



Taking an Intersectional Approach: Immigrant Women Language Teachers' Lived Experience of Identity

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ABSTRACT

This article explores skilled immigrant women language teachers' lived experience of identity through an intersectional feminist lens. It examines how women teachers speak about themselves and their lives as immigrants and aims to understand the complex implications of identity and power relations by focusing on intersectional understanding of inequities. Data was generated through in-person and virtual individual interviews with six participants living and working across Canada. The findings revealed the following main challenges and ongoing barriers: discrimination, overqualification, financial limitations, a lengthy process of re-credentialing and professional reintegration, and insufficient government support. Furthermore, this study sheds light on how heteronormative frameworks pervade immigrant women's personal and professional lives, intersecting with their identities vis-à-vis gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and English as a second language. These categories collectively and individually present systemic barriers and sites of oppression that negatively impact an already marginalized minority group—internationally highly qualified immigrant women language teachers.

Keywords: Canadian workforce, discrimination, feminist intersectionality, skilled immigrants, women language teachers

INTRODUCTION

Skilled immigrants—including English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers—are admitted to Canada based on a points system that considers their education, language proficiency, work experience, age, and adaptability (Government of Canada, 2021). When assessed, professionals accepted into the country as skilled immigrants are assigned a National Occupation Classification (NOC) code, corresponding with the number of jobs per Canada’s official job classification system. This means that they are deemed qualified to fill gaps in the Canadian workforce and do jobs that they are internationally university-trained for. However, a significant number of these foreign-trained professionals encounter challenges associated with entering the Canadian market, including foreign credentialing, gaining local teaching experience, and finding a meaningful place in mainstream society (Beynon et al., 2004; Niyubahwe et al., 2013; Reitz, 2005; Shan, 2009). In addition, recertification varies between Canadian provinces, often leading to the overqualification and deskilling of immigrants (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Subedi & Rosenberg, 2016), which explains that “highly skilled immigrants drive taxicabs and pizza delivery vans” (Cervatiuc, 2009, p. 255). Gender differences are particularly significant for skilled immigrant women, whose unemployment rate is almost double that of their Canadian-born counterparts (7.2% versus 4.3% in 2017) (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). For racialized immigrant women, systemic biases manifest as racist behaviors and language-based discrimination in hiring, advancement, and everyday life in the workplace (Gibb & Hamdon, 2010).

While some scholarship investigates issues related to ESL learners (Dagenais, 2020; Higgins, 2015; Norton, 2019), current research lacks a focus on immigrant women language teachers—the largest group of language teachers in Canada (Walsh et al., 2011). Furthermore, the pay gap between men and women—“the feminization of poverty” (Haraway, 1991, p. 167)—calls for a focus on women, whose experiences need to be understood as different from those of male immigrants (Ng & Shan, 2010; Norton, 2013; Sadeghi, 2008). Given their outsider and peripheral status to the Canadian workforce, immigrant women teachers need extra support to compete for the same jobs as their Canadian-born and educated peers and gain access to new opportunities. To that end, this paper reports on interviews with women-identified language teachers in Canada through, where possible, an intersectional approach. The following section reviews the research literature on language teachers and identity before introducing the study and its participants.

LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY (LTI)

Scholars in applied linguistics conceptualize language teacher identity (LTI) as three-layered (e.g., Leibowitz, 2017; Matsuda, 2017; Richards, 2017).

Leibowitz (2017) envisions LTI as being made up of individual, teacher, and language teacher identity, while Richards (2017) discusses personal (i.e., who the teacher is and how they perceive themselves and others), professional (i.e., a teacher's language proficiency and content knowledge), and social identity (i.e., people and interactions). Richards's three-layered LTI is echoed by Matsuda (2017), who distinguishes between psychological (i.e., a teacher's self-image), professional (i.e., in close relation with the material world), and social (i.e., a teacher's perceptions of the world and those around them). Other scholars, on the other hand, explore LTI through the lens of time and space (Block, 2017; Donato, 2017; Hadfield, 2017; Kubanyiova, 2017; Mercer, 2017; Norton, 2013; Oda, 2017). Norton (2013), for example, theorizes identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 4). Similarly, Block (2017) and Donato (2017) concur that identity develops in time through a process of "creatively engaging with, responding to, and renegotiating the self" (Donato, 2017, p. 28).

The construct of time also informs Hadfield's (2017) and Kubanyiova's (2017) understanding of LTI as consisting of the actual self (i.e., who the teacher is), ideal self (i.e., who the teacher wants to become), ought-to self (i.e., others' expectations from the teacher), and feared self (i.e., who the teacher is afraid of becoming). Kubanyiova (2017) highlights the benefits of teachers imagining their future persona, while Oda (2017) emphasizes the interconnectedness between a teacher's past experiences and their present and future teaching practices. Finally, informed by the complexity theory, Mercer (2017) proposes a hybrid LTI between self-efficacy (i.e., a teacher's belief in themselves and their ability to succeed) and self-concept (i.e., a cognitive dimension of self-evaluation and an affective dimension of task evaluation). Complexity theory aligns with the time and space approach to LTI in that it views the self as "a never-ending ... nonlinear process" (Mercer, 2017, p. 95) and acknowledges that individuals undergo emotional changes across time and space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study took an intersectional feminist approach, which begins from a feminist standpoint that places women (and women-identifying individuals) as the central matter of concern. The intersectional feminist approach we take here is informed first and foremost by the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who demonstrated how different forms of oppression intersect across race, ethnicity, gender, sex, disability, and sexuality. One entanglement that happens when using a feminist intersectional lens is between a structural understanding of power (and thereby oppression) and a focus on identity. As Cho et al. (2013) put it: "Intersectionality is inextricably linked to an analysis

of power, yet one challenge to intersectionality is its alleged emphasis on categories of identity versus structures of inequality” (p. 797). While it certainly is the case in this article that we are examining how women language teachers speak about themselves and their lives, we endeavor to connect back to their stated (and very much “in time”) identities concerning broader categories of inequities. Such an approach in this study also allows us to see in more nuanced ways how women language teachers constantly renegotiated their positionalities about a move from a more ‘insider’ status to being ‘outside’ in the context of immigration. An intersectional approach also allows us to see how heteronormative frameworks are very much in circulation for many women language teachers, which is left out entirely in the above literature review.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was generated by two individual interviews per participant of up to four hours total; for this paper, however, we discuss only data generated by the initial interviews of up to two hours. Informed by an intersectional feminist approach, the interviews asked participants questions about their past and present lived experience of identity—with a focus on gender, physical appearance, skin colour, way of dressing and wearing their hair, and accent—and challenges and accomplishments as immigrants in terms of relocating, re-credentialing, professional reintegration, finding a sense of belonging, adapting to life in Canada, and plans for the future.

Specifically, this paper focuses on six (see Table 1) out of the 17 participants who agreed to the individual interviews. The rationale behind selecting these six women is that: a) their ages represent the overall ages of the participants (i.e., from 38 to 59 years old), b) their home countries cover different geographical locations, such as Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, South, and Central America, c) the time spent in Canada is representative of the overall immigration arrivals (one woman arrived last year, another one has lived in Canada for two years, and others have been here for 10, 20, and 30 years), d) like all the other participants, these women live across different provinces in Canada (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario), e) they were teachers in their home countries, like the vast majority of the participants, f) most of them are satisfied with their current teaching positions, and g) their experiences showcase the most significant challenges observed across the interviews. Since data collection was conducted post-pandemic (January to March 2023), the ubiquity of using Zoom was twofold. On the one hand, it allowed for a more extensive reach of potential participants; on the other hand, it impacted the in-person researcher-participant connectivity. For instance, one of the participants residing in Vancouver—the exact location as the researcher—opted for an initial in-person interview and an online second interview, which worked better with her schedule.

Table 1*Overview of Background Information: Six Immigrant Women Language Teacher Participants*

Nickname	Age	Home country	Ethnicity	Year of Arrival	Province or Territory of Residence	Job in the home country	Job in Canada	Satisfied with job
Magda	46	The Philippines	Asian	2012	Calgary (AB)	Associate professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINC instructor • Employment workshop facilitator • Curriculum developer 	√
Veronica	57	Serbia	Caucasian	1996	Vancouver (BC)	Elementary school English teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINC instructor • Assistant department head and coordinator in the LINC program 	√
Liz	50	The Netherlands	Caucasian	2005	Saint John (New Brunswick)	High school teacher	Online content developer for the LINC national learning platform	√
Glory	59	Nassau (The Bahamas)	Black	2011	First Nations Reserve (ON)	English professor	High school English teacher	√ X
Anna Silva	46	Brazil	White	2021	Richmond (BC)	Manager for curriculum development course design	CELTA tutor freelancer	
Vitalina	38	Ukraine	Caucasian	2022	Saskatoon (SK)	ESL teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual translator • Tutor • Teacher volunteer • Youth coordinator (2 months) 	√

Participants

Here, we provide brief profiles of each participant to better document their multiple (and shifting) identities as language instructors. To protect their identity, we asked them to choose pseudonyms.

Magda is a woman of color who came as a skilled immigrant from the Philippines in 2012. She lives with her husband and daughter in Calgary, Alberta. In her country of origin, she was an associate professor (tenure), whereas, in Canada, she juggles three jobs: language instructor, employment workshop facilitator, and curriculum developer.

Veronica, originally from Serbia, came to Canada with her husband as a skilled immigrant in 1996, hoping for a better life. They live with their two daughters in Richmond, British Columbia. A former elementary school English teacher in her home country, Veronica works as assistant department head and coordinator with a prestigious non-profit organization catering to newcomer language learners.

Previously a high school teacher and currently an online content developer, Liz, a skilled immigrant from the Netherlands, relocated in 2005 to Saint John, New Brunswick, where she lives with her female partner and three children. Liz is aware that being white and coming from a developed country like the Netherlands, “where there is a good education system in place and a country whose education system Canadians value, definitely was a huge advantage” (interview, January 27, 2023).

Glory and her husband made Canada their second home in 2011. Originally from Nassau, the Bahamas, she lives on a remote First Nations reserve in Northern Ontario. She identifies English as her second and Creole as her first language. She also identifies as a black woman. Glory, an associate professor in her home country, taught linguistics and English for 25 years; in Canada, she teaches high school English to Indigenous students.

Anna Silva, a white woman in her mid-forties, relocated from Brazil with her husband and their dog two years ago. Although they received their permanent residency in 2019, it was impossible to immigrate until 2021 because of the pandemic. Currently residing in Richmond, British Columbia, Anna Silva does not have a job in Canada. She freelances as a tutor in a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) program and has kept her job as a manager for a curriculum development course design in Brazil, which she does online.

Vitalina, an ESL teacher in her native country for 15 years, arrived in Canada in 2022 through a unique program under the Government of Canada aimed at Ukrainians fleeing their war-torn homeland. She is currently living with her teenage son in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. After fleeing Ukraine, they briefly lived in Italy, where she “planned to make a life because I love the culture” (interview, March 12, 2023). However, they discovered Canada was a better option because the son struggled in school and could not adapt. In March, when the interviews were conducted, Vitalina worked as a casual translator and volunteered as a tutor and teacher. Her two-month paid contract as a youth coordinator was about to end when the interviews took place, and she was worried about her future employment.

Concerning our positionalities, the first author identifies as a white cisgender woman. Like the participants, she is a skilled immigrant who relocated to Canada in 2008 and has worked as a language instructor in the private and public sectors. The second author is a queer, white cisgender woman who is also a settler-immigrant to Canada.

RESULTS

In this paper, we focus on the main challenges prevalent across the stories of all six interviewees, broadly categorized as a) discrimination, b) overqualification, c) finances, d) re-credentialing and professional reintegration, e) insufficient government support, and f) unique challenges.

Next, we take a closer look at each challenge pertaining to the women's lived experience of identity as immigrant teachers in Canada.

A. Discrimination

Four of the six interviewees—Magda, Glory, Anna Silva, and Veronica—reported instances of discrimination. Glory and Magda have been discriminated against based on their race and ethnicity: Glory is a black woman originally from the Bahamas; Magda was born and raised in the Philippines and identifies herself as a person of color. Two women—Glory and Anna Silva—have been discriminated against because of their gender. Three participants—Veronica, Glory, and Anna Silva—mentioned unfair treatment due to their immigration status, having English as their second language, and speaking English with an accent.

Glory connects how she looks, speaks, and behaves with the challenge of convincing people to take her seriously. Although people do not openly say that “Professionalism is not for people like you, sometimes that is what comes across” (interview, February 10, 2023), making it particularly difficult for Glory to prove her worth and value in the workplace. Whenever she speaks, Glory feels like younger white men perceive her as condescending, as if she were teaching them rather than communicating with them. Although white men do not overtly express those sentiments, “that is what I was getting back from [them]” (interviews, February 10, 2023). It should be noted that, unlike “Young white men [who were] very contentious ...[and] took umbrage with the way I spoke because I spoke with authority, I spoke with confidence” (interviews, February 10, 2023), Glory specified that “The young white women, the older white men, they did not question my authority, they did not confront me, they did not have a negative attitude, they did not portray stigma against my identity” (interviews, February 10, 2023). A black woman who has the privilege of living and working in “high valued fields, fields that come with cultural opportunities, fields that carry financial opportunities, economic opportunities” (interview, February 10, 2023), Glory understands people's negative attitudes, not as demeaning or aggressive, instead as indirect: “The Canadians are very polite, but they discriminate... They're very quiet with it” (interview, February 10, 2023). As Glory put it, this “subversive racism or prejudice” (interview, February 10, 2023) usually manifests as questioning her confidence, education, and knowledge. She goes on to call it “hush discrimination,” adding that “it just wants you to be in place, wants you to be in your place, and wants you to learn the ropes maybe and contribute something first and become Canadian first, and then show up in those places” (interview, February 10, 2023).

Magda, too, has experienced discrimination based on her race and ethnicity, which has impeded her opportunities for growth and a professional career; she attributes it to the fact that “the whiteness culture is still evident in my workplace”. Similarly, Anna Silva has dealt with instances of

discrimination in the form of linguisticism—unfair treatment based on her use of the English language. Back in Brazil, where she worked as the president of the National Association for Language English Teachers, students, and fellow instructors looked up to her because of her advanced English language skills. In Canada, students tend to appreciate Anna Silva having English as her second language; in contrast, male English-speaking teacher trainees perceive being taught by a woman who speaks English as her second language as “breaking their ego” (interview, March 12, 2023). Like Glory, Anna Silva has been discriminated against, especially when in a position of authority (i.e., teacher trainer), by local teachers who doubt her professionalism because of her gender, second language, accent, and status:

Most of my trainees are actually native [English] speakers; they look at me and say, ‘But you’re not speaking it correctly. How are you going to help us?’ [...] That could be because I’m a woman as well because it comes mostly from men, not women. So, there are a lot of comments on my accent. When asked, ‘Where do you come from?’ I say, ‘Brazil.’ ‘No, you don’t have a Brazilian accent.’ [...] It is because of the accent or sometimes because of an image because I’m an immigrant and teaching them to teach their language to other people.

Nevertheless, Anna Silva hopes that fellow Canadian instructors will realize that teaching the language has nothing to do with one’s accent or speaking English as their first or second language; it is about skills and the ability to help students learn “regardless of your background” (interview, March 12, 2023).

B. Overqualification

As newcomers to Canada, most women had to settle for non-teaching jobs (e.g., cleaner, construction worker, building manager) before they could work as teachers. For example, soon after immigrating to Canada, both Magda and her husband—experienced teachers and Ph.D. holders—had to take on survival jobs, such as cleaning houses and working in construction. Veronica pointed out that it has taken her a while to get to where she is now—assistant department head and program coordinator. Thinking that no one would hire her, soon after arriving in Canada, Veronica did not apply for teaching jobs; instead, she worked as a building manager. Like other immigrants, Veronica volunteered, “naively thinking, if I volunteer, I can find a job” (interview, January 26, 2023). Importantly, Veronica acknowledges the importance of networking, which is how she landed her first job as a substitute teacher in 1999—three years after she arrived in Canada. While this job was somewhat unreliable, “I got called once, and then I did not get called for the next six months” (interview, January 26, 2023), Veronica recalls that evening jobs like this—that nobody else wants—are how everyone starts—Canadians and immigrants alike. Similarly, Liz—who relocated from the Netherlands—

worked for a daycare first and started working as a supply teacher four years after living in Canada.

It is important to note that Magda and Glory came to Canada with Ph.D. degrees completed in English in their home countries; this, however, did not count toward securing jobs that reflected their education and teaching expertise. As such, Magda's Ph.D. in educational management did not help her land a college or university-level job in Canada; instead, she taught literacy in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) centers, Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) Levels 1 to 3—no to basic English language proficiency levels. While Magda admits that some opportunities are available for newcomers, she insists that these are not the opportunities that skilled workers like herself aim for when applying to immigrate to Canada. In her opinion, the devaluation of immigrants' skills is because "something is rotten probably in the system" (interview, January 20, 2023). Seeing in her current teaching context that fellow skilled immigrants, despite being highly qualified, are facing the same struggles that she experienced a decade ago is why Magda decided to participate in this study—to make her voice heard and raise awareness that the federal and provincial government "did not really push through on this, because a lot of immigrants are ending up frustrated" (interview, January 20, 2023). Significantly, Magda urges the government to show commitment and allow newcomers to participate "to reinforce more on valuing, instead of devaluing, the strength of every immigrant coming to Canada" (interview, January 20, 2023).

C. Finances

Most participants struggled to make ends meet soon after arriving in Canada. Magda and Veronica had to take on menial jobs to survive, whereas Liz and Vitalina used free services such as food banks. Buying food and clothes was one of the first challenges in terms of financial limitations that Liz faced soon after coming to Canada: "There have been times when I had to go to the food bank, and that was a hurdle to overcome because that was something that I never had thought of doing" (interview, January 27, 2023). Liz remembers going to local churches to get free clothes, always ensuring she would return a bag of clothes that her family did not need anymore. She used to buy almost everything from yard sales, flea markets, and second-hand stores. It is worth mentioning that these financial struggles have taught Liz and her family a valuable lesson *vis-à-vis* making more environmentally friendly choices: "Buying second-hand is part of being thrifty, and this is my kids' favorite way of shopping" (interview, January 27, 2023). As far as Vitalina—a single refugee mother—is concerned, given her dire current financial difficulties, she wishes to use the food banks. However, not having a car and relying on unreliable public transport makes her access to this social service untenable. When the interviews took place (beginning to mid-March), the two-month paid contract was about to end, hence her concern about not

having any other teaching prospects lined up, let alone the worry of paying rent and putting food on the table.

D. Re-credentialing and Professional Reintegration

All participants underwent a lengthy process of re-credentialing—completing additional courses and practicum to certify as Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) teachers by Canadian standards—while working non-teaching jobs to provide for their families. Most women specified that it takes a long time to gain local teaching experience—a prerequisite for working in the field—and to secure more stable, better paying teaching job opportunities. Although Magda’s and Glory’s credentials were recognized in Canada, they did not materialize into better career opportunities. For instance, after having her Ph.D. evaluated and found comparative to a Canadian Ph.D., Magda was advised to study a master’s degree in Canada, which she did not pursue given that it required investing time and money and she had no assurance that it would bring better job prospects and allow her to advance her teaching career. Similarly, Veronica’s bachelor’s degree—completed in a language other than English—was recognized in 1996 when she immigrated; nevertheless, she had to take additional courses to certify to teach ESL in Vancouver. Enrolling in the Building Bridges with the Pacifically Marine Resource Society program that helps refugee and immigrant women was a stepping stone for Veronica. Although it took her longer to finish the program—she was working and became pregnant with her first child—the program gave her a sense of belonging, allowing her to connect with other immigrant women and learn skills that would prove helpful later. Unlike the other teachers, who were able to have their degrees evaluated and initiate the re-credentialing process at some point, this is impossible for Vitalina for the time being. She applied but still has not received the required documents from Ukraine, which she attributes to the ongoing war slowing down all services.

E. Insufficient Government Support

Two participants brought up receiving little to insufficient support from the government soon after immigrating. Glory, Veronica, Magda, and Anna Silva acknowledged that there is (some) support that newcomers are provided with; however, the other two teachers—Liz and Vitalina—were more critical about this issue. As such, Liz talks about the online presence—or lack thereof—of skilled immigrants serving settlement organizations meant to assist newcomers. According to Liz, unlike refugees and other categories of migrants entering the country under different immigration streams who receive pre- and post-arrival support, the lack of available support and information for skilled immigrants leaves them unprepared to relocate. As Liz said, “If you come as a skilled worker like we did, you kind of have to figure it out for yourself” (interview, January 27, 2023). While

Vitalina is grateful for the financial support that she has received, adding that the government gives you money if you do not have a job, she explains that this is just enough to pay rent “but nothing more” (interview, March 12, 2023).

F. Unique Challenges

Of the six interviewees, Vitalina’s lived experience revealed a host of unique, ongoing barriers that include having a work permit but not being able to teach or study, being stuck in the entangled re-credentialing process, being a single mother whose access to free services like food banks is problematic given the lack of a car, living in severe weather conditions, losing a family member, fleeing her home country, leaving family behind in a war-torn zone, and dealing with trauma in the aftermath of the war. Vitalina has a work permit and is allowed to work; however, she is not allowed to work as a teacher because she is not certified to teach in Canada—she does not have a Saskatchewan teaching certificate. Moreover, the work permit does not allow her to study to become TESL certified; hence, Vitalina feels trapped and is wondering:

Why am I forbidden to study? Because I think Canada is also interested in well-educated people. And if they want to see [that] I’m a skilled teacher, I can provide all my certificates and all my degrees, but just give me this chance, open this gate so that I can start.

Living in a province with extreme weather conditions—temperatures drop to minus 40 in Saskatoon—doubled by the absence of a car and a relatively undeveloped public transit system makes this single mother’s daily routine acutely challenging. Vitalina recounts that once, she missed the bus and had to wait one hour to catch the next one. She was scared because everything was closed; she was frozen and could not call anyone because her phone had died due to the cold weather.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Intersecting Relations of Oppression

The intersectional feminist approach we take in this study analyzes the complex ways that gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and English as a second language intertwine in the lived experience of six immigrant women teachers, shedding light on the main challenges (i.e., discrimination, overqualification, finances, re-credentialing and professional reintegration, and insufficient government support) encountered when entering the Canadian labor market and more specifically across the field of TESL. The rationale for our intersectional approach to women’s lived experience of identity stems from Crenshaw’s (1989) argument against single-axis or single-issue frameworks (prevalent in feminist theory), which are conceptually limited in that they “treat gender and race as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (p. 139). As Crenshaw

(1989) explains, gender discrimination is usually associated with white women's lived experience, while race discrimination tends to point to black men's, thus leaving out any discrimination against black women.

Our exploration of the conflicting, fluid relationship between identity categories (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and second language) and power through an intersectional lens does not mean that the focus is on identity at the expense of power, which would impede our ability to "see which differences make a difference. Yet it is exactly our analyses of power that reveal which differences carry significance" (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 1012). Furthermore, two concepts put forward by Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) guide our analysis. First, power "operates by disciplining people in ways that put people's lives on paths that make some options seem viable and others out of reach" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 16). Second, power relations—inherent to lived experience and relationships—point to advantaged or disadvantaged members within a social group, which explains why different people receive different treatment based on which rules apply to them and how they are applied. Analyzing the six women's lived experience of identity considering power relations shows categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and second language operating as rules that impose different treatment, thus impacting the women's life trajectories in ways that made many options that they had envisioned when embarking on their immigration journeys seem intangible.

Zeroing in on more subtle intersections—sub-intersections—of the participants' intersectional identities brings to the forefront racial differences between white women and women of color and the inherent dimensions of privilege they warrant. Considering this, first, we discuss the two women of color's—Glory and Magda—intersectional identities, which are twofold. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of understanding black women's experiences as different from those of black men and white women. In doing so, we avoid oversimplifying and marginalizing theories that regard black women as too similar or different from black men and white women. On the other hand, it extends the conversation from a relatively narrow perspective, factoring in only white women, to a broader conceptualization that brings women of color's experiences to the forefront. This point echoes Crenshaw's (1989) argument that if a white woman who is discriminated against can claim that she represents all women, then a black woman who is discriminated against should be able to claim that she represents all women. Carbado (2013), too, refers to this phenomenon—colorblind intersectionality—which allows for white people's "racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity ... [to] travel invisibly and undistributed as race-neutral phenomena over and against the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of people of colour" (p. 823-824).

As an analytical tool, intersectionality addresses Glory's struggles and social problems at one time rather than separately, which is essential given that "race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 13). Significantly, these categories point to social injustices and "gain meaning from power relations of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class exploitation" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 15). As such, understanding Glory's lived experience cannot be done through a single-axis or a single-focus lens that considers only one identity category or social inequality at a time: She is not separately but simultaneously Black, a woman, an immigrant, and not a Canadian citizen. Moreover, unlike the white women participants who have English as their second language, Glory is a black woman who speaks English at a first language proficiency level (although she identifies Creole as her first and English as her second language). Analyzed through an intersectional lens, Glory's lived experience indicates an unbalanced identity-power relationship whereby the reproduction of power is a visible means to discriminate within the field of TESL. It explains why Glory's English language proficiency is pushed outside of power relations, thus marginalizing her as a peripheral rather than a legitimate language instructor in her workplace. For example, especially when in a position of authority (e.g., running an exam, being part of a community program, presenting or leading in various teaching contexts), Glory—Black, a woman, an immigrant, and not a Canadian citizen yet—has been discriminated against, especially by younger white men. In Magda's case—a woman of color, originally from the Philippines—race in concert with ethnicity is at the root of her discrimination. The multifaceted, layered aspects of discrimination at play in the two women of color's lived experience are summarized by Crenshaw's (1989) traffic metaphor:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

Furthermore, gender, in tandem with race, highly over-qualifies these two women of color: Magda and Glory are the most qualified teachers among the six participants. Both are Ph.D. holders who worked as professors in their home countries. Neither of them has been able to teach at a university in Canada; instead, both work regular teaching jobs like the other (white) women teachers. The mismatch between their teaching status in their home countries and their current teaching situation exemplifies the devaluing of the skills of immigrants. It is no surprise that Magda takes on whatever teaching work is

available, while Glory has put her goals on hold and instead focuses on self-care and traveling.

Turning our attention to the white women's lived experience, we begin our analysis of their intersectional identities with a relevant remark made by Crenshaw (1989): "For [white women], there is no need to specify discrimination as *white* females because their race does not contribute to the disadvantage for which they seek redress. The view of discrimination derived from this grounding takes race privilege as a given" (p. 144). Narrowing in on Anna Silva's lived experience through an intersectional feminist lens brings into focus four interrelated identity categories—gender, race, immigration status, and second language. The intersectionality of being a white woman and an immigrant, in concert with having English as her second language, points to workplace discrimination in the field of TESL. According to Anna Silva, predominantly (white) male teachers doubt her ability to teach and train them. Interestingly, both Anna Silva—a white immigrant woman who speaks English as her second language and is not a Canadian citizen—and Glory—a black immigrant woman who speaks English as her first language and is not a Canadian citizen—share similar instances of discrimination by (younger) white men.

As far as Veronica is concerned—a white, heterosexual, married woman originally from Serbia—although she did not experience overt, direct discrimination, she attests to privileges afforded her by her race. In Veronica's case, the intersectionality of race, gender, immigration status, and second language brings to the forefront what we identify as self-imposed overqualification. This means that her inner doubts, augmented by being a newcomer to Canada and speaking English as her second language, prevented her from applying for teaching jobs; instead, she worked as a building manager soon after immigrating. Some of these interrelated aspects of identity are still at play in Veronica's identity, which might explain why, although currently an assistant department head and highly proficient in English, when in the classroom, she assures the students that she will teach the language to her best abilities but admits that she might make mistakes given that English is her second language.

Across the interviews, gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and second language act as systemic barriers and agents of oppression against an already marginalized minority group—internationally highly qualified immigrant women language teachers.

Summary

In a world characterized by inequities, intersectionality has the potential—both theoretically and empirically—to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of social injustices and center the conversation around how identity and other categories (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and second language) are influenced by

intersecting relations of oppression. In our exploration of immigrant women's issues through an intersectional feminist lens, we were not concerned with highlighting differences as we were to understand the complex implications of identity and power relations by zeroing in on inequalities because of one's gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, and English as a second language. Our exploration of the relationship between identity and power in the women's lived experience draws attention to structural inequalities at a micro (i.e., the TESL industry) and macro level (i.e., the Canadian workforce and society).

Starting the discussion section with an intersectional analysis of the two women of color's experiences was twofold. First, it extended the conversation from white women—a more privileged sub-category within the larger group of immigrant women—to women of color, who “are theoretically erased” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) from existing single-axis or one-issue analyses. Second, by incorporating race, we avoided colorblind intersectionality (Carbado, 2013)—white women speaking for black women and women of color—while at the same time focusing on the multilayered nuances of privilege (or lack thereof) and difference prevalent across all six participant profiles. We believe that the intersectional feminist approach we took to analyze the women teachers' identity challenges gender barriers and decentralizes the conversation from focusing on white women to including the voices of black women and women of color as equally significant within the paradigm of skilled immigrant women teachers (primarily white women). Significantly, we argued that the role that gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and second language play in the participants' lived experience of identity showcases the kind of discrimination manifested against skilled immigrant teachers. We now raise the question of whether this argument can be extrapolated to discrimination against the broader community of (skilled) immigrants, which suggests the potential that intersectionality has to connect individuals with social struggles while at the same time contesting existing unbalanced power relations.

Implications

Importantly, this study revealed struggles and (ongoing) barriers that skilled immigrant women language teachers experience when entering the Canadian workforce. In doing so, this study brings to the table a discussion of women teachers' identity through the lens of intersectionality, whose “insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness has played a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788). To date, there is no such intersectionality study dedicated to skilled immigrant women language teachers' lived experience of identity within a Canadian context. The findings of this study suggest a need for change to be made at micro- and macro-levels—whether in communities of

practice, the TESL industry at large, or the mainstream Canadian workforce—to facilitate newcomers’ relocating and professional reintegration. Specifically, more government and community support tailored for immigrant women—whose needs are different from those of immigrant men—is essential. The participants in this study were all surprised by the barriers they face(d) in the TESL industry; therefore, communicating those barriers more clearly would potentially help immigrant women teachers personally and professionally.

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