I show, according to the participants’ accounts, many of them are made to believe that the identified deficiency lies within themselves, and, therefore, they need to correct it to be successful here.

Relying on the evidence presented in the previous chapters, I present four main findings with reference to potentials for and barriers to transformation. Firstly, I found that individuals inherently possess the capacity to transform their worldviews, however, they may not act upon it
due to their social and economic lives taking precedence over the goals of broader, more obvious or definitive transformational choices and options: no person in this study entertains the notion of abandoning their current arrangements entirely in order to pursue some type of revolutionary change activism, for example. Through this study, we come to know more about why this is the case, as well as why transformational trajectories can still emerge, albeit in other less easily identifiable forms. Individuals’ economic and civic lives are in constant interaction with each other in ways that form experiences that challenge their perception of self and also create room for transformative learning and change. Thirdly, my analysis suggests that the individuals’ desire to become part of the mainstream is an expression of their desire to change in all aspects of their material and social life where they can find their niche in the host country. In these terms, one might argue that participants’ desire to join the mainstream indicates their desire to regain lost status and privilege, not necessarily to challenge or change their oppressive circumstances in opposition to a hierarchical social system. However, my findings suggest that the dynamics involved in this are far more complex than that. As discussed in the previous chapters, the data shows that the notion of inclusion in the “mainstream” and the way participants understand the mainstream, conveys a multilayered process in which regaining the lost status tends to simply offer a necessary starting point or a first phase in a longer, more complex process.

These points represent four core, inter-related observations. But, some further comments on this notion of mainstream inclusion are in order to properly understand them. The underlying theme behind the idea of mainstream inclusion comes from the participants’ history as well as ongoing race, gender, and class experiences in that this appears to be the initial frame for emerging awareness of and desire for bringing about change in their everyday lives. As Freire (1970) and Mezirow (2000) argue in their distinctive ways, it is in the context of people’s everyday lives that
the potential for transformative learning resides. The discussion of mainstream inclusion and the way it is approached shows that in order for marginalized individuals to move towards transformative action and/or praxis, their economic and social necessities need to be addressed first. For better or worse, the data shows that the first framework participants adopted for addressing these needs is mainstream inclusion. Feeling alienated in their everyday experiences made them wish to be like the majority in the centre, which also means people are willing to conform to conditions they want to resist in order to feel included.

At the same time, something more interesting was occurring for the participants. Once basic material/economic/social needs are met, as we see in this study with special attention to the role of engaging in informal work, it is quite likely that the possibility remains that they may not move beyond their comfort/comfort-building phase and into a broader and ongoing action/transformation phase. The discussions in the focus groups and my observations in the community suggest that, firstly, people want to see change so they can confidently live as full citizens of this country: the confidence that emerges even in the case of the most modest success then can lead them to further action to address deeper issues of social and economic injustices deriving from race, class, gender, a lack of social capital, a lack of political voice, and so on.

While I discuss these findings, I am also aware of a deep and necessarily existing tensions:
Social change not only depends on the individual’s willingness to act, but it depends on changes in social structures and processes in which they actively (or are expected actively to) participate and/or create.

Implicating each of these prior points above, in this thesis, I argue that informal work likely fulfills the individual’s need and desire to be part of the wider society. In effect, it may offer a
distinctively effective starting point for change, and thus, empirically, informal/cash work is shown to act as a possible avenue to challenge oppressive labour markets and economic relations more generally. Informal work, in other words, appears to serve a role as a bridging activity in which important capacities and contradictions are brought to light for the women in this study. Not the least among its outcomes, we see informal work supporting a means for people to find some balance in the midst of chaos. Informal work allows the necessary space to construct and sustain networks, and the social ties that help preserve their culture and traditions while adapting to the new cultural and social challenges. Quite clearly, participants also viewed this as one of the most efficient ways to increase social capital, engage in informal learning, and create social cohesion. In a small yet significant way, what appears to emerge is alternative forms of collective organization in the community, and according to the data a good deal of the explanation about why this is so rests in informal work activities.

In order to explain the type of synthesis I have just outlined, below I offer discussion broken into three sections. Section I discusses the main themes identified as fundamental to transformation, emerged from this analysis, with reference to adult education and transformative learning literature (discussed in chapter three of this thesis). It analyses experiences and avenues of change in relation to learning discussed in chapter five and six. Section II examines the potentials and barriers of transformation as they unfold through social relations and informal work at the meso level of people’s lives. In addition, this section draws some tentative linkages to global/macro themes that are concurrent to local and meso level themes discussed in this thesis. The discussion is a brief examination of immigrant experience in relation to capitalism, globalization and transnational migration. In section III I discuss the possibilities and challenges of social change and action for a population and community such as the immigrant women of
this study and summarize the chapter more generally. A complete executive summary of this study – including its implication for adult education, its implications for the individual and social dimensions of change and learning, as well the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research – are presented in the next short chapter.

Section I
Transformative Learning Possibilities: Individual and Collective

The accounts of the participants of this study point towards the varied nature of the learning they encounter/undertake in their everyday life and work interactions. In order to identify and organize the analysis of the transformative learning potential in various parts of the participants’ work/life experiences, I have divided the ways learning occurs into four categories/phases: 1) Participants articulating their experiences of change, identifying differences in experiences through that articulation; 2) Learning to manage expectations in relation to material wealth and position to better integrate into the host society; 3) Learning to develop and manage an informal work activity in order to address or mitigate key post-immigration challenges; and, 4) Learning to select what to adapt to and when to resist unwanted change. I claim that this set of categories, if treated as fluid and contingent, allows for an examination of learning frameworks, and specifically allows for an examination that helps us understand if a learning type is normative or radically transformative in nature, sometimes despite outward appearances. Furthermore, this provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of some aspect of individual’s capacity for transformative learning – in contrast to Mezirow’s (2000) claims – regardless of their material and social life situations. That is, here we see it is also important to examine the context in which learning takes place, creating room and access for transformative action, as the context is often a significant factor in shaping the experience of marginality as revealed by the participant
accounts collected for this study.

It remains very important to recall that I presented this set of learning categories/phases not in order to create dichotomous learning categories or to suggest a lock-step pattern of development and change as such, but rather to highlight the different levels and forms of learning processes in which immigrant women engage. I present this, in other words, as a depiction of how, taken together, with adequate supports and achievements at critical junctures, transformation and consciousness-raising opportunities can emerge. All four learning categories identified are interconnected, and can be viewed as occurring in a sequence, but may, in some instances, occur either simultaneously or erratically.

The first two types of learning I have identified are linked to a normative developmental process that appear in this data to result from transnational migration to Canada and which commonly occur as part of adaptation to a new environment. Some of these learning processes are instantaneous and, for some people, many of them are completely unexpected. However, accounts of their experiences also reveal the ways in which they were led to dialogue and reflect with one another as they try to make sense of these processes. The findings also suggest that communal reflection and dialogue help them to manage their expectations, since their lived experiences are in stark contrast to what they believed they would experience post-immigration. The previous chapters explored the dual nature of this process as, in part, coordinated by different expectations and social relations. At one level, the dual nature of experiences shared speaks to a conflict between participants’ need and desire. At another level, however, it speaks to the external social relations of advanced, western capitalism (i.e. class processes), from the standpoint of a gendered immigrant of colour, and the way these relations organize their life in
such a way as to limit the opportunities through which they are seeking to integrate better. The evidence suggests that these two types/phases of learning can and often do lead to the latter two categories of learning; that is, learning opportunities which are more radical in nature in light of most participants’ previous (race, class and gender) experience, histories and education.

The latter two categories of learning identified in this study are more radical and transformative, and occur over multiple phases (e.g. learning to develop and manage an informal work activity in order to address or mitigate some of the changes and then learning to select what to adapt to and how to resist unwanted change). There were many examples of participants resisting unwanted change and taking action to prevent negative change. For example, we see this in Selma’s account of quitting her job by refusing unwanted change (i.e. to remove her hijab) (in Chapter Six) and Rumi’s narrative of walking the cultural divide between her husband and her children (i.e. taking action and the refusal of unwanted change in the home) (in Chapter Five). According to a number of participants, they had to (learn to) let go of their idea of what successful employment looks like and the attachment to class hierarchies had to then be re-evaluated.

Moreover, these participants had to learn to develop and implement a plan that worked for them personally, as well as in relation to their families. Participants identified and articulated the positive and negative of this change in their perceptions: on one hand, it is a negative outcome of immigration from the perspective of mainstream/normative employment and economic life, and on the other, it is challenging their perceptions of work, class, status, notions of the ideal woman, and notions of the successful immigrant. I suggest the latter represent objects and opportunities of learning – often emerging from more normative learning phases initially – that hold the potential for more radicalized learning trajectories.
Considering again all four categories/phases outlined at the outset we see that the first two present an ongoing learning process in which participants are naming their world and acknowledging their current experiences as well as their histories. The latter two lean towards an action oriented learning process that sustains their choice of work and makes it successful. The action oriented activity and the way it is developed point towards the possibility of collective action that, in this study, is community-based and lead by the people; and, this action oriented activity is also a more identifiably politicized stance. The action oriented learning I identified are in line with Mezirow’s ten phases of transformative learning, as participants went through the experience of dilemma that leads to reflection, action plans, and implementation of the plan.

However, the specific dilemmas dealt with in this data also reveal a weakness of the Mezirowian transformative learning theory, a theory in which a contradictory context is given relatively little attention. We see, in other words, an empirical example of how in Mezirowian transformative learning theory there is no tool to address multiple dilemmas an individual embedded in this type of contradictory context can face. As noted early on in the thesis, Mezirow (2000) suggests the numerous challenges a marginalized individual needs to overcome make it hard, if not impossible, for them to engage in perspective transformation. I argue here, their individual agency needs to be counted and the context in which the individual is defined as marginalized needs to be taken into account as well; and when we do this adequately we see something different than Mezirow seems to predict. Thus, as we have seen it in the previous chapters, a change in the context can remove the barriers an individual faces or add to further their marginalization. My data suggest the experience of marginality does not stop someone from becoming a transformative learner; however, it is simply more complex and contingent at times, there are many barriers that tend to hinder further action, and revealing the construction of the
foundation for perspective transformation requires attention to subtlety through sustained engagement with the research subjects. These data also indicate that, for some people, changes in the socio-economic situation are a necessary step of the transformative learning process. This is where examining the everyday life in the social space in this particular study of immigrant women as informal workers is useful in understanding the potential of, and barriers to, transformation for people living in the margins. The personal nature of this process makes it complicated to navigate, yet opens up further discussion on who can be an ideal learner under what conditions and whether learning leads to collective action and change that are genuinely transformative.

Having taken a critical look at the avenues of change and transformative learning potential from an individual perspective, based on the immediate situation of the individual and their experience of learning, we are in a better position to move forward more broadly in the analysis. I have argued that individuals’ agency and awareness of the process of change that each person encounters situationally is an important dimension of the learning process that can, in turn, lead to further, potentially more radical, choices. In the next few paragraphs, I return in greater detail to the question of informal work as a base in which people used their agency and agentive participation in their social life. However, I observed that throughout the learning that occurred around informal work and women choosing to resist change, there seemed to be a persistent prompt/potential for an action-oriented learning, which is indicated by agentive participation in an activity of their choice with a goal of change in their socio-economic set-up. Although learning occurred as a result of a change in their socio-economic positioning post-immigration, as well as from their ongoing experience subsequently, it seems clear that this learning opened up their world to other possibilities and further changes.
The chaotic process of change may make it appear there is little room or time to reflect on one’s agency or agentive participation in circumstances, especially where internal and external expectations are in tension pulling to different directions, and choices are limited in terms of formal work and scantily available resources. Several participants clearly demonstrated their learning, as well as their change of perception, when the subjects of informal work vs. formal work, change of class relations, and the dilemma of household work vs informal work in their new socio-economic reality were made to emerge. However, their active choice in initiating informal work – all the while shepherding the family in a new social, cultural, and economic environment– revealed their strong will to pursue fuller lives in the midst of these difficult circumstances. I argue this resonates with Gramsci’s (1929/1996) basic point that individuals retain the capacity to think and act, regardless of their socioeconomic position. From the participants’ perspective, it is the changes that occurred through learning that further propels them from the internal to the external and vice versa such that they became able to make additional choices to move forward. The transformative change potential in this process would seem to rest in their ongoing learning and, notably, unlearning – especially in their perceptions of gender, race, work, class and status which this environment (and their personal histories) presents. As much as it is a new type of learning, according to many participants, in their agentive participation in informal work, they are unlearning many important aspects of their previously held perceptions: that is, they are revealing contradictions and engaging in a type of transformative unlearning. Their initial experiences helped them become aware of their own prejudices. Making the choice to move forward with this type of work allowed them to confront these prejudices in a very real and often very powerful way. There were a few women (three) who did not share this view. For them, informal work is only there for economic reasons and
learning is more of an indirect outcome. In these instances, the experiences apparently lacked this important element of transformative unlearning.

This, in turn, raises the question of alternative views on human agency. I argue that the evidence recommends we consider two ways to analyze agency in the participants ‘learning/life situations. On one hand, agency is central to the human capacity to survive life’s hurdles. It is a seemingly inherent dimension of development in difficult situations: people have exercised a will to adapt and survive. On the other hand, agency can sometimes more clearly implicate a process of active choice-making that seems less inherent or automatic because it challenges the very nature of the hurdles themselves and expands the scope for learning, future growth, and development through individual and collective action. In both situations, there is active discourse and reflection internally and externally, though the outcomes and the way one’s will becomes focused and is exercised are quite different.

Participant accounts offered in earlier chapters indicate the participants ‘determination to be successful’ and also illustrated the ways in which their perceptions of work, status, class, and so on, began to undergo a subtle but significant process of transformation. However, I would also like to note that the material realities these women face reveal the various power relations in which gender plays a significant role. In many ways, the interlocking nature of these power relations contributes to the nature of their perceptions and experiences of learning and change. Gender and patriarchy directly and indirectly influence thinking and learning. They also reinforce a system of power relations in which internal and external experiences collide with the dynamics of race, class and status. Nevertheless, rooted in an examination of everyday life, informal work choices, dominant Canadian culture and experiences of immigrant women, it is
easily identifiable that many change their point of view. Indeed, we may detect even more subtle
and incremental changes in what could be called their thinking habits, e.g. in terms of a new
openness towards immigrants from other countries, perspectives on class relations, the
hierarchical status of types of work, etc. And in this way, we partially confirm some of what
Mezirow (1997) says in his definition of transformative learning as involving changes in one’s
frames of reference or perspective.

As discussed earlier, agency and agentive participation through informal economic and social
activities and the constant interaction of economic life and civic life are some of the significant
ways – at the individual level -- transformative learning can be seeded to become the basis of
collective activity and change in the social life. Much of Freire’s and Gramsci’s work focuses on
this aspect of civic life. Material needs – and specifically, the contradictions involved in
satisfying these needs in initial phases of learning and development in the course of everyday life
– are at the forefront of the motivations lying behind people’s activities; this is a relatively
understated issue in Freire’s and Gramsci’s work. However, as I have discussed earlier, people’s
lack of material well-being does not necessarily diminish their capacity to critically think about
their situations and find creative solutions. It may impact how much they can overtly and
actively pursue/enjoin the cause to end their struggles in the immediate term, but it is hard to
deny that obtaining material and social stability, amidst otherwise extremely de-stabilizing
conditions, does not provide the basis for future critical thinking/action.

To this point I have discussed much of the change and learning from an individual perspective,
but I have also posed the following question: can those learning experiences and changes
influence or lead to social change? There are glimpses of critical reflection and discourse in
many of the participant’s accounts of their experiences to varying degrees, but in their choosing of informal work and their activities in the community at large, we find many expressions of hope for change that will address interlocking systems of power that derive from race, gender, and class dynamics in their everyday lives; that is, broader social change issues beyond their individual life. Importantly, they do not feel that their learning and involvement is of radical nature, nor do they expect it to incite radical change. However, they do believe it is causing incremental change for them individually, which they believe will lead to further, and more socially just, forms of inclusion and integration. And, here we find overtones of broader social and collective concerns.

It is helpful to recall that I regard the possibilities of social change from the vantage points of the main two approaches to transformation, as discussed earlier in this thesis. For example, the concept of conscientization leading to reflection and change as discussed in Freire (1970) and Allman’s discussion of social consciousness (1991) is obvious in some participants accounts of their learning processes, and in their articulation of their experiences of gender, class, and race, than in others. However, my overall argument suggests that even in the latter instances, a potential basis for examining apparently incompatible perspectives may be present. I would suggest that critical reflection and discourse/dialogue are major themes that are central to the discussion of social change in these communities and networks. The ways in which these themes are used differently in these approaches helps address the interactions of individual and the social. While I argue that individualized approaches, such as Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, retain some value, at the same time, such approaches tend to understated the possibilities of social change. Thus, here, as elsewhere in the thesis, we see how critical anti-racist feminist approaches offer a way to correct for this deficit by providing a much needed social perspective.
My data reveal that there are many avenues and possibilities for collective action and change. I traced these avenues starting with individuals and their experiences leading to reflection, and sharing of their experiences to begin the dialogue in a more collective and socially networked context. Although for some, this dialogue and reflection are very personal in nature and their interaction is oriented by the purpose of their own well-being (along with the well-being of their immediate family), many recognized as a potential collective learning opportunity leading to forms of growth in critical perspectives/action (i.e. praxis). In each instance, and at whatever more or less developed phase we find the learner, the possibility for change lies within these learning opportunities. Consciousness raising (Donovan, 2000) and conscientization (Freire, 1970) are, according to my interpretation of this data, typically an indirect outcome of such processes (i.e. these were usually not among the explicit goals of participation in dialogue). Nevertheless, it is in dialogue that participants started to respect and trust each other, and by extension, established the potential for viable group or community responses to the multiple contradictions of racial, migrant, language, gender, and class dynamics in Canadian society; dialogical learning being a crucial element of transformation, according to Freire (1970, 1997).

Section II

Outcomes of Informal Work: Individual and Social-Questions and Possibilities of Transformation

The participants’ responses to the outcomes of informal work, outlined previously, reveal that they are making choices to engage in informal work and adhering to their choices, knowing and learning that informal work has positive and negative sides. Women’s choices as preliminary responses made it appear as though, by choosing informal work, they are simply responding to their basic economic and social needs. However, further probing revealed it is much more than the financial outcome of this work that draws them to it and sustains their involvement in an
ongoing way. Although some tend to believe they have something to correct with themselves in order to reclaim their lost employment and/or economic status, in the course of their informal work many came to identify this as an issue Canadian society and the state have to address. They believe their current experiences and work choices challenge them to think about life differently. For many participants, their work interactions were their way of integrating and contributing to the world around them, and themselves: e.g. “This work allows me to help another person in need and help myself with the income and learning opportunities. This makes me feel that I am also contributing to my community” (Mina, India).

Importantly, certain experiences and types of learning seem to set the stage for critical new questions and concerns that, in turn, become potentially open to resolution. Radical visions of something truly transformative do not emerge wholly formed in a single step. For example, as I have discussed previously, these notions of change created contradictions and confusion in some of the participants regarding their roles as they experience a false dichotomy of household ‘labour of love’ work (Luxton, 1980) and informal work, or ‘labour of will and need’ [...]. Over time in the course of participation in informal work, a number of participants clearly learned to think that both should be recognized for their value and contribution to the well-being of the family and society.

According to the majority of the participants, the dual nature of work activities has several benefits and is multi-dimensional: on one level it adds value, and it brings visibility to the work they do; and on the other it is also a process in which they began to rebuild some aspect of their lost social capital. From a Marxist perspective, participants' accounts create an impression that when use-value labour becomes valorized (as an exchange-value product, in this case household
labour/production), overall value of the household labour is increased, even though the activity retains its invisible nature. The reason I have identified the possibility of transformative change in a highly complex situation like this is because of the multistage process of change described earlier in the chapter. That is, this particular work arrangement allows women to be in a flexible place rather than simply remain a domestic worker with no income, or visibility, or networks. However, the difficult aspect of this particular arrangement is that a significant portion of production remains within the domain of the household and even when services are linked to those outside the home these linkages remain intensely localized. By comparison, formal employment tended to expose interviewees to broader connections and, sometimes, higher status. These difficulties are compounded by the addition of class and race dynamics that became defining features in their new social set up. Defining participants as marginal workers of colour from a third world country.

Agency and agentive participations come out as strong factors in women’s continued participation in informal work. However, not every aspect of their oppression is addressed, nor can it be addressed, through their agentive participation alone; for that, women’s social relations and other external factors need to be changed. This is not addressed very much in the individual perspective on transformative learning, nor is this aspect itself clearly described in Freire’s work. Yet, the findings in this study suggest critical reflection and discourse lead women to agentive participation, since they made these choices after much thought and discussion with their family, friends, and networks. Overall, however, this is consistent with Mezirow’s (1978, 2000) and Freire’s (1970) suggestions generally in that these types of reflection and discourse are fundamental to transformative learning and/or conscientization.
Based on these findings and my observations of immigrant life trajectory in Canada, I argue that transformative change is a multiphase process in which marginality is not necessarily a permanent condition. However, I also want to note that an individual’s social relations, how much they can control the outcomes of this experience, as well as their emotional and physical abilities and disabilities, can either perpetuate or decrease the intensity of feeling marginalized or isolated. For example, there were three participants whose experiences were quite different from others; in two cases, women were full-time caregivers to their spouses, who acquired disabilities after their arrival here. These women found themselves unable to do as much as their peers. One of the participants suffered from depression and other ailments for many years after her arrival and did not find herself doing much in groups or in the community. She does not believe she is capable of influencing change for others, as her personal needs are required high and full attention.

Overall, however, accounts of informal work by the immigrant women in this study offer several new insights to the discussions of gender, race, class and capitalism at the macro-level. Firstly, these particular accounts call for special attention to context. As discussed earlier, for the participants, the change in their context created experiences, learning, and new social relations very different from their earlier ones. Moving from one country to other, and from the formal to the informal labour market, changed their external relations to class as women. Changing perceptions of the contradictions of social class are some of the first obvious signs of perspective transformation and learning reported by many participants. Hennessey and Ingraham (1997) see these class relations as the capitalist agenda that reinforces the connection between women’s oppression and capitalism. While their internal relations and their consciousness of their changing relations created positive learning, their material relations, in terms of employment
outcomes, produced negative experiences. This particular predicament created a unique situation for women like those in this research. They become aware of class and status, and at the same time, they started associating class relations as power relations in this new context, which resulted in people viewing class as a signifier of success in the host country. Although from a material perspective this change may not be positive, from a dialectical perspective, the changes and the new learning formed new experiences for them as women and added value to their personal lives. These changes and their learning also produced tension in their everyday lives in their perceptions of a successful life in Canada. The notion of successful life is not only constituted by access to material well-being, but would also serve them for their external status; in their private lives, they tend to believe class and status have no particular value. Moreover, I argue that the emerging awareness of these tensions is the first step toward their transformative resolution.

It was also the first time some of the participants became, or were made, aware of their racial or class identity and how those were realized and expressed in their lives pre-immigration. According to the participants, it seemed that becoming aware of their perceptions of race and ethnicity experiences pre-migration was a key learning point. Many of them had significant racial and class privilege prior to immigrating to Canada. Freire (1970) points out the importance of paying attention to context to unveil oppression, as an oppressor in one situation can be the oppressed in another.

Not least of all, as experiences are shared and networks become strengthened, the majority of participants found their experiences of gendered power relations in their private space changing for the better as well. In fact, the majority of the participants identified experiences of gender
relations post-immigration as positive and enjoy the freedom they perceive in their social situations. Once again, change in this context gave them the opportunity to be aware of the possibilities and forms of oppression that existed in their pasts. At the same time, these perceptions are not automatic. It is important to say that a small minority (three) of participants did not share this view. They believe that the change they experienced and observed here for girls and for women has not been positive, and in fact identified it as a harmful change for their children and occasionally themselves. They believe religion should be central in making moral values and they see this influence severely threatened in the course of their new lives in Canada.

The participants’ accounts of their experiences of social relations provide insight into their own life journeys and the influence that religion and culture have had on their experiences before and after immigration. Informal work, in their opinion, is their avenue to expand and live out some of what they have learned while beginning to look toward a better future. They believe their experiences and subsequent actions in their private and public lives are making small but significant changes in their everyday situations. Rumi and Suja’s narratives in Chapter Five are extended examples of this type of change. Jameela, Jasmine, Sameena, and many others spoke about the opportunity they have as women residing in Canada, e.g. “The place is better for women, more freedom and flexibility, men are more respectful and show openness to change” (Focus group 2). An additional, key observation in this regard was that women were addressing the power relations in which they saw their private and public lives colliding. This collision was both troubling and led to important new learning. The awareness and the process of learning that the participants identified resembled what Freire defines as conscientization; although complex, it seems clear that this is a central dimension of a first step toward broader transformative change.
These findings call for a broader understanding of the category of class, not just as an economic category, but also as a social/cultural category. As stated earlier, many of the participants’ experiences revealed that they created a false binary to assess success in the host country: they judge success and failure depending on who is on the other side of class relationships. One of the challenges associated with these perceptions is that class will become a central focus in people’s social life and the issue of race and gender will take a back seat. The outcome will be that people may not see the interconnected nature of these issues and may not engage it as an issue that needs to be addressed. From the data collected for this study, I found that informal work represents the needs and desires of a group of people, especially women, to settle in this country and become contributing citizens. It also represents the opportunities available as well as the threats individuals and groups face, in the urban knowledge economy. It reveals the dire nature of the knowledge bargain that takes place between countries, especially between the third world countries and first world countries. This is discussed in detail in much of the literature relating to immigrant life and employment outcomes (e.g. Guo, 2010; Ng, 1996). Here I draw attention to the specific nature of informal work in terms of the learning and experience it produces in relation to the participants’ everyday lives and work. The types of activities women are involved in may be insignificant in terms of employment opportunities, however, cash work also poses a challenge to the formal system since it is unregulated and untaxed (and may compete with profit-making).

Still, cash work activities tend to resist the market-based economy in which civil life is given little importance and everything is based on profit. Informal work, at many levels helps increase social and economic capital for these women, and therefore shows promise to increase social cohesion among diverse populations and create opportunities for informal learning that otherwise
need to be created. Informal work gives visibility to the invisible social organization of gendered, racialized work on multiple levels. From an individual perspective, their immediate social relations create a platform for using their newfound agency and resistance. At the broader-level, this work exposes the social organization of a capitalist society where race and gender influence the class formation. For example, it is the changes in their economic and social lives that lead them to informal work, the changes occurred because of the racialized and capitalist State processes. Furthermore, at the meso-level, informal work reveals the ways in which small communities organize socially, find solidarity, gain material help, and create ways to resist the hegemonic norms of the wider society from which they feel excluded. A close examination sheds light on local lives being influenced by the extra-local and vice versa, as well as local life sustaining itself in alternative ways. Furthermore, it sheds light on people like the participants of this study as active agents of a civil society through their work networks in their neighbourhoods. Women who are performing gendered, informal work also bring attention to the otherwise virtually invisible situation wherein racialized and gendered workers are contributing members of a civil society and its economic life. While it is true that this work, on the one hand, may be helping to maintain the capitalist agenda broadly conceived (i.e. it does not challenge capitalism directly), I would argue that, on the other hand, it reveals an important capacity-building and learning process that underlies additional opportunities for change and collective action. According to many participants, informal work is an active choice and is the best available option given all the constraints they find in their new society.
Section III
Possibilities for Transformative Social Change and Action

In this final section, I specifically focus on one of my major research questions that initially led me to this research: the possibilities for, and challenges to, transformation occurring through informal work in particular and the immigrant experience in general. And here specifically I discuss some of the practical themes and solutions that can be drawn from the discussions and analysis presented in the previous chapters.

The themes of informal work as an activity reveals many aspects of transformative change identified in the early social movements in Canada and elsewhere. In fact, there are several ways in which the processes of informal work and community activities as a whole might be seen to resemble the early social movements in Canada. Here I am thinking, in particular, of the Antigonish Movement, as it shares many characteristics of early social organization such as informal networks and nascent forms of solidarity linked to economic cooperation and production. Informal work arrangements also allow room for sustaining the networks and ties that help preserve their culture and traditions while adapting to the new cultural and social norms. Additionally, there is room for an alternative world and worldview that challenges the dominant view and discourse where people can choose to sustain dimensions of their life views and values that is comfortable for them. This is clearly not the answer to all issues faced by people living on the margins, and nor does it likely offer a major, direct response at the macro-level of social change processes. However, it provides an alternative against a backdrop of few alternatives; it offers a small but significant solution to serious issues that people face as a result of inter-locking oppressions, including those uniquely linked to transnational migration. The evolving nature of community engagement is visible in many of the activities women choose to
participate as time pass, for example, joining the school council, is one of the examples where women are showing signs of increased capacity for collective action. Through the descriptions of their learning, women increased their political and collective agency as well as civic engagement allowing them to address some aspects of issues related to race, class, and gender. While here I use the words political and collective agency, I am aware that it is still quite fractional and almost dismissible. However, I argue that it is a sign significant enough to warrant the claim of an emerging capacity, creating new possibilities in the future if there is room for further engagement and support.

Informal work as an activity generates social capital and increases social cohesion, where women become, in Frierian terms, cultural workers, and, in Gramscian terms, organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1996/1929) who know their particular position in the struggle. In such situations, people feel hopeful enough to move forward and not to give up on the fight while finding comfort in their local/social world. From a dialectical materialistic perspective, another significant aspect of this informal work/life model in a community setting is that the social relations that are produced and sustained are not solely dependent on the market economy. Therefore, the worker and their production continue their relations based, either primarily or at least partially, on the principle of use value rather than exchange value, the process of capital accumulation, and so on. The exception to this is where there are some women wanting to make this into a full-blown business (and thus aim to eventually reproduce a form of the capitalist mode of production). The relation to production and the way it is perceived is ambiguous with regards to the data collected for this study, since the findings with respect to this relation were contradictory, inconsistent and not altogether clear as to people’s intentions or future trajectories in this regard. Yet, the presence and absence of an orientation to capital accumulation and the
intentionality of the worker in the process do offer evidence of tendencies which we should consider. Having use value production leading the movement of a group of women from the privacy of their homes into the community sphere brings visibility to the worker and the activity, but in a particular way that is not necessarily obvious. Moreover, as I mentioned in an earlier section, the work also increases the value of the worker and, I have argued, increases her potential to develop political agency in their community. If participatory work is encouraged and supported, it can also be space for collective learning that may produce organic intellectuals who become champions of addressing other systemic issues faced by both the community at large and by individuals in their particular life situations. For example, many women strongly believe their involvement in the community through informal work is making a difference for them and for others beyond their community. Several of these women, it seems clear, have begun to emerge as potential, informal leaders in their communities.

In the focus groups conducted for this study, women discussed at length the possibility of collective action, although they tended to believe that a protest or demonstration in front of a government building is not what they need to bring change to their situations. The site for this learning is communities, where the participants are living and have as the point of entry for citizen engagement, informal economic transactions, and networks. One of the main observations I have made after examining informal work and the community as a potential place for collective action for marginalized individuals is that certain types of socio-economic development initiatives – those that are organized around the principles of use value generation – may serve as the basis for change in this context.
Barriers to Transformative Social Action and Change

One of the biggest barriers to social action and change identified in this study is people’s material needs taking over their wish to participate in collective activities in the long term. The distance between their current reality, their capacity and skills to become fully integrated to the host society is widened by their socio-economic positioning on the margins, which at times negatively impacts how they view change. Their desire to be part of the mainstream is an outcome of this lacking they experience in their new marginalized social and economic realities. Apart from material needs, gender roles, ideologies and religious values and perceptions may contribute greatly to hinder the process of collective action. Changed and reduced networks and social capital that resulted from transnational migration were also identified as barriers in this thesis. Furthermore, loss of childcare and other domestic assistance, as well as losing the strong ties they had pre-immigration, diminished or de-prioritized any desire women had to be in a full time capacity to work for social change.

My findings suggest that women’s perceptions of their roles inside and outside their homes are highly contradictory. This is intensified by their lived experiences of cultural, gender, patriarchal and religious ideology. Their new economic and social realities add further to this dilemma of living two lives; one that is private and one that is social. Rumi’s and Suja’s experiences are examples of the everyday contradiction many participants felt they faced in their new homes in contrast to their socio-cultural life prior to immigration. However, these contradictions can be reconciled through initiatives that promote reflection and other intentional dialogues. Many of the participants directly or indirectly discussed about decision-making process in the domestic sphere, in many cases, it appeared that it was their male partners who made decisions. This type
of experience extends to their social lives and connections, since this may influence women’s choice of, and participation in a social activity, that may not have any direct benefit to the family.

I also observed a tendency among the participants a desire to actively maintain a dichotomous position on issues that were affecting them, thus maintaining the contradictory outcomes and perspectives it produced. The dichotomous position also makes it appear as though they are experiencing some sort of false consciousness of their current reality. Issues related to their roles as women, mothers, and, wives, implicating gender based violence, religious and cultural views about women, and their roles in domestic and public spaces, heavily influenced this desire to keep some aspects of their many roles private and others public. From an analytical point of view, the process of reflection on their constructed identities made them aware of the gendered nature of their work and their roles. They also become aware of how it hinders or slows the possibility of discourse that may lead them towards moving to collective action. As much as they are aware of it, in many cases the women I spoke with also seem unwilling to explore this in depth, as they are not ready to take the consequent action that their reflections may lead them to explore. This is intensified by their experiences of racism, exploitation in the work place, and not knowing their rights in the new country. Collective action and organizing for a social cause, even if it is an issue that directly impacts them, elicits only a timid response or a desire to engage in action or change since there remain concerns about drawing undue attention to themselves which they fear may further jeopardize their position in the host country as an immigrant as well as in terms of their situation as it regards many other roles in their lives. Lack of political agency is also a reality in this context, as the work in which women are involved is not a major force in enhancing their political agency. This in turn impacts how fast things can change for their benefit, even if they are willing to act upon changing their situation (Eagleton, 2011).
Religious views on sacrifice, suffering, and hardship also play an integral role in how participants react to certain oppressive situations in their lives. Suja’s experience in Chapter Five is one of the many instances where participants viewed their hardship and struggle as part of a divine plan, and therefore, believed they should not be fighting it, but rather accepting it. This resonates with Freire (1970) when he discusses how religious beliefs can contribute to sustaining oppression and exploitation. According to Freire, such worldviews have historically influenced people, dissuading them from using their agency to fight oppression.

They re-sort (stimulated by the oppressor) to magical explanations or a false view of God, to whom they fatalistically transfer the responsibility for their oppressed state. It is extremely unlikely that these self-mistrustful, downtrodden, hopeless people will seek their own liberation—an act of rebellion, which they may view as a disobedient violation of the will of God, as an unwarranted confrontation with destiny (Freire, 1970, p.164).

My findings in this study suggest this issue often continues to represent an obstacle for people to respond to situations of injustice.

Another issue participant's find as a barrier for them to participate in collective action is the more practical issue of not knowing how to navigate existing services, activities, and movements, such as academic, political and or civic engagement groups, and lobby groups in the broader community in their new country. Change in location appears to be another barrier that influence people’s choice in collective organization. For example, Jemma and Sandra expressed a desire to get involved in community action plans and other activities, however they found lack of English language skills and limited networks become a stumbling block for them to fully participate. In Rumi’s account, (Chapter Five) we saw that, for her first few years in Canada, she lived in
complete isolation. The interlocking natures of gender and race also play a role in how comfortable people felt accessing those opportunities since they previously had negative experiences in the community. Moreover, many of the participants do not view their geographical community as a permanent choice of residence, which in turn influences their commitment to getting involved in social or community causes. However, some practical and theoretical ways to develop a platform for social action and change emerged both from my observations of participant activity and from participant suggestions.

**Adult Education and Immigrant Women: Some Theoretical and Practical Considerations for Social and Economic Change**

My research points towards the impact of current community education practices adopted by adult education theorists and a need for more comprehensive approaches to address the differences and diverse needs of the population. This also points toward the need for revisiting the transformative learning theories to include community action and dialogue to address marginality. Informal work, as analyzed in this study, offers a significant, under-appreciated possibility as a source for alternatives to the formal labour markets by enabling people to exercise a certain level of initial autonomy in work and life choices, while retaining values important to them to live a life with dignity and growth.

Generally speaking, participants’ individual and social needs varied greatly in terms of their particular experiences. A key exception in this regard involved views and experiences of economic need and gendered work; here people’s thinking and learning tended to converge. I believe that starting from the latter commonalities in order to build on what might be a social cause will result in a positive outcome for all. Thus, there are a set of commonalities that, I argue, create an opportunity for community based organizing, for example, in relation to mothers
with small children. Adult educators or agencies who care about societal issues are able to organize people more effectively if they can provide childcare, or more broadly attend more carefully to other immediate needs women have, which would allow them to join collective action. Likewise, I argue that informal work offers a way to expand further on collective action as it already partially meets these economic needs. With an intentional community capacity building model, there will be opportunities for group dialogue and reflection, which the evidence here suggests may move the group to identify broader issues that are individual as well as shared. These can resemble consciousness-raising opportunities, though it would also seem that – based on the multiphased learning model that was presented earlier – framing these types of activity in relation to social movement radicalism may, in early phases of learning, reduce their appeal. In the next chapter, I provide, a brief executive summary, discuss future research, limitations and some broader suggestions for adult educators to consider based on my learning from this study.
Chapter 9
Conclusion and Executive Summary of the Research Findings

My dissertation has examined the experiences of Asian immigrant women’s work in the informal sector. Specifically, I began my study by examining the everyday experience of immigrant women and the reasons that lead them to informal work choices. I then examined the possibilities for, and challenges to, transformative learning and change in the informal work activity that women were involved in their homes and communities. I analyzed the findings mainly using two major themes: agency and social relations in the context of learning and change from a critical adult education perspective. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss some of the broader theoretical as well as some of the practical implication of the study.

Summary of Major Findings

In my study, I focused on three aspects of change that occur in the life of immigrant women as a result of transnational migration. First, I focused on the individual, their ways of learning, and how their worldviews changed after immigration. I examined how their ways of learning and worldviews influenced or guided the way they approach and process those experiences, which, in turn, influence and/or challenge their private, personal perceptions of self and society. Secondly, I focused on the social aspect of change that occurred as a result of immigration - change in economic, social, and class relations that lead the individual to particular locations, social groupings, and networks, which in turn lead them to specific choices and work activities. A third element was the examination of informal work and how immigrant women’s informal work activities and choices influenced learning and change that are multidimensional and contradictory.
My research findings indicated that, after transnational immigration, highly educated and/or professional immigrant women’s choices become limited in terms of professional and personal growth. However, the women in this study responded to their new socio-economic situations by actively making choices, such as choosing to become involved with informal work. Although informal work is often depicted as a survival tool used merely to address poverty, my findings indicate, in addition to the financial aspect of informal work, that the participants of this study viewed it as an active choice they made in order to navigate the new society, to develop new networks, and to increase their social capital. According to the data, the multidimensional aspect of change women experienced invoked learning for them. The majority of the participants found the learning and reflective discourse embedded in their everyday work and life situation was a positive outcome of their informal work activity. The four categories of learning I identified revealed glimpses of both normative (reproductive) and radical learning tendencies deeply rooted in their everyday work and life experiences after immigration.

The key findings here can be summarized as: an individual’s capacity to learn and their ability to exercise agency occur regardless of their individual place in society. On one hand this should be obvious, but on the other hand, as I noted in my discussion of some theories of transformative learning, it is a point that is not always adequately recognized or understood. What is seen here clearly is that individual learning occurs as a result of constant interaction across one’s individual/private and social/public lives. Women in this study contrast their private experience of everyday life to their social life/relations, finding new meaning and challenges to their worldviews. Weaving through both their private and public learning lives, the notion of mainstream life is a strong theme. Here I found the desire to join the mainstream life is not necessarily all about re-gaining lost privilege and/or reproducing the positive (and the negative)
aspects of predominant Canadian values, but may be viewed in a more complex way; for example, as an entry point in which people want to actively, and sometimes very critically, engage in (and not simply go along with) life in a new society and culture.

Based on these findings, informal work in this study represented the individual’s needs and desires to be an active agent in the wider society; and, for many informal work offered a possible avenue to think critically about and perhaps challenge an oppressive labour market and economic system. As an essential element of this unfolding dynamic, informal work seemed to allowed them to sustain networks and ties that helped preserve their culture and traditions while adapting to and then re-considering aspects of the new cultural and social norms. Likewise, participants also viewed this as a way to increase social capital, engage in informal learning, and create social cohesion without having to put too much energy or resources out of their little means. In a small yet significant way, the findings begin to suggest that there is a collective movement in the community being created through these informal work activities and participants tend to believe this will open doors for more collective action. Drawing from these findings, I also argued that the concept of transformation is multidimensional for people who go through major socio-economic and political changes in their life, and therefore a broader and more inclusive theory of transformative learning is necessary to address the issues of individuals and societies that are going through significant changes.

**Suggestions from the Participants**

During the focus groups and individual interviews, participants made their own suggestions on how to address their employment issues, and they wanted these suggestions to be included in this thesis. One of the practical solution participants tended to believe would solve many of the issues
they face here in Toronto, Canada dealt with the need to create better policies in the areas of employment and training. Many do not believe that creating general employment and training opportunities takes care of the issue. Participants tended to believe that part of the issue is with the current employment and training programs as they tend to gear them towards looking for jobs in the service sector or in entry-level positions. This is a point raised in many previous studies in fact. For many, doing informal work is a better option than formal service sector jobs, in part because they believe too much of their earnings will be spent on childcare and related services anyways. Given that the majority were educated and had worked in particular occupations pre-immigration, one of the chief suggestions that was offered was to create opportunities for training in their field of education through paid internships (in their field). Another suggestion that came up in the focus groups was to develop programs in consultation with immigrants who have already settled nicely in Canada. This, it was felt by the women in this study, would provide a better understanding of people’s immediate needs.

Still, for women, a related issue was having affordable childcare options and culturally appropriate services, which would make their transition and negotiation in their domestic space much easier. Again, similar findings along these lines can be noted in previous research that focused on labour market outcomes in studies ranging from the 1980’s up to the present, for example, Ng’s (1986), Mojab’s (1999) and Guo’s (2013). The fact that these issues continually come up in research points towards the existence of only small changes, or that changes are benefiting only certain categories of immigrants, and/or that the changes made are simply not adequate. This also means there are other issues, more deeply related to the dynamics of class, race, gender, and capitalism, that likely continue to influence the way people’s experiences are
coordinated locally and these need to be tackled in order for there to be a long-term, sustainable solution to the problems immigrants of colour face in Canada.

Contributions and Limitations of this Study

My study brings together the individual approaches to transformative learning and feminist, anti-racist approaches to transformation. I propose agency, and agentive participation, are key factors of a transformative learning process in the context of marginality. Following the individual and social approaches to transformation, I claim that we can begin to see more clearly how learning is an individual and collective process that influence each other simultaneously, producing contradictory learning outcomes and changes in individuals and groups. This study highlights the issue of marginality as contextual, and that multiple dilemmas are a product of a marginalized social set up. A broader definitional understanding of marginality in the everyday life of people is necessary to capture the complex and fluid nature of this socially constructed situation for people.

Having paid special attention to and conceptualizing informal work in this study revealed the different aspects of informal work intertwining with individuals’ social and personal needs. Furthermore, I argued that attention to this area created a broader understanding of the constant pull and push of the market forces vs. an individual’s needs and desires. The gendered nature of informal work, especially the merging of household labour and informal work, calls out for deeper examination of power relations that are imbued in such contexts. Private and public dimensions of paid and unpaid work/learning, and the outcomes of such conceptualizations for immigrant women in particular, I believe, have ongoing relevance to anti-racist feminist studies.
I also discussed the way an immigrant service sector is created and the ways in which gender, race, and class contribute to the formation of this new class in the host society and why this is worthy of further discussion. Various studies from the past three decades have discussed, analyzed, and contrasted this data, uncovering the depth of this continuum of experiences and outlined strong linkages to systemic issues of racism, classism, and gender inequality that continue to exist in immigration policies and programs up to this day. The significance of this inquiry is that it helps expose the procedural outcome of a market economy in which female immigrants of colour become marginalized and have extremely negative experiences. Moreover, it also helps unveil the ways in which these negative experiences and power relations create learning and reflection, resulting in agentive participation in activities that are otherwise mostly not seen as ‘work’.

Informal work as a category, as described in earlier chapters, helped explore networks due to the constant interaction of people’s private, social and economic lives. It also presented a way forward for many of the participants. Informal work, women, and poverty are common topics of discussion at the international level. For example, Losby et al. (2002), Carr and Chen (2001), ILO (2002), and others, all discuss the global nature of informal work and its outcomes. One of the common themes that I identified in this study, as well as in literature on informal work among women in developing countries, is the dynamic of economic redistribution in the household leading to women having increased power. While the types of activities women performed do not differ greatly, there are some activities that are very specific to urban contexts. The main difference between the global picture and this study is the education and previous employment status of the participants, which is partly addressed in the various discussions of race, gender, and class in the post-colonial world in the literature. Informal work at the global
level looks to expand to social enterprises by formalizing and expanding the work. It also exists as part of the national economy and in certain instances can be seen to almost parallel the importance of the formal economy. In Canada, informal work is still largely invisible. It is not recognized in the national account, and data is not collected to sufficiently account for it. Part of the reason most of the participants do not see informal work as valued is this invisibility: they view it as a way to address their immediate issues related to integration in a new country and culture that is intensified with negative employment outcomes. Despite this, the study speaks to the way that informal work is also a way to weave into the fabric of the host society without jeopardizing their private lives. However, they realize it also opens their world to new learning opportunities and it challenges their perceptions; these realizations are not discussed much in the current studies on Canadian immigrants or in literature on informal work in developed countries.

I felt a need to point out the multidimensional aspect of informal work in which immigrant women’s work become visible and in fact can play an important role in helping them find a place in and build their community. Thus, we might say that informal work, for these women, represents the bridge from the privacy of their homes to the community in which they find themselves isolated initially. Although small, the amount of money they make helps them negotiate power relations in their private and public lives.

The participants of this study, and those studied in related literature, indicated that the most common positive outcomes of informal work were that women gained confidence, a sense of self-sustainability, and a feeling that they were making an income contribution to the household. Similar themes were also noted in the discussion of the negative sides of this work: isolation, invisibility, and merging of the productive and reproductive roles. A major difference in negative
outcomes between this study and the data from developing countries is that, in developing countries, there is an additional factor in the competition between formal and informal markets, since both are almost equally placed in society, whereas in this study, which focused on a Canadian urban context, the competition was between the workers within the informal labour market. The competition between informal workers can also be considered a sign of the capitalist market permeating all aspects of economic and social life. The questions for which I do not have answers yet however are as follows: Is it paid work that will make a key difference in the lives of these women who find themselves in unequal relations of power at home and/or outside? Does informal work offer a viable alternative with many otherwise hidden positive effects? What are the implications of informal work for women who considered themselves highly successful educated immigrant women?

The empirical contribution of this study points towards some, but hardly all, of the answers to the questions raised above. This study once again calls attention to the need for better immigration settlement strategies and plans that are inclusive of differences. This study unveiled a series of systemic issues and interconnected nature of these issues informing and influencing the current employment, training, and other practices in the host society; the impact of immigration on highly educated immigrant women and the strong link between informal work, household work, and gender inequality being reinforced in this situation. Importantly, this study also helps reveal the everyday dilemmas and experiences of people who are transnational migrants to this country, regardless of their legal immigration status. At the same time, this research calls additional attention to the need for addressing informal work legitimately so that people, especially women, can be seen as contributors, not as invisible entities on the margins.
The limitation of this study is that many questions still remain almost completely unanswered. The contradictory nature of learning identified in the previous chapters points towards the need for further conceptualization of the subject of learning itself. The individual perceptions of learning, the social expectations of learning and who is defined as the learner and by whom, often do not add up. The deeper ontological question of informal work is identified and analyzed, but questions linger. What is the meaning of ‘work’ generally, and what is the meaning of work in an immigrant society such as Canada? Linked to this are epistemological questions that revolve around how we come to recognize and evaluate work generally, and in the specific case of immigrant women of colour. This is not to suggest the findings discussed in this study are completely partial, but rather it is to suggest further research is needed to identify the long-term outcomes of informal work on immigrant women in Canada. A longitudinal study that covers other urban centers in Canada (or in other places where there is a high incoming number of immigrants) will be beneficial to understanding and comparing experiences and outcomes. Given that the women I spoke to in this research referenced their orientation to family and the future of their children as central to their learning, further information on the experiences of second-generation immigrants and informal work/learning could likewise prove important. For example, future research into second generation immigrants could help trace how and if people’s idea of mainstream culture still remains and whether their hope for their children became fruitful, so that the first generation feels their mission accomplished in their ‘sacrificial work’.

Another big puzzle that remained in the data and literature I reviewed was a definition of transformation that fits all the issues addressed. My data and the studies I reviewed did not offer me an entirely comprehensive definition of what transformation is, and what I did find was that it is highly contextual. Therefore, additional research aimed at developing a more comprehensive
picture of a transformed world is likely needed, despite the fact that this study offered a clear
glimpse of what it may look like for individuals and their social world amongst a particular set of
immigrants, in a particular time and place. This may be of a partial view but what it reveals is the
need for a society where the individual is valued for who they are and have the opportunity to
enjoy the material world without having to fight so desperately for it, against such unequal odds.

Proposal for a Critical Participatory Action Pedagogy

In the context of my research, I learned that there is a need for finding a common language that
can help deconstruct the complexities around the notion of transformation. In my own view, this
will, in turn, may make it a somewhat useful tool for participatory learning and action for
immigrant women who are trying to create community through their informal work. A related
point of interest lies in opening up this dialogue to include feminist academics, community
organizers, and activists who work hard to fight oppression and injustice for all marginalized
people and invite them to build partnerships; for example, forge relationships with immigrant
women in inner-city neighbourhoods, make them a part of their research and writings, and take
their standpoints\(^\text{20}\) into account. These suggestions, I believe, may help develop appropriate
spaces for immigrant women and their experiences to speak for themselves. A practical step to
achieving this is through relationship building and consensus in order to find common themes
that are of interest to both parties. Once this is achieved, a common goal to address social and
systemic issues can be identified and developed as a project or process for the overall
development of immigrant and marginalized people in the city.

\(^{20}\) What I mean by standpoint here is finding ways to include the experiences and voices of women in research and
its dissemination by developing appropriate research methodologies.
Perhaps above all, a critical participatory action pedagogy will need to be further developed if these ideas, and those like them, are to be implemented. What I mean by critical participatory action pedagogy is immigrant women taking ownership of their own development and working together to create an informal educational tool that incorporates their prior learning and experiences. That means, creating opportunities for individual and collective learning through collective action. This in turn will help to develop an emancipatory socio-economic plan that proposes an alternative to the market economy that is coupled with advocacy and training tools to fight oppression and other forms of injustice as placed on them by the hegemonic other.\footnote{‘Other forms’, here is used loosely to include all oppressive conditions, practices, cultures, and people (including male and female).} In this context, what I hope to see is the transformation of the binary nature of the oppressor and oppressed; the creation of a population working and living together with a choice for an alternative worldview and social set up accepting of each other's differences while sharing resources.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Information and Consent

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Department of Sociology & Equity Studies in Education
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252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6

Anti-Poverty Community Organizing & Learning Project

Date: Oct/2012

By signing this form, I agree to participate in a short interview that is the subset of a major research concerning grass-roots learning and organizing activities related to poverty issues. I have been informed that this research hopes to explore: (1) the alternatives ways immigrant women find to help their families to survive economically and socially in Canada; (2) women's views on work, social networks, and what women do to learn about and organize around issues affecting them; and (3) barriers and opportunities for learning and social transformation emerging from immigrant women's work in the informal sector. I am not being compensated for my time. I understand that this project is co-led by Peter k, Professor at the University of Toronto, and Sharon Simpson, Coordinator of Activities at Labour Community Services Toronto.

My participation in this study will consist of a 45 to 60 minute interview during which I will be asked questions about my experiences and insights regarding my participation in informal sector and community work. Some examples of questions I will be asked during the interview are:

1. When did I come to Canada?
2. What did I do before coming to Canada?
3. Did I look for job? Did I take any training?
4. How did I become an informal sector/home based worker?
5. Describe the nature and schedule of my work.
6. How do I define work? How do I do outreach?
7. How do I see this work is making a difference in my life?
8. What are some of the positive and negative aspect of my work? etc
The interview will be recorded (audio only), can be scheduled when I wish, and will take place at
the location of my choice. I can chose at any time to have the researcher turn off the audio
recorder. The transcript of the interview will be sent to me if I choose. I may also be asked later
to participate in a group discussion with other participants who were part of the individual
interviews. I may contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office if I have any questions
about my rights as a participant at email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or phone: 416-946-3273. If I
would like more information on the APCOL project I can contact Peter Sawchuk at 416-978-
0570 or peter.sawchuk@utoronto.ca

I trust that the information I share will remain strictly anonymous. The contents will be used to
assist both researchers and academics to better understand the informal work of Asian immigrant
women in Canada. The contents will be used only for this study, and my confidentiality will be
protected by not revealing my name in any step of the study or resulting publication. The results
will be presented in an overall basis, with all the participants remaining anonymous. The data
collected will inform the doctoral dissertation of Agnes S. Thomas, a doctoral student at the
University of Toronto, under Dr. Peter Sawchuk's supervision. The results will be disseminated in
various forms of publication. The data collected will be kept in a locked office at the University
of Toronto, and will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

My participation in this study will involve providing information about my knowledge and
experience working in the informal sector. I am under no obligation to participate. I may
withdraw from the study at any time. I may refuse to answer any questions. I can also say “I wish
to stop the interview” at anytime and the interviewer will end the interview with no hassle or
pressure. If I choose to withdraw, any data incomplete at the time of withdrawal will not be
considered in the research.

Signed in Toronto this _____ day of ____________, 2012.

Interviewee: _______________________________________

Interviewers: _____________________________
_________________________________

☐ Yes, I want to receive a general summary of the project findings. Please mail it to me at the
following address:

______________________________________________________________

☐ No, I do not want to receive a general summary of the project findings.

Follow the progress of the project on the APCOL web site at www.apcol.ca
Appendix B: Sample Recruitment E-mail

Hi everyone,

This mail comes with a request. I am looking for study participants for my doctoral research at the University of Toronto. As some of you know I am looking particularly for immigrant women from Asian countries who are doing informal (cash based pay) work at home or in the community. If you or any of your friends in the community are willing to participate, would you please let me know. All the information collected will be kept confidential and real names will be removed.

To participate in this study, they must self-identify as immigrant women and have come to Canada between 1998-2009.

If you know anyone could you please send me an e-mail with their contact information. Or ask them to contact me directly on this e-mail or call [phone number]. I will provide them with payment for childcare or other costs associated with them taking time off for this interview. The interview will be minimum twenty minutes to maximum of an hour. I can meet them where it is most convenient for them at a time they suggest.

I thank you for your help and should you need further information please contact me at: [phone number].

Sincerely,
Agnes S Thomas