

Women in Cross-Cultural Transition

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study of the life experiences and self perceptions of new Canadian women living in Calgary, Alberta. The study used participant observation and the findings of the first person open-ended interviews of twenty-four women contacted through the Calgary Immigrant Women's Centre during the period of February 1983-June 1984. The richness of womens' experiences and perceptions available through the life history approach enables one to identify and to describe complex aspects of the transition process of immigrant women and their implications for the concept of self. A number of the experiences of female newcomers in seeking a transition from the "old" to the "new" culture are described. The experiences document some very real connections between the self-images of the women, their quest for a sense of community or belonging, and their identity as Canadians. The use of Mead's interactionist theory is used to explain the importance of opportunities for interaction between women and their new community in order to acquire a revised sense of self.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit une étude basée sur des expériences vécues et des perceptions de soi dans un groupe de Canadiennes qui ont été obtenus à Calgary, Alberta. Les résultats personnels et de l'observation de participantes, au nombre de vingt-quatre, signalées entre février 1983 et juin 1984 par le Calgary Immigrant Women's Centre. L'appréciation de la richesse des expériences et des perceptions féminines que permet l'approche biographique nous met en mesure d'identifier et de décrire certains aspects complexes qui marquent la transition de la "vieille" culture à la "nouvelle" chez l'immigrante. Les expériences racontées portent témoignage des liens entre les perceptions que les femmes ont d'elles-mêmes, l'effort qu'elles font pour appartenir à une communauté et leur identité en tant que Canadiennes. La théorie interactionnelle de Mead sert à expliquer l'importance qu'il y a à procurer à l'immigrante des contacts nombreux et variés avec sa nouvelle communauté afin qu'elle arrive à connaître le sens de sa valeur propre.

Every act of immigration is like suffering a brain stroke. One has to learn to walk again, to talk again to move around the world again, and, probably the most difficult of all, one has to learn to re-establish a sense of community (emphasis added).

Vivian Rakoff, Canadian psychiatrist. Parts of this paper appear in *Vignettes of Life: Experiences of New Canadian Women*. Calgary, Detselig, 1986.

Introduction

This article reports on a pilot study of the life experiences and self perceptions of new Canadian women living in Calgary, Alberta. The study used participant observation and the findings of the first person open-ended interviews of twenty-four women contacted through the Calgary Immigrant Women's Centre during the period of February 1983-June 1984.

The objects of the study were:

1. To describe those life experiences identified by the female immigrants themselves to be important in their lives and to identify their feeling about those experiences (experiences both before and after coming to Canada).

2. To describe and to provide insights into the attitudinal bridging processes used by the female newcomers in

making the transition from the "old" to the "new" culture.

3. To identify and to describe the effect which the bridging processes have had upon the changing concept of self of the women.

Why such a study? There has been a small but growing number of studies about female immigrants in Canada. Such studies as well as the one reported on here, are attempts to rectify the traditional silence surrounding the lives of immigrant women. For example, Roxanna Ng and Judith Ramirez undertook a Toronto based study of working class immigrant housewives (Ng & Ramirez, 1981); Sheila MacCleod Arnopoulos reported on the problems of immigrant women in the Canadian labour force (Arnopoulos, 1979); and Helga Jacobsen has written about immigrant women and the community (Jacobsen, 1979). Milda Disman in an insightful work has compared the process of immigration with the grief process undergone by widows (Disman, 1983). In addition, several task force and governmental bodies have reported on the problems of immigrant women and made recommendations for their resolution (The Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, 1979; The Secretary of State, 1981; The Ministry of State for Multiculturalism, 1984).

The pragmatic and immediate settlement concerns of new immigrants are important ones to be addressed.

However, a challenging sociological concern is one which addresses how newcomers over time are able to carve out for themselves a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and even a sense of "being Canadian." This study addressed this question by seeking insights through the experiences of new Canadian women. In particular, the study allowed the voices of new Canadian women to speak.

What do we know about the nature of Canada's immigrant population? Canada is a country populated by recent immigrants. The census defines an immigrant as a resident of Canada who is not a Canadian citizen by birth (Statistics Canada, 1984). Most immigrants have taken out Canadian citizenship, and most speak English or French although many may cherish another language and another culture.

At the last census in 1981, there were 3.8 million immigrants contributing 16 percent of the total population (The U.S. has 5 percent and Australia has 20 percent). Half of the immigrants were clustered in three large metropolitan areas: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. In Calgary (population almost 600,000), the city of this study, 21.1 percent of the population were immigrants (Statistics Canada, 1984).

Traditionally, more men than women immigrate. However, over the decades the gap in the sex ratio has gradually narrowed so that in 1981, for the first time, immigrant women outnumbered immigrant men. Contributing factors to this convergence include: the increasing mortality of men who immigrated in pre-war years; an increased immigration of the female dependents of men who had immigrated earlier; and recent immigration policy encouraging family re-unification. As the numbers of immigrant women increase, the need to understand the perspective of immigrant women becomes increasingly important.

Canadian immigrants have been found more apt to have university degrees than non-immigrants (Statistics Canada, 1984). Overall 10.5 percent of immigrants had degrees as opposed to 8 percent of non-immigrants. The difference holds for both sexes and for all ages under 65. However, there is also a larger percentage of immigrants than non-immigrants with less than grade nine education, and this was more frequent among immigrant women than immigrant men. Thus new Canadian women represent both polar extremes of the educational spectrum.

Most immigrants came as husband and wife; only 8 percent of immigrant families were headed by lone parents

as compared with 12.5 percent of non-immigrant families. This means that for most families "head of the household" has been defined as male rather than female. It has also meant that it has been the men because of their status as head who have been eligible for government subsidized English language programs.

When did the immigrants come? About 85 percent arrived in Canada since World War II. More than 6 in 10 have come from Europe but this varies by the period of immigration. By the 1960s the pattern of source countries shifted away from Northern and Western Europe toward Southern Europe, Asia, the Caribbean and South America. This shift of countries has implications for women. Although it is not true of many Caribbean women, the women in Southern Europe, Asia, and South America are less likely to have some English upon arrival in Canada than are the women from Northern and Western Europe. The countries of origin of the women in this study included: Vietnam; The Peoples' Republic of China; Hong Kong; Japan; Kenya; Bangladesh; Iceland; Finland; Britain; Hungary; Grenada; Trinidad; Chile.

The Calgary Study

A proposal for the study of the women associated with the Calgary Immigrant Women's Centre was presented and approved by the board of the Centre in the summer of 1982. This Centre is an organization set up by immigrant women to provide support for each other and to help immigrant women establish meaningful lives in Calgary. It is open to all immigrant and other women.

An explanatory letter of the project, including its voluntary participatory nature was sent to the membership in the fall of 1982. Women who had been in Canada for more than two years were telephoned and an interview requested. In addition, the prime researcher and assistant went out to the regular meetings of the Centre and made arrangements with individual women for interviews. There were several refusals, usually because of real difficulties with language, but for several, also because of their heavy multiple role responsibilities: working in paid employment; attending classes; and executing roles as wives and mothers.

Twenty-four women were interviewed in English from one to two hours. All had been in Canada for at least two years. The interview schedule was relatively open-ended in order for the women to talk about that which was important to them. The ages of the women ranged from twenty-two years to seventy-three years, with a median age of thirty-five years. Three women were single; two were

divorced; one was widowed; and the rest were married. The women had come to Canada under all classes of immigration status. Two of the women by the census definition were native to Canada but through their experiences including marriage to immigrants and self definition, thought of themselves as new Canadians.

The interviews were taped and later transcribed; notes also were taken during the interview. In some cases, the typed transcripts reflected very closely the original interviews and were recorded in the first person. In other cases, the interviews were re-constructed, using wherever possible the actual words of the women. Such transcripts were written in the third person with the words of the women recorded in the first person. All of the women were given pseudonyms.

The methodology chosen for this study was qualitative and the data obtained are subjective. As with such kinds of materials, questions and hypotheses tend to arise from the data rather than *a priori*. Support for the hypotheses or for theories derived from the material is often of a fragmentary or delicate nature, providing supporting evidence which is suggestive rather than conclusive. This author, as well as others, has written extensively elsewhere about qualitative methodology and how life history materials may be analyzed (Warren, 1982; Denzin, 1970; Plummer, 1983).

Conceptual Framework

The theme of community is a major theme seen running throughout the life stories of the women. Each life history seems to address the women's quest for a sense of belonging and for associational networks with others.

Why is this sense of community so important for these women? Can they not first make "an adjustment" to life in Canada, and then later be concerned about the search for community? Why does the acquisition of language seem to have important mental health implications for these women?

The social psychologist George Herbert Mead notes that the degree to which the self is developed depends upon the community and the degree to which the individual is able to call out the institutionalized group of responses from the community in her/himself. He says:

Until one can respond to himself as the community responds to him, he does not genuinely belong to that community (Mead, 1956:253).

As Mead's theory suggests, the sense of self, who one is, and the sense of community, are concurrent developments—

developments in which language plays a crucial role. Using the analogy of a baseball game, Mead notes that each player must know the roles of each of the other players and anticipate each of their moves. It is through the internalization of the organized attitudes of the entire group that the individual develops a complete self. This internalization process is much dependent upon interaction between and among people and of course upon language as the medium for the interaction.

Interactionist theory tells us that the self is a social self, one developed through interaction with others: significant others (family and loved ones); and generalized others (a composite of the norms and values expressed by institutions). To the extent that one's significant others and generalized others in the new country differ from one's country of origin, it follows that a different sense of self must also be developed. The newcomer necessarily must interact with those in her new community in order to develop a different sense of community and to achieve a revised or expanded sense of self.

The Findings

Immigration as a Grieving Process

How do immigrant women achieve a sense of community and a sense of self? As their experiences indicate, the transition from one culture to another and the achieving of a satisfactory sense of identity are not easy.

Milda Disman has likened the experiences of being an immigrant to that of being a widow, showing that the patterns of grief experience follow a similar pattern to the stranger's discovery of the new country's culture (Disman, 1983). The following description from the study illustrates this parallel.

Ziddah is a Palestinian who came to Canada in 1971 as a young bride of 19 years. Her vignette shows the process of transition she underwent over time from being dependent and grief-stricken to being independent and fulfilled. She says:

I left the airport there and came here—after a few weeks I was in complete shock. I thought I was dreaming. Everything came all together like getting married, getting to know this new person, this new country—I didn't know what was going on—I missed my parents—so much pain. I felt all alone.

Did your husband have any friends, here?

Not really—he knew some people. We lived with an old lady, a Canadian woman for a while. She was nice but I couldn't speak with her.

Did you know any English?

I had some English—but when my husband when to work, I didn't know what to do.

Did you or he belong to any clubs, or groups?

No we had no close friends—just people we knew. Then I had my first baby; less than a year after coming here, which was good.

Have things changed for you since that bad time?

Gee, I hope so. It took a long time, actually. It was a good six years before I stopped feeling lonely—my son was six and my daughter three—I did a lot of thinking, I would do my housework and sit and do nothing. I wasn't happy with myself the only person I could talk to about my kids was at the Health Clinic. A woman there gave me a book and I think that is what really changed it for me a book about life and kids. She said kids need lots of love just like us. It stuck in my mind give them love and enjoy it. It really stuck in my mind. Then I started taking care of myself; I started to exercise at home every night (Exercises from the Readers Digest). I started looking better and feeling better. I started reading magazines.

Then the kids started school. I started to look around for a part-time job. I filled out applications and went all around looking for a job all over the place and finally got a job close by.

Did you know how to drive?

I didn't then, but I do now. I got my license a year ago. When I first came here, I let my husband try and teach me. It is not a good idea to let your husband teach you. Then I became too big behind the wheel—I said—forget it who wants to learn! I tried again later and gave up. Then last year, I said, to heck with it I'm going to school to learn to drive I have to learn. When I got my license it was the Best Day Oh Boy! I'm very thankful to him (tester) because I passed. It was a good feeling to accomplish something.

Then I started to university because I have lots of time on my hands. Before I said, 'I'm so bored, I have

nothing to do I've vacuumed three times.' But now, I even enjoy being a housewife as a change from the responsibility of reading. I enjoy everything now.

The Transitional Bridges

What are the processes or transitional "bridges" which the women use in order to make the transition of sense of self from one culture to another? These bridges may be viewed as situational perspectives, as attitudes adopted by the women on the basis of their experiences. The concept of situational perspectives has been well described by Howard Becker who tended to view them as more short-term attitudes than is probably possible for these women (Becker, 1961).

1. *The Continuity Bridge of Familiar Persons.*

Disman has indicated that the original culture provides the framework and meaning from which an immigrant can approach and learn the new culture (Disman, 1983). Role continuity between the two cultures probably is a major structural device allowing such a bridging to occur. The vignettes of Salima, an Indian from Kenya, and Catherine from the Netherlands illustrate the stabilizing influence extended family or familiar work colleagues are for a sense of continuity. They also illustrate the way such bridges can build a buffer against the negative effects on self of not having full access to language and the new community. Salima is 45 years of age, an Indian and a native of Kenya. She and her husband and two children have been in Canada for nine years. They chose Calgary because both sets of their parents were here, and now all of their family except one of her sisters, lives in Alberta. Salima's husband has been unable to work because of a serious illness. Her daughter, too, has had a serious illness and was out of school for a period.

Nevertheless, despite these illnesses, and especially that of the husband, the family is happy and economically viable. Salima herself reaches out to other women of all faiths to assist them when she can. The family businesses (motels, stores, etc.) are run as a co-operative amongst the extended family and appear to have enabled Salima's family to cope economically with two severe family illnesses. Thus the extended family model appears to be one which ensures a successful immigration experience. Not only does this model provide economically for its members, but it also acts as a cultural bridge, allowing a thread of familiarity of community through its family members to the new country. Do other immigrants bring a sense of continuity with them? Catherine came from the Netherlands with her husband and sons several years ago. Her

husband was transferred from his company in Holland to a branch in Calgary. In response to the question "How did you meet your friends," she said:

We came over with four families, from one company. Everybody almost at the same time. Two came in May and the other two came in June, and we met once before everybody moved over.

So you kind of looked after each other?

Yes, especially in the beginning. Now we are farther away from each other, mentally, because everybody makes his own friends, at his work, at school for the kids, and so on, but we still meet once in awhile.

In this case, the company may be seen as playing a similar role to that of the extended family. The company has provided a language and cultural continuity amongst the four families. Furthermore, if the economy worsens in Calgary, the company will ensure that Catherine and her family are transferred back to the Netherlands.

2. The Traditional Female Role Bridge

For some women, a sense of continuity and sense of self can be achieved by viewing their present life in Canada as but a continuation of their traditional roles in their country of origin. The smoothness of this transition is assisted by their perception that their lives as women now are not much different from the lives of other women here or elsewhere. In a study of working class women in Britain, it was found that a source of satisfaction for many of them, too, was a belief that their lives were not much different from those of women anywhere in the world (Warren, 1979). Two vignettes, those of Betty and of Yoko, illustrate this traditional female role bridge.

Betty immigrated from Iceland three years ago with her husband and three daughters. Her husband works in construction. She worked in a fashion boutique in Iceland and now works as a waitress in a department store. She knew English before immigrating. Life in Iceland and life in Canada seem very similar to her. She says:

Life in Iceland is not so different...it is the same as here in Calgary...so I like it here. When I first moved here then also I felt quite at home...there was no problem...no problem at all. I think that happened because (also), I know English so you see I can talk to anybody here, do my own work, enjoy with my family...no problem at all.

From Betty's perspective, there is little discontinuity between the old and the new life. Her knowledge of English no doubt contributed to this perception and aided her in a relatively smooth transition.

However, in addition, it may well be that Betty's somewhat limited view of the lives of other women around the world is also an asset in helping her achieve satisfaction with her new life. She says her life here and in Iceland followed "pretty much the same routine":

Wake up, clean house, cook supper, do work for husband, kids...*isn't that what women are doing all over the world really?* (emphasis added)

While her observation that her life is not much different from that of all other women in the world is not true necessarily from other perspectives, her perspective does allow her to feel content and aids her transition. As W.I. Thomas has noted in his famous dictum, "If men (and women) believe situations to be true, they are true in their consequences" (Thomas, 1970).

Yoko is married and lives with her husband and two children. They came to Canada three years ago. She is Japanese but her husband was a Chinese immigrant in Japan. She does not work for pay in Canada but was a secretary at a university in Japan and has specialized training in pre-school teaching. Her husband works as a receptionist in a hotel where his fluency in Japanese and Chinese are an asset.

Like Betty, Yoko sees her life here as much the same as in Japan except that Calgary is less crowded. She enjoys life here and wants to stay. As with Betty, Yoko sees her life as not much different from other women. She says:

Everybody's life is the same...even if they come from another country.(emphasis added)

Again, Yoko's perception of her life as similar to her life in Japan and similar to other women provides a good bridge for a continuity of self-image.

The only "little problem" Yoko sees concerns her lack of English. She says "I can't even watch TV or read newspapers just because I can't understand English...this is bad." However, she does not really mind it nor does she think it a big problem because "I can always learn English."

On the basis of the experiences reported by other Canadian immigrants, if they do not learn the language,

women such as Yoko, may find themselves eventually in the agonizing position of being rewarded with alienation from their husbands and children.

3. *The Burning of Traditional Bridges*

Women like Yoko may be protected from the need to learn English at least for awhile by their husbands and family. Others, such as Bach-Mai, an unmarried Vietnamese refugee, 27 years old, who has been here for three years, has no such temporary protection. Unlike the women seen previously, she has little role continuity with her past life and no buffer to protect her self from the new language problem.

In her vignette, Bach-Mai can be seen breaking off relationships with Vietnamese friends in Calgary, and also breaking away from the traditional role expectations of her parents. The burning of such traditional bridges is not without much anguish as her vignette illustrates. However, this is the cost which many young women feel must be paid in order to learn English.

Bach-Mai lives with her two younger brothers in Calgary; her parents are in Vietnam. She is presently on social assistance and adamant about spending this time learning the language and developing some job skills. The following excerpt sees Bach-Mai in the process of separating herself from Vietnamese friends in order to spend time on her studies:

I am very busy in my own life so I have no time to meet or talk to my friends. I don't even want to because most of their lifestyles are very different. When other immigrants from Vietnam come to Canada, they only want (a) job or money. They don't bother about studying or education, not even learning to speak English. But I do [want to study and learn English], so I can't talk to these other Vietnamese.

Bach-Mai's desire to learn English is flamed by a negative self image. She says:

I am different from my friends. They don't care if by not learning English they feel confused or lost, as long as they get money. But I do I very much mind. I don't want money and feel lost always or feel bad as someone who is foolish. I want to live a better life too.

The process of separation of herself from the expectations of her parents Bach-Mai sees as necessary in order to

achieve a sense of a new self which she can respect. She notes:

In our country most are old fashioned. We obey our parents and our decisions are always made by parents. Parents keep telling me to get married. But now I won't because (then) I will be totally dependent. I want to be totally independent, then get married. I want to work hard, save money, then live a really good life. I want to make my brother (an) engineer. I want also my own job training.

In the meantime, Bach-Mai reports a feeling of loss of community. She says:

When I talk to my mother (on the phone) I feel sad. We are totally disappointed, totally isolated. We are confused. People are not always friendly. My next door neighbour does not know me. Sometimes I want to talk. But who do I talk to? Is this happiness? Happiness for what?

George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1956) reminds us that language, and a communication of the symbols of that language with others is what makes possible our sense of self. Thus, the loss of a language may mean a loss of the sense of self. Bach-Mai knew no English before she came and her written language as well differs from the European script. For Bach-Mai and women like her, the loss of shared symbols must be particularly acute. This it seems is as important for mental health reasons as for more practical reasons that women such as Bach-Mai have ready access to English as a Secondary Language (ESL) programs as well as opportunities for practice of their English in sympathetic and supportive settings.

4. *Support Group Bridges*

While the availability of ESL programs are of primary importance for immigrant women, the availability of social opportunities for the practice of English and for a sense of rapport with others are perhaps of equal importance. The vignettes of Mona and of Rozsa illustrate how easily one's self confidence can slip when opportunities to interact in English are not present.

Mona, a Lebanese woman, works as an office cleaning woman. She learned her English by talking with other cleaning women who were Spanish and Italian. She has not been eligible for government sponsored ESL programs because English is not mandatory for her unskilled labour. Yet, Mona, who has four children, finds herself

isolated from adult company especially while separated from her husband. Thus, while she would benefit from ESL classes, opportunities for more informal gatherings as well would help her increase her confidence in her self.

Rozsa, a Hungarian woman who has been in Canada for three years, is concerned that neither she nor her daughters have made Canadian friends. She also expresses concern over her English and having to work for her husband as she was unable to find work for which she was trained. Clearly, her confidence in her self has been shaken. When asked whether she thinks her husband's English is better than hers, she replies:

No, it isn't better, but he has a courage which I haven't. I'm afraid. I know so many men have a courage. They know they have the responsibility for their family, and they don't care what other people think about their English. I'm afraid all the time.

While Rozsa could benefit from ESL classes, she would probably benefit more from socialization opportunities in order to increase her confidence and to re-affirm her sense of self.

5. *The (Negative) Discriminatory Bridge and the Over-Compensatory Bridge*

Mary's story illustrates that even after a long time, some immigrants still do not feel comfortable with the language and never achieve a real sense of community. Her vignette suggests that Mary senses discrimination against her as an immigrant. This perception probably acts as a negative bridge or deterrent to allowing the growth of the new self, and hence explains her inability to obtain a sense of community.

Mary came from Yugoslavia seventeen years ago with her husband. They have two children. Although acknowledging that if she ever left Canada she would miss the car, the house, and her job ("they are the most important things in my life"), nevertheless she says, "I do not feel happy in Canada." She expresses her sense of longing for home in Yugoslavia:

That was my real home. All my friends live there (in Pula). We all speak that same language. It is really a different feeling. I can't explain.

When I am in my homeland, I know the language and I can easily talk to everybody without any problems. Life is much easier in Pula. I also miss the

ocean and our beautiful beach. I miss the warm weather. I find Canada very cold, even after all these 17 years. I still find Canada very cold and miss the warm weather.

For Mary, it seems likely that her immigration to Canada brought with it a lowering of self esteem, for she says:

I feel less important here in this country. That's how I feel as an immigrant. Canadians feel immigrants are less important than they are. They are always correcting our language and our accents. They just don't like our lifestyle and I think this makes many problems.

Of course a lot of things can be done to solve these typical immigrant problems. Immigrants can improve their language, mainly their accents, by further studies, going to school, taking training. But you know what, *I think that even if I learned good accents it might not still be enough for Canadians to accept me.* (emphasis added)

Did other women sense discriminatory attitudes? At least four of the women mentioned incidences. For example, Ziddah, a Palestinian reports:

It was so disappointing. I went around and made all those applications and no one called. I felt so badly because they hired Canadians after me, *that I was too dark.* (emphasis added)

Also, a woman from Pakistan, Mosheda, says:

I've seen a lot that I like in Canada, the freedom to speak your mind, the political freedom, that kind of thing. And I've seen a lot that I don't like, the alienation of people, the uncaring attitudes. *I've seen a lot of racism there too.* (emphasis added)

To what extent are such perceptions based upon an objective social reality? Participant observation also revealed discriminatory attitudes toward immigrants. During the interview period, the Centre was participating in activities at a Women's Summer Festival. This writer was involved in leading a group discussion amongst immigrant women to which non-immigrant women were invited to listen. The first question each woman was asked was: What did you like most about your country of origin? Non-immigrant participants were invited to hand in questions anonymously. One comment was: "If you liked your country so much why did you leave?" Such a ques-

tion, it was felt, contained veiled hostility toward the immigrant situation.

In some interviews, especially with refugee women, a reluctance to be critical about anything was sensed. While such a perspective may have been that there indeed was nothing to be critical about, an alternative explanation is that their experiences in Canada have led them to believe that talking about the "negative," including their feelings of homesickness, may only alienate them from Canadians and hence further jeopardize their sense of inclusion into Canadian life. Support for this interpretation is given by Disman's work in which she cites the case of a wife of a Soviet dissident invited to speak. When the women expressed her sadness at the loss of her native country, it was misinterpreted by her audience as a sign of her lack of appreciation of being accepted in Canada.

Further evidence of discrimination is the perception that as an immigrant one has to work harder than non-immigrants in order to achieve similarly. The vignette of Lisa, a Finnish woman, illustrates the use of a successful overcompensatory bridge which has enabled her to achieve ...a sense of acceptance and community in Canada.

Lisa, aged 40 years, came to Canada with her husband and son from Finland nineteen years ago. She has always worked and especially loves working as a practical nurse in nursing homes. Never did she encounter problems finding a job and says that she always had confidence in herself and enjoyed working with people. Nevertheless, she reports that in order to succeed as an immigrant, one has to be better than the others. She says:

In order to survive in a new country with the others, you need to really do better, to show your best instincts. You never can criticize and you must give them no reason to criticize you. You need to be better because you are an immigrant. I shouldn't really say immigrant any more because I've been here for 19 years. No one could ever say anything about my work. I gave them no reason to.

Lisa, even with her self confidence and industriousness sensed the need to "overcompensate" on the job. For her, this overcompensation seems to have created for her a successful transition bridge as she has made a number of friends, Canadian as well as Finnish.

6. *The Positive and Pragmatic Bridge*

Anna's vignette is a tribute to the tenacity and pragmatism of many immigrant women enabling them to bridge discriminatory areas and to achieve a sense of community.

Anna is a Hungarian Jew, 58 years of age. She has two married children in Calgary. She was widowed in 1979 under tragic circumstances, and an engagement was terminated recently because she was not a Moslem.

Anna was a prisoner of war in Auschwitz, where she met her husband: she was a prisoner of war and he was a Hungarian soldier in Hitler's army. Both her parents died in the camp but her husband took her home with him after the war and married her.

Anna and her husband immigrated to England to escape from the Communists (the children came later in an underground operation), and finally to Canada in order to get an excellent education at low cost for their children (both children now have university degrees). In 1979 the family moved from Montreal to Calgary. Here her husband persuaded her to put her small savings into a deli. At first the business did very well, but then it fell off. Anna's views of why this happened is that:

We did note that the other shopkeepers were mainly German and that the community supporting the centre were also German. They found out that I was a Jew and that Germans hate the Jews. They stopped people from coming.

In November 1979 my husband got a call to go and see his bank manager. He went and never came back. It was the last time I saw him. He killed himself. He was a very proud man and he felt shame for himself. The police found a letter written in Hungarian in his pocket to his son — in it he said the bank manager put pressure on him to pay the loan and he felt very old and that he did it (killed himself) to make it easier for me. Afterwards, many people said, 'Why did you not come before, we would have helped.'

Anna had a very difficult time because the deli was in her name too. Thus she inherited her husband's debts. However, one of the first things Anna did following her husband's death was to sign up for driving lessons. She says, "My husband never wanted me to drive but I knew I needed to drive."

The symbolic meaning to women of being able to drive has been discussed at length elsewhere by this writer (Warren, 1979). For women, being able to drive allows the self to feel it is in control and "in the driver's seat" of one's own ego. Several other women in the study also mentioned the importance to them of learning to drive. In a country such as Canada where distances are long, the

climate often inhospitable, and public transportation often poor, the women who can drive (for groceries, taking children to doctor, etc.) is one whose self feels much less dependent upon husband and friends. She experiences a sense of freedom, independence and power. Anna says, when asked how she felt about driving her husband's taxi after his death:

Feel? Well, at first I was scared, then I said, 'You see — I made it and you never let me do it.' I now can come and go. I have real woman freedom. There is nothing I cannot do, if I want to — well, not a real miracle. You have to be realistic, you have to put your mind to it. I never was taught to sew, or knit, or crochet or do needle point. I learned it all on my own.

My brain is still working, it is like a small machine, it doesn't rust. Every night for at least one-half hour before I go to bed, I read.

What is Anna's perspective on life which enables her to survive and to overcome all obstacles? She seems to have a faith and confidence in herself and her abilities and a tremendous resilience and resourcefulness, refusing to be discouraged, or embittered. For example, when she took the body of her husband to the synagogue to be buried, she was told he could not be buried there because he had been cremated. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Fine, if you don't want us, others will." She is a pragmatist in that all her life she has learned skills when she needed them. For example, in Britain, she taught herself to sew (and supported the family by sewing) after seeing a billboard with a sewing machine on it. All of these attitudes of Anna together create a perspective which encouraged her to take action. Being unafraid to take action means that she can create positive bridges for herself into any culture by going around the road blocks of discrimination and rejection.

The Achieving of a Canadian Identity

Yvonne's vignette is interesting in that it allows one to speculate on the process by which one obtains a sense of Canadian identity. Yvonne is 35 years of age, has two children, and is French Canadian by birth with North American Indian ancestry on her father's side. She is presently divorced from her Nigerian husband. Although she has always lived in Canada, it is only now that she felt she was a Canadian.

The case of Yvonne suggests that the mere act of being born in Canada does not necessarily confer *the feeling of*

citizenship although it does confer *the fact of* citizenship. The vignette strongly suggests a link between a negative self-image, a lack of sense of community, and the absence of a sense of Canadian identity.

self image → sense of community → Canadian identity

Yvonne believes that her inferiority complex as a child and young adult was responsible for her never feeling that she belonged, which in turn negated her sense of a Canadian identity. If a poor self-image of a woman born with citizenship prevents the achievement of a Canadian identity, to what extent might a lowered self-image due to immigration deter the process of acquisition of a Canadian identity?

Secondly, one can ask to what extent was the Nigerian community in Toronto responsible for teaching Yvonne what it felt like to belong to a community? The warmth and open-heartedness of communities from third world countries may well be antidotes to the alienation and loneliness of individuals in industrialized countries. Thus for Yvonne, the feeling of belonging experienced in the Canadian Nigerian culture may well have prepared her to achieve a similar sense of community in the larger Canadian culture. Yvonne says:

I've just newly felt like a Canadian. We were really, really isolated when I was growing up because my father had encephalitis which affects your mind. He had another disease which he'd got in World War II beside the encephalitis. He had a big skin disease which was always painful and itchy. It was really, really rough for him. Because of this disease, he'd shoo people away from the home. Like if you had a friend, you'd soon lose him. He'd say something, and the person would be so embarrassed he'd never come back.

We were so isolated too from our relatives, and no-one would come near the home. And there was no-one in the area who was my age. Why I didn't feel much like a Canadian? Because I was so isolated all the time. Also, I had an inferiority complex so I did not reach out to anybody. I was always a loner. I never went to weddings or baby showers. I didn't even know what they were like until I was completely grown up and in my twenties. By the time I was twenty I left because my mother had remarried a fellow who didn't really want any kids. So we all left

her home. I went to Toronto because I couldn't get a job in Windsor.

I was sort of a loner (for those four years in Toronto before marriage). I didn't have any friends and I wasn't reaching out, so I wasn't really into anything Canadian. And then I married at 25 or something like that. Then I was with Nigerian people for seven years! Most of our friends were Nigerian, and I really sunk into that culture. There are a lot of good things about that culture other than the fact that they need women's liberation—a very unfeminist culture!

So, the last three years are the only time I've had any Canadian friends or contact. So I'm really liking Canada. I don't know if I want to leave it. Like, my gentleman friend that I've known for two years is from Malawi and is going back, and I'm trying to make a decision. I don't really want to leave. I *like* Canada, I *like* Canadians that I've met. I find it a dynamic society with so many things going on with the women's movement and everything. I don't know whether I could go back to a very unfeminist culture. I'm struggling with those ideas right now.

I'm just newly becoming a Canadian. I've been here all the time but not really in heart or spirit. I feel that I belong for the first time in my life. I never felt that before. With the Nigerians, it was sort of like an extended family atmosphere. I taught them to sew, and they taught me to cook. For example, if I had a party for my kids, people would just show up to help. You didn't have to ask. And that's the way it is. And people just come. They don't phone and say they're coming, they just come. And you cook for them when they come.

Sometimes we'd go shopping and it would be close to dinner and we'd be famished and we'd just drop in on somebody. And they'd just cook! Or they'd have it cooked if it was around dinner time. Their type of food is like a stew and it can always be shared or added. I got used to that type of life. That was the only time that I ever felt I belonged, was when I was with those people. Up to that time I was always alone. So it was hard to leave them, too, because I was leaving my family. (Because of the culture?) Because of the culture. I was leaving friends, the first time in my life I'd had friends.

Summary and discussion

A number of the experiences of female newcomers in seeking a transition from the "old" to the "new" cultures have been described. The experiences document some very real connections between the self-images of the women, their quest for a sense of community or belonging, and their identity as Canadians. The use of Mead's interactionist theory explains the importance of opportunities for interaction between the women and their new community in order to acquire a revised sense of self. Several aspects of the transition process have been emphasized.

First, learning the new language becomes of major importance for the emergence of the new or revised self-image of the women. Other studies, such as those of Arnoopoulos (1979) also stressed the importance of a revised policy on federal government training policies, one enabling unskilled immigrant women more access to language training. While such studies have focused upon this need as important for labour market choices and for awareness of rights, the Calgary study demonstrates the importance of such programs for mental health reasons as well. An argument can be made that such programs are of special importance even when the women are in the unskilled labour force or unemployed: language is the only vehicle through which a new self identity as Canadian is possible.

Secondly, descriptive evidence to support Disman's contention that immigration may be compared to a grieving process was presented. Thirdly, a number of different situational perspectives or bridging attitudes used by the women to assist in their process of transition were identified and described: the continuity provided by the presence of extended family and colleagues; the traditional female role bridge; the burning of traditional bridges; support group bridges; discriminatory bridges and overcompensatory bridges; positive and pragmatic bridges.

Fourthly, in examining the bridging attitudes used by the women, it becomes apparent that discrimination and racial attitudes as well as poor language skills contributed to the lowered self-esteem of some of the women after immigration. Fifthly, the identification of other causes of poor self-esteem by a woman born in Canada was presented. Her vignette clearly demonstrates the relationship between a poor self-image (from whatever cause) and the difficulty of achieving a sense of Canadian identity. The isolation from other adults in the community, the demeaning attitudes of family members, the loss of confidence from an extensive illness or from a difficult marriage, and

the difficulties of obtaining employment (of self or spouse) are all visible causes for lowered self-esteem within the women's life stories.

Do not male immigrants have similar negative experiences? It may well be that some men have had some similar experiences. However, for women there may be additional reasons for a negative self-image arising from their experiences. Being female and being an immigrant has been described as experiencing "the double whammy" of discrimination which could be called "the triple whammy" when race is considered. Many of the women also come from countries where the view of women is even less egalitarian than in Canada. Furthermore, women in many cultures are socialized to be more dependent upon the views of others than are men (Hoffman, 1975; Horner, 1972). Thus immigrant women may be more affected than men by the negative discriminatory views of others pertaining to women and immigrants.

In addition, immigrant women often find themselves in Canada as having similar home responsibilities but with less help and less female adult companionship than in their countries of origin. The men's response to their own trauma of immigration and its accompanying self-image uncertainty is often for them to enforce more tightly the traditional roles of women than in their country of origin in order to regain a sense of control. Thus women may find their movements more restricted to the home than in their countries of origin but without the compensatory companionship of other adult females.

The life histories also indicate that ethnic clubs usually are not seen by the women as responsive to the needs of women in that they have a more masculine climate. While religious institutions may be helpful for some of the women, for other women they are viewed as conservative forces unable to support the real needs of women.

One can thus predict the probability that the self-image of female newcomers will be more precarious than it is for their male counterparts. However, the governmental policy of subsidizing ESL programs only for the "head of the household" has meant that males rather than females usually have had access to a major resource for improving one's self-image. What recommendations can be made for improving the self-image of women? First, opportunities and access to language classes should be at least as readily available to women as they are for men. Secondly, appropriate logistical considerations such as fees, day-care, location, and time of classes all need to address the reality of the lives of women. Thirdly, neighborhood groups and

parenting groups can give a purpose for the practice of one's English as well as opportunities for learning that one is not alone with a problem. The presence of strong women such as Lisa and Anna in such programs could contribute models of real strength and experience for younger women. Fourthly, programs including assertiveness and communication skills designed specifically to improve the self-image of immigrant women need to be offered in tandem with language programs. Fifthly, more opportunities for new Canadian women to meet with other segments of the community with positive non-discriminating attitudes could enrich the lives of all Canadians. Lastly, public relations endeavors to increase the public awareness of the present as well as the potential contributions of new Canadian women to the fabric of Canadian life need to be continued and encouraged.

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