

Article

“My Family’s Weight on My Shoulders”: Experiences of Jewish Immigrant Women from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Toronto

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Abstract: In dominant western society, we tend to interpret the experiences of immigrant women as emancipation and liberation, rather than as the complex experiences of subjects acting within several hegemonic systems. While intersectional and transnational feminism led to questioning this view through the discussion of the challenges faced by immigrant women from developing countries, their counterparts from socialist countries have been largely ignored. To address this gap, this article focuses on the employment and social reproduction experiences of 11 white, professional, heterosexual, immigrant Jewish women from the former Soviet Union (FSU) who are now living in Toronto, Canada. The data used in this article was collected as part of a study on lived experiences of Jewish immigrant couples from FSU in Toronto. This study utilized intersectional feminist analysis as a theoretical framework and combined the qualitative methodologies of Testimonio and Oral History. This data suggests that, for these women, immigration had mixed outcomes. Although the material conditions of their lives may have changed, the traditional moral associations between femininity, domesticity, and maternity remained strong. Apparent heterosexual privilege both challenged and reinforced their subordination, in that it facilitated their access to Canadian education and professional jobs and promoted their social legitimacy/status, while also resulting in greater subordination at work and home where they had more tasks to fulfill than in premigration life. These findings challenge the monolithic representation of immigrant women’s experience and enhance our ability to generate a more comprehensive theory of those experiences.

Keywords: immigrant women; employment; social reproduction; intersectional feminist analysis; former Soviet Union; Canada

1. Introduction

This paper problematizes the lived realities of white Jewish immigrant women from the FSU as a response to historical oversight in relation to immigrant women’s experiences in immigration literature, as well as the current deficit with regard to the exploration of the experiences of immigrant women who come from a privileged race, class, and ethnic background. Much of the migration scholarship of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was focused on immigrant men, who were seen as risk takers, achievers, and subjects capable of and willing to assimilate into the role of ‘Western man’ (Pessar 1999, p. 578). Women were either ignored in the theoretical discussion of migration or dichotomized as dependent guardians of stability (Dion and Dion 2001).

Feminist scholars of the 1980s were the first to draw academic, professional, and public attention to gender in the discussion of immigration and to highlight the impact of the exclusion of immigrants as gendered subjects (Gabaccia 1991; Pedraza 1991; Tienda and Booth 1991). Feminist analysis of the power of gender ideology and the uncovering of how political and economic forces shaped women’s

lives and their subordination was applied to the experiences of immigrant women. For example, liberal white feminists interpreted immigrant women's access to wages and the increase in their spatial mobility as important steps that led to more control over decision-making in the family and to liberation, emancipation, and equality with men. The sociocultural and legal context of the west and the accompanying acceptance of women who "smoke, drink beer, and wear clothes that show their bodies" (Kibria 1993, p. 121) were catalysts for changing norms regarding feminine behavior and the gender relations of immigrants (Darvishpour 2002; Lim and Wieling 2004; Zentgraf 2002). Through a feminist lens, immigrant women were viewed as successful integrators in their new country, accompanied by speculation that immigration was beneficial for them. This new analysis made a small crack in the construct of male dominance.

However, with the further evolution of the feminist movement and the rise of "gender rebellion feminism," intersectional and transnational feminists were critical of the previously mentioned view. They considered it assimilationist, reductionist, and naïve in its monolithic analysis of oppression and its assumption that, globally, all women are equally oppressed, and all men are equally oppressive (Lorber 1998). Adopting what is now identified as an intersectional lens, new wave feminists recognized that gender needed to be understood within its historical and cultural context, with reference to the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, ageism, and ethnocentrism (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). If the main feminist task is to fight oppression, an appreciation of "multiple jeopardy, multiple affiliation, and multiple identity" of immigrant men and women should become an essential tool in the analysis of immigrant realities (Mahler 1999; Pessar 1999; Pessar and Mahler 2001). Intersectional and transnational feminists questioned the white liberal and radical feminist representation of immigrant and ethnic minority women as "a singular, monolithic subject" (Mohanty 2003, p. 17) and argued that patriarchy is experienced differently in various societies due to variations in socio-economic factors.

Although it is useful in shedding light on the complex position of immigrant women from the developing countries, intersectional and transnational feminist discourses set up an alternative binary between white women and racialized women. Additionally, they ignored the experiences of white immigrant women from the Socialist Bloc. Unlike racialized immigrant women from the Third World, these immigrant women are white, professional, and come from societies that, at least rhetorically, have supported equality between genders. As a result, their position may be viewed as more ambiguous and, thus, more complex. With the dearth of empirical evidence on the experiences of immigrant women from the Socialist Bloc in the west (Remennick 2007), their lived realities are obscured and reduced to representations of Third World women's experiences. Furthermore, when the experiences of groups privileged in terms of race, professionalism, and legal status are not investigated, our ability to generate a more comprehensive theory including one that addresses the experience of immigrant women from a more inclusive set of class, cultural, religious, and racial origins and contexts, is limited (Gold 2003).

This article complements the existing discussion of immigrant women's experiences and offers the intersectional view as a platform for moving beyond the experience of so-called "Third World" women to explore the experiences of white immigrant, professional, heterosexual, married Jewish women from the former Soviet Union (FSU) in Toronto. This discussion is based on a segment of data collected in a bigger qualitative study on lived experiences of Jewish immigrant couples from the FSU in Toronto. The original study was concerned with the relational dynamics of these immigrant couples in terms of gender, oppression, and power and how these were negotiated within different socio-political contexts (Hernandez et al. 2005). It aimed to elaborate how the socio-economic structures of the socialist Soviet Union and neo-liberal Canada, historical conditions, and the dimensions of gender, race, and sexual orientation influence individuals and couple experiences of Jewish immigrants from the FSU. This particular group of immigrants was chosen for the study since their experiences and identities illustrated the tensions of simultaneous participation in experiences of privilege and oppression. These are white, professional, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied individuals

who are also immigrant, Jewish, and originate from a non-Western social and economic context. Toronto, with its multi-ethnic economy, access to multiple academic institutions, and urban sprawl, hosts the largest FSU Jewish community in Canada with over 40,000 Jews from FSU in residence (Shahar 2010) and, therefore, constituted a relevant site for the exploration of this group's experiences. This article focuses specifically on FSU Jewish immigrant women's unique experiences in the areas of employment and social reproduction, identified by study participants as primary areas of concern, as well as the changes they experienced in these areas upon immigration to Canada. In accordance with the feminist intersectional understanding of individual experiences as constituted historically and socially, it contextualizes their gender, racialized and classified experiences within the socio-political contexts of the socialist Soviet Union and neoliberal Canada. In doing so, this article seeks to add to the emerging empirical literature on the role of the social location and historical and structural context in our understanding of the experiences of immigrant women.

2. Literature Review

2.1. FSU Jews in Toronto

According to Shahar (2015) report on the Jewish community of Toronto, based on the 2011 National Household Survey, about a third (34.7%) of the Greater Toronto Jewish population are immigrants. Of a total of 129,680 Jewish immigrants residing in Canada, 50.5% live in the Toronto metropolitan area. FSU Jews comprise about 20% of the Toronto Jewish community. The majority of these immigrants arrived during the last two decades with 7965 arriving between 2000 and 2001 and 9175 people arriving between 1990 and 1999. This significant influx of FSU-born Jewish immigrants in the last two decades represents the largest arrival from a single country or region to the Toronto metropolitan area since the 1901 to 1921 immigrations of Eastern European Jews. This group constitutes Canada's third largest Jewish community, following Canadian-born Jews in Toronto and Montreal (Cohen 2001). The majority of FSU Jewish immigrants were born in Russia (9520) and Ukraine (7210). They arrived in Canada in search of improved living standards and quality of life for themselves and their children (Remennick 2006). It is important to note that their immigration to Canada was influenced by socio-economic and political upheaval and the rise of anti-Semitism in the FSU in the 1980s, as well as Canadian immigration policy, which favored skilled immigrants (Basok 2002; Remennick 2006).

FSU Jews are spread almost evenly across two cohorts representing individuals aged 25 to 44 (31.7%) and 45 to 64 (38.5%) years old, with a median age of 49.3 years old (Shahar 2015). This is higher than the median age for the Jewish community as a whole (40.6 years old) and much higher than the median age of the non-immigrant Jewish population (32.6 years old). The age distribution is positively skewed as a result of a relatively high proportion of immigrants over 65 years old (20.4%). This distribution is caused by the non-selective nature of immigration policies at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s (Cohen 2001).

This group of immigrants is characterized by high human capital. The education level of FSU Jews is the highest in the Jewish community. A total of 50% of recent immigrants have a university degree and 27.2% have a graduate degree (Shahar and Rosenbaum 2006), compared with 43% of all Jewish immigrants with university degrees and 47.6% of non-immigrant Jews with university degrees. The same is true regarding graduate degrees: 21.9% of all Jewish immigrants and 19.5% of non-immigrants in the Jewish community have a graduate degree.

Despite their high education level, FSU Jewish immigrants have the lowest median income within the Jewish community at \$26,398, compared to the median income in the Toronto Jewish community, which is \$39,348 and median income for non-immigrant Jews, which is \$42,230 (Shahar 2015). Within the Toronto Jewish community, FSU Jews have the highest proportion (49.6%) of individuals with earnings below \$25,000 and lowest proportion of individuals in higher income brackets, with 9.9% in the bracket of \$70,000 to \$99,999 and 7.4% in the bracket of \$100,000 and over. About two-thirds (64.5%) of Jewish immigrants from the FSU earn under \$40,000 annually. In terms

of income sources, 52.5% earn wages and salaries and 11.5% are self-employed. Both figures are comparable to the Jewish community as a whole. However, FSU Jews have the highest proportion in the Jewish community—12.9%—receiving their income from government sources, such as training programs or social assistance. Lastly, 12.2% of these immigrants receive government pensions. FSU Jews were found to have the highest level of economic disadvantage within the Jewish community of Toronto: 22.2% are under the poverty line compared to 12.9% in the Toronto Jewish population and 10.5% poor in non-immigrant Jews. Such a high level of poverty is explained by the recent immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union. According to the [Shahar \(2015\)](#), despite their relatively high education and skill levels, FSU Jews experienced economic vulnerability throughout the decade after settlement. The key obstacles to securing meaningful employment were a lack of Canadian work experience, poor English language proficiency, and a lack of recognition of credentials from Canadian professional associations and licensing bodies. As a result, many professionals are not able to practice in their fields ([Cohen 2001](#); [Remennick 2006](#); [Shahar 2015](#)). Many of them, particularly men, had to downgrade to lower level positions or return to college in order to obtain a similar Canadian degree. Women, by contrast, tended to launch a new professional career with Canadian credentials. Immigrants in skilled technical or manual occupations had better chances of integration in the ethnic labor market since these jobs do not require English proficiency and/or professional accreditation ([Remennick 2006](#)).

Two important social characteristics of the FSU Jewish community in Toronto are the salience of the Russian language and culture and transnationalism ([Basok 2002](#); [Cohen 2001](#); [Remennick 2006](#)). Many stores in the community offer magazines, newspapers, and books in Russian. Videostores in the community specialize in Russian-language movies. Multicultural cable television offers four stations in the Russian language. Occasionally, artists, singers, comedians, and theater troupes from Russia and Israel perform in Toronto. Mastering the Russian language and its literature is a source of pride for FSU Jews and they tend to pass it on to younger generations. It should be noted, however, that, within this transnational space, it is not only the Russian culture that is reinforced, but the Jewish component of identity is also emphasized. The magazine, *Exodus*, published in Russian, focuses on Jewish issues, explains various Jewish rituals and traditions, and lists prayers to be recited ([Basok 2002](#)). Many FSU Jews have extensive networks of relatives and friends in the USA, Israel, and Russia. Contemporary telecommunications and the Internet make it easier to maintain these contacts. Many of the immigrants who arrived after 1993 were able to keep their citizenship in the post-Soviet republics. With the emergence of new economic opportunities in the FSU and with the help of pre-immigration contacts, a number of immigrants developed international businesses that serve the FSU Jewish community in Canada ([Cohen 2001](#)). However, no statistical data characterizing this kind of economic activity is available.

Most of the existing literature on migration experiences of FSU Jewish immigrants in Canada has focused on Jewish identity and relations between the established Jewish community and newcomers. In this literature, FSU Jewish immigrants were characterized as “a highly pragmatic group, lacking the impulse for ethnic and religious survival so characteristic of their North American counterparts” ([Glickman 1996](#), p. 209). Their Jewish identity was judged against the Canadian Jewish norm of communal performance. As [Avrich-Skapinker \(1993\)](#) states, the result was that FSU Jewish immigrants were deemed “not Jewish enough” (p. 197) and labeled “Russian” by Canadian Jewry. The expression of Jewish identity is the most prominent reason for tension between FSU Jewish and the mainstream Canadian Jewish community ([Avrich-Skapinker 1993](#); [Basok 2002](#); [Cohen 2001](#); [Glickman 1996](#)). This tension is explained by the dynamics in the Canadian Jewish community resulting from the history of Jewish oppression, the particular niche this ethnic community occupies today in multicultural Canada, and the reasons, hopes, and aspirations related to its movement to free Soviet Jews ([Beckerman 2010](#)). [Basok \(2002\)](#), however, provides a more nuanced postmodern perspective on former Soviet Jewish identity, extending the discourse based on one stable Jewish identity to a perspective

that stresses multiplicity, flexibility, and constant (re)negotiation of Jewish identities, which sees Soviet Jewish identity as a blend of Judaism and Jewish history with a secular Russian culture.

A notable exception is the ethnographic study conducted by [Remennick \(2006\)](#), who focused on FSU Jewish immigrants' "occupational adjustment, perceived living standards, family issues, and relations with the hosting society" (page 65). The participants in this study noted that immigration to Canada resulted in improvement in material well-being, personal security, children's education, and urban infrastructure, with deterioration in social ties and sense of inclusion in mainstream society, cultural life, family relations, and, to some extent, employment. This study provided additional evidence of the employment challenges faced by this group of immigrants as a result of Canadian accreditation policies, lack of Canadian experience, and limited English proficiency, as well as their downward occupational trajectories and/or upgraded educational credentials. It also provided support for the already known experience of a strained relationship between the Canadian Jewish community and Canadian mainstream society, as a result of the immigrants' limited command of English and perceived cultural and class differences. Unlike earlier studies, this study shed light on the immigrants' experiences of family adjustment, which noted the existence of marital conflict caused by the challenges of resettlement, change in gender roles, and partners' differential pace of integration and occupational adjustment. Additional challenges in the family adjustment realm included the sense of isolation experienced by youth and elderly due to limited social opportunities and the broad linguistic and cultural gap between themselves and Canadian mainstream society. It is important to state that, in years following the publication of this study, the range of educational and social opportunities for the immigrant youths has grown considerably due to the upward mobility of these immigrants and the emergence of new youth programs geared specifically to FSU Jewish youth.

2.2. Immigrant Women in Canada

The number of women immigrating to Canada has grown since 1980, with a larger proportion of racialized women from developing countries. Because current Canadian immigration policy is dictated primarily by economic preferences and skilled immigration priorities, the number of highly educated, professional women is growing even though women continue to immigrate to Canada primarily as dependents, either in the family class category or as the spouse of a principle applicant ([Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018](#)).

The existing research focuses on a number of areas relevant to immigrant women's experiences in Canada, namely employment, cultural transitioning, and the impact of immigration on physical and mental health. In addition to the commonly reported negative experiences related to discrimination ([Dlamini et al. 2012](#); [Hagey et al. 2001](#); [Hojati 2009](#); [Koert et al. 2011](#); [Rasouli et al. 2008](#); [Ronquillo 2012](#)), deskilling and work-home imbalance ([Choi et al. 2014](#); [Koert et al. 2011](#); [Martins and Reid 2007](#); [Ronquillo 2012](#); [Suto 2009](#)), and problematic access to medical, mental health, and well-being services ([Higginbottom et al. 2015](#); [Tang et al. 2007](#)). Some positive experiences associated with settlements were also reported. These are higher personal autonomy ([Jibeen and Hynie 2012](#)), greater autonomy, and freedom to share their knowledge and expertise after securing professional employment ([Ronquillo 2012](#)), financial independence ([Dlamini et al. 2012](#)), opportunities to financially support their parents back home ([Ronquillo 2012](#)), and improved educational prospects for their children ([Dicocco-Bloom 2004](#)).

Women's immigration to Canada, as to other Western countries, is associated with the renegotiation of gender roles. The extent of changes in cultural gender role expectations varies. Some women actively challenge the traditional division of gender roles, whereas others maintain the pre-migration cultural expectations while taking up new roles, including entering the paid labor force. The negotiation of gender roles is closely related to women's experiences of integration into Canadian society and their relational experiences within their families and communities ([Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018](#)). While often positively associated with increased familiarity with Canadian norms and practices and advancement of women's rights, changes in traditional gender roles, according to some research, may

also be perceived as a threat to the family's cultural norms and result in increased risk of intimate partner violence (Guruge et al. 2015).

Immigrant women's participation in paid employment experiences is often linked with gaining financial security and a sense of independence (Dlamini et al. 2012; Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018). However, immigrant women are often underemployed or employed in dead-end, low skill jobs or traditional female jobs (e.g., child and eldercare, cleaning, garment industry) and earn lower incomes than Canadian-born women (Maitra and Shan 2007; Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018). They are also more likely to be unemployed than immigrant men (Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018). Many professional women trained in male-dominated fields are forced to change their employment trajectories to female-dominated arenas (Banerjee and Verma 2012; Meraj 2015; Ng and Shan 2010; Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018). The experiences of underemployment, deskilling, and unemployment are explained by the systemic barriers related to the lack of Canadian educational credentials and Canadian experience, demanding lengthy and an expensive credential assessment process, and the high cost of childcare (Chai et al. 2018; Chen 2008; Dlamini et al. 2012; Meares 2010; Ng and Shan 2010; Sakamoto et al. 2010; Suto 2009). Facing competing demands to contribute to family income and secure professional employment, while also completing domestic responsibilities, forces women to accept lower paid employment (Choi et al. 2014; Koert et al. 2011; Martins and Reid 2007; Ronquillo 2012; Suto 2009) and/or eventually accept their role as homemakers as "natural" (Dlamini et al. 2012; Suto 2009). Lack of English proficiency and knowledge of labor laws and rights often keeps them in low skilled and dangerous jobs. Many women, in both professional and low-skilled jobs, report facing discrimination and racist attitudes and noted persistence in "feeling foreign" (Dlamini et al. 2012; Hagey et al. 2001; Hojati 2009; Koert et al. 2011; Rasouli et al. 2008; Ronquillo 2012).

Immigrant women's well-being and physical and mental health is adversely affected by these factors: psycho-social stresses associated with a decreased sense of control with regard to professional employment, precarious employment, demanding menial jobs, linguistic difficulties, financial insecurity. Multiple burdens of combining paid employment with social reproduction responsibilities lack extended family support and loss of social support networks including adjustment to the Canadian cultural norms, experiences of discrimination at work, and barriers in accessing and utilizing healthcare services (lack of information about or awareness of the services, insufficient supports to access these services, and discordant expectations between the women and their service providers) (Ahmed et al. 2008; Hagey et al. 2001; Higginbottom et al. 2015; Tang et al. 2007). Informal emotional, instrumental, and informational support from friends and family and participation in religious community practices improved women's mental health and sense of well-being and acted as a buffer against the previously mentioned stressors, underscoring the importance of social support and the inadequacy of existing settlement services (Choi et al. 2014; Koert et al. 2011; Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018).

The previously mentioned research sheds light on the experiences of immigrant women in Canada and indicates that immigrant women in Canada experience multiple, intersecting factors that differentially affect their well-being. However, the main shortcoming of this research is a lack of specific data that contextualizes immigrant women's experiences (Rezazadeh and Hoover 2018). Many studies do not specify women's countries of origins or treat immigrant women as a homogeneous entity, grouping together women from multiple countries of origin. Those studies that provide information on women's origins focus on the experiences of racialized women. The experiences of immigrant women from a more privileged set of racial or cultural characteristics are not described. In the North American context, three dynamics interact to create significant complexity in immigrant experiences. First, immigrants of any origin may experience a similar set of problems due to downward occupational and social mobility. Second, the homogenized view of whiteness obscures the different forms of oppression that FSU women may face and leads to a silencing of their experiences, leaving room for the recognition of white privilege only. Third, these women have more privileges than racialized immigrants from the Third World (Remennick 2007). Hence, FSU experiences are both similar and different from others.

The reported study addresses this gap by describing the experiences of white FSU Jewish immigrant women and the structural forces that inform these experiences.

3. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Intersectional Analysis

This study built upon feminist intersectional theory that analyses the connections between subjectivity, nationhood, culture, race, class, gender, and sexuality (Baca Zinn 1990; Dua 1999; Hulko 2009; Mohanty 2003). Black, working class and lesbian feminists, later referred to by Lorber (1998) as “gender rebellion feminists,” initialized the critique of the “taken-for-granted” gender order, questioned the boundaries between women and men, female and male, and heterosexual and homosexual, and opened up white feminism to become more inclusive. Focusing on identity, as well as the processes and symbols that build and maintain the gender order, they challenged the legitimacy of favoring one group over its opposite. They claimed that analyzing inequality as a result of gender politics is not only limited, but it also ignores the broader social structure, in general, and race, ethnicity, and class affiliation, in particular. Focusing on one of these social statuses alone lead to narrow and insufficient analysis. Thus, the intersection between race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, i.e., *intersectionality*, must become the main unit of feminist analysis. Intersectional feminist analysis draws attention to the role of social structure that shapes individual’s experiences and meanings, gives people a location in the social world, and defines and locates their economic and social rewards (Baca Zinn 1990; Dua 1999; Hulko 2009; Juan et al. 2016; Mohanty 2003). Multiple dimensions of race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, immigrant status, geographical location, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability intersect and provide an individual with the location within the social “[m]atrix of domination” (Hill Collins 1998). This social location shapes an individual’s definition of their place in the world, which makes the individual’s identity a complex product of the histories and experiences of simultaneous participation in different levels of privilege and oppression. This identity is not static but rather dynamic, as identity categories and meanings ascribed to these categories vary in different socio-political contexts, as well as throughout an individual’s life course (Hulko 2009). Individual identities not only shape the ways individuals think and act, but also become a means of disciplining since they constitute the grounds on which people become advantaged and disadvantaged in complex social stratification (Hill Collins 1998). Intersectionality, thus, recognizes the complexity of experience, even within the same ethnic or racial minority group.

Feminist intersectionality was chosen as the interpretive lens for understanding the experiences of FSU Jewish immigrant women in Toronto, Canada, assuming that gender is informed and mediated by intersecting factors, including heterosexism, classism, and whiteness. This theoretical framework provides an alternative discourse on the experiences of groups subordinated within the stratified social order. Problematizing the role of social structure helps to grasp *what* macro-structural forces operate in the broad socio-economic and political context of immigrant lives and *how* these structural forces inform the experiences of those who immigrate from one socio-political context to another.

4. Methodology

This study was concerned with the ways in which the dynamics of heterosexual immigrant couples unfold within social and political contexts (Hernandez et al. 2005). It aimed to explore how systemic barriers and dominant discourses (e.g., patriarchy, heterosexuality, and individualism) affect the lived experiences of FSU Jewish immigrant couples in Toronto. This particular group of immigrants illustrates the tensions of simultaneous participation in experiences of privilege and oppression. They are white, professional, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied individuals, who are also immigrant, Jewish, and from a non-Western social and economic context. Toronto has been chosen for being the largest FSU Jewish community in Canada with over 40,000 FSU Jews in residence (Shahar 2010). The research question relevant to this article explored how issues of gender and power were experienced and negotiated by FSU Jewish immigrant couples throughout the process of immigration and establishment of life in Canada.

This study utilized qualitative methodology. The intention was to focus on immigrant lives as a complex, multi-layered reality. The “complex, holistic nature” of qualitative research, which focuses on the subjectivities and multiplicity of meaning and sees knowledge as a construction of these meanings, (Creswell 1998, p. 15; Denzin and Lincoln 2005) makes qualitative research appropriate in this context. The intention was to describe “what is going on” (Creswell 1998, page 17), rather than to establish associations, relationships, or cause and effect. The intention was to provide a detailed view of immigrant experiences focused on “the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings” that were not experimentally measured in terms of quantity, intensity, or frequency, but rather to “stress how social reality is created and given meaning” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, page 8).

In this study, availability and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit participants. The recruitment process began with availability sampling. This method of sampling is popular in qualitative studies in social work due to its relatively low costs and suitability for recruitment of participants from minority groups who are typically difficult to access (Rubin and Babbie 2008). A number of strategies were used. Flyers in Russian with information about the study and researcher’s contact information were placed in various popular spots in the Russian Jewish community, including community centers, the Russian library, delicatessens, clothing stores, and restaurants. The study was also advertised in free Russian newspapers/magazines. In addition, a flyer was posted at Jewish Family and Child Services. It was hoped that this multi-pronged approach would allow for a heterogeneous sample in terms of length of residence, profession and occupation, and socio-economic status. This method of recruitment was ineffective since it did not provide any participants. A more productive form of recruitment was established through snowball sampling. Similar to the strategy employed by Remennick (2006, 2007), the researcher, herself a Russian-speaking, Jewish immigrant woman, used her own social connections within the FSU Jewish community to create initial contacts for interviews. Subsequent interviewees were accessed by referrals from these initial participants (snowballing). As often happens in snowball sampling, the limitation was a slightly homogeneous sample in terms of the participants’ level of education and their socio-economic status. Twenty-two immigrants participated in the study, among them the eleven women whose stories are described in this paper.

The study utilized a combination of the Feminist Oral History and Testimonio research designs to guide data collection and analysis. This methodological choice is consistent with critical feminist intersectional analysis. Feminist Oral History is used to explore the meanings of events in the eyes of women and men, facilitate understanding among social classes, contribute to social justice, and “right the injustice” (Reinharz 1992) of a particular person’s or group’s unheard voice (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Reinhartz 1992). It deals with a person’s past and ranges over a wide series of topics that participants identify as significant aspects of their life stories (Reinharz 1992). In Oral History, the individual’s experience is reflected without necessarily contextualizing their personal story within social conditions that may have influenced and shaped the narrative. While reading a personal story is important, the personalized form of the story may “detract from our ability to develop a socio-political understanding of events and forces” (Reinharz 1992, page 137). To mitigate this important concern, Testimonio, a research methodology that calls research participants to testify as witnesses to collective, rather than an individual experience, was used, which is for the identification of patterns and social systems of repression.

The choice of this methodology was relevant for the following reasons. First, Testimonio allows for telling a story of a collective experience. In this case, a collective story of Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union to Canada, through participants’ personal histories as a part of the larger collective and the inclusion of their perspectives on broader social discourses, shape their understanding. The collective nature of constructing a common story is also part of Oral History. Second, this methodology highlights the social urgency of the story, that is FSU Jews’ problematic relationship with the dominant Canadian Jewish community, structural barriers to secure meaningful employment, and potential changes to gender roles and dynamics. Lastly, it provides the potential to establish a dialogue and collaboration

between a researcher and participants and creates a discursive space for an empathetic understanding of FSU Jewish immigrants' lives on the part of the dominant society.

Testimonio interviews were conducted first to explore the participants' understanding of the collective socio-political story of FSU Jewish immigration to the West and then used as a backdrop for Oral History interviews that explored individual couples' experiences. The following questions were asked in Testimonio interviews: "Can you talk about experiences of FSU Jews who immigrated to Canada?", "What was their situation like in the FSU?", and "What do you think it is like for them in Toronto?" In oral history interviews, couples were asked "What was your life like in the Soviet Union?", "What has life been like for you since immigrating to Canada?", and "What helps you, as a couple, to survive the hardships of immigration and building your life in Canada?" Probes were used to further explore participants' education, economic situation, relationship to the labor market, and differences they may have noticed between life in the context of a communist government as compared to North American capitalism.

Participants were given a choice regarding whether they wanted to be interviewed separately or together in order to ensure that they felt comfortable when relating their stories and views. At the beginning of data collection, the methodological choice to interview partners together was made in order to allow them to learn about each other's perspective and for the researcher to be able to observe the interactions and reactions between them. After conducting two interviews this way, it became clear that men were more dominant during the conversation, with women supporting or complementing their views, or sometimes censoring partners' stories. In order to learn women and men's perspectives more fully, the decision was made to conduct separate interviews. Some couples did not express any concerns about providing separate interviews, while other couples insisted on being interviewed together, explaining that it was more convenient. At the end, five of the couples were interviewed together, and the rest separately. These separate interviews with each partner provided more complex and nuanced stories of their experiences. Face-to-face Testimonio and Feminist Oral History interviews were conducted in Russian in the participants' homes and tape-recorded. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim with attention to both content and paralinguistics (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). The interested participants reviewed the transcripts and their feedback was incorporated in the final report.

Data analysis of the stories was performed in Russian in order to remain as close as possible to the meanings constructed by the storytellers (Temple 2008). Only selected quotes supporting the analysis were translated into English. The data analysis began with the social constructivist thematic analysis of each individual interview, which identified each couple's stories. Elements of narrative analysis (Riessman 1993) were used to explore how each couple approached questions of class, gender, and Jewishness, as well as accounts of their lives before and after immigration. At the next stage, similarities, differences, and resonances across the interviews were examined. Later stages of analysis were informed by feminist intersectional understanding of the way in which ideological, social, and cultural frames define how individuals see the past and construct their stories. Stories, views, and issues that emerged from a collection of individual (couple) accounts were scrutinized for how they were possibly shaped by participants' social location as members of a group or groups defined by gender, class, ethnicity, immigrant status, and sexual orientation (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). This step was followed by examining the role of social structures (patriarchy, neo-liberalism, and heterosexism) in participants' experiences. Each structure was examined separately (e.g., How does gender inform this individual account? How does class inform this individual account? How does heterosexual discourse inform this individual account?). It was then analyzed in relation to others, identifying when each structure seemed to be relevant for understanding experiences and dynamics, and how they emerged and submerged in relationship to one another (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999).

A number of strategies were employed to ensure the integrity of the study. All participants reviewed their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of their narratives and those participants who were willing to be involved more were offered a meeting to hear and discuss the draft of the findings to

ensure they agreed with the depiction of their subjective realities. Thick descriptions/participant quotes were used to ensure the credibility of the interpretation and to help readers make informed judgements as to the transferability of the research (Rubin and Babbie 2008). Peer-debriefing, including discussions with the research advisor and a number of peers, was used to enhance the accuracy of the interpretation. Reflexive journaling was used to document the researcher's impressions, reflections, insights, feelings, and experiences throughout the process of data collection and data analysis. It began with the process of self-reflection, articulating motivation for the study and an analysis of the way in which researcher's social location might influence the research process. This reflexive journaling continued during the data collection and analysis. The research advisor provided analytical comments in the journal.

The University Ethics Review Board approved this study. All participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. Participants were asked to choose pseudonyms to be used in the research report and publications. This was done for several purposes to ensure the confidentiality of the information provided by the participants and to protect their privacy in a small community, to personalize them instead of referring to them as Participant 1, 2, etc., and to provide an element of ownership over their pseudonym. The names of the participants were omitted from the transcripts/notes and replaced by the pseudonyms chosen. The identifying details of their lives (e.g., occupation/place of work, names of relatives) were changed and information about their places of origin in the FSU omitted to ensure their confidentiality and privacy.

This article focuses on the experiences of women, as reported by the study participants. Other research findings are reported elsewhere (Morgenshtern and Pollack 2016; Morgenshtern Marina 2014).

5. Results

Using a feminist intersectional analysis lens, women's experiences and the extent of changes in their gender identities, roles, and familial practices were interpreted through the historical context of their pre-migration lives and their social location before and after immigration. These pieces of information are presented first to contextualize their stories about experiences in the labor market and social reproduction areas following their immigration to Canada.

5.1. Women's Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Eleven women took part in the study. Table 1 presents specific data on the women participants' educational and professional characteristics in order to illustrate their profile of privilege and oppression and provide further information about their social location and the changes they experienced following immigration. All participants but one immigrated to Canada through the immigration program for skilled workers, which means that they were accepted into Canada based on their educational and professional credentials. Their tenure in Canada ranged from five to 19 years. All women participants but one held academic degrees, which is a relatively high proportion compared to 50% of undergraduate degree holders within the FSU Jewish community (Shahar and Rosenbaum 2006) and 40% of university degree holders within the general Canadian immigrant population. Their years of education ranged from 13 (professional college diploma) to 24 (All but Dissertained). Eight women complemented their previous education with further studies in Canada. Although all women participants held professional jobs before immigration, their employment experiences in Canada were not always consistent with their education level and pre-migration professional experience. Five women experienced downward occupational mobility, while the rest were able to maintain or regain their pre-immigration professional status. One woman was unemployed at the time of the interview. Five women juggled several part-time jobs or a full-time and a part-time job. The participants' individual income levels varied from below \$24,999 CAN a year (5) to higher than \$60,000 CAN (4). The majority of women (6) had similar earnings to their partners. Three had an income of less than \$24,999 CAN on the part of each partner. One enjoyed similar earnings of \$40,000–59,999 CAN. Two earned more than \$60,000 CAN each. This sample of participants had a

slightly higher proportion of individuals with mid-range and high-range salaries, compared to salary distribution within the general FSU Jewish community (Shahar 2015). Women participants' ages at the time of immigration to Canada ranged from 31 to 42 years old with a median age of 36 years old. All participants but one were married. All immigrated to Canada with pre-school and school-age children. All but one owned a house or a condo.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants.

Name	Year of Immigration to Canada	Years of Education	Profession before Immigration	Current Occupation	Annual Income (\$\$ CAN)	Number of Children
Tsipi	1993	15	English Teacher	Secretary/PT Tourism	≤24,999	2
Lora	1995	16	Electronic Engineer	PT Early Child Educator	≤24,999	1
Janna	1995	17	Journalist	Retail	≤24,999	1
Ira	2005	17	Radio Technologist	PT Graphic Design/PT Retail	≤24,999	2
Tanya	2004	20	Bio-chemist	Technologist (unemployed)	-	3
Stella	2002	24	Mechanical Engineer	College Professor	≥60,000	2
Sveta	2004	17	English Teacher	PT ESL Teacher	≤24,999	1
Lana	2003	13	Nurse	Nurse	≥60,000	2
Inna	2001	15	Industrial Engineer	Health Information Specialist	40,000–59,999	2
Natasha	2003	18	IT Project Manager	IT Project Manager	≥60,000	2
Larisa	1993	16	Public Relations	Psychologist	≥60,000	1

5.2. Historical Background: Gender Roles in the FSU

Gender relations, marriage patterns, and kinship networks are the product of social and economic conditions and a family's social location in a given society (Baca Zinn 1990; Frazer 1997). Thus, the participant stories in this study must be understood against a particular historical background and within the socio-political contexts of the socialist Soviet Union and neoliberal Canada.

From the first days of its rule, the Soviet state stressed gender equality and, hence, women's emancipation through legitimized education and employment (Shlapentokh 1991). This emphasis led to women's mandatory participation in the workforce. Additionally, women were encouraged to participate in public life, and a comprehensive network of public services, such as a daycare network, was developed to decrease the time and energy women required to attend to a family's basic needs. These social policy developments resulted in high cultural capital, including for Jews. More than 50% of both male and female Jewish immigrants from the FSU have college degrees and professional experience (Remennick 1999). However, despite the rhetoric of equality between men and women in the Soviet Union, sexist attitudes toward women, both in the workplace and in the family, never ceased to exist (Remennick 2007). These attitudes informed gender practices that, in turn, demonstrated the dominance of men in the economic sphere and relegation of women to the domestic sphere. This distinction meant that women enjoyed economic privilege generated by their partners' position and income. In the social reproduction realm, women's universal full-time employment did not change the common perception of their domestic roles as the core aspect of their feminine identity. Masculinity, in turn, was associated with breadwinner responsibilities. Men's roles in the domestic sphere were mostly marginal. The support of parents/extended family and the state allowed women to balance employment and domestic responsibilities.

In Canada, these gender arrangements are complicated by two systemic phenomena. First, these highly skilled immigrants coming from a non-Western economy face the problem of occupational

re-adjustment since their educational and professional credentials are not recognized and skill incompatibility is usually aggravated by limited English proficiency (Remennick 2006, 2007). This experience is not unique to FSU Jewish immigrants and has been noted with regard to many other immigrant groups in Canada (Chai et al. 2018; Chen 2008; Kaushik and Drolet 2018; Meares 2010; Ng and Shan 2010; Sakamoto et al. 2010; Suto 2009). Non-recognition of foreign credentials and demand for Canadian experience causes unemployment, underemployment, and de-skilled labor among foreign-born women (Suto 2009). Many women find themselves relegated to dead-end factory jobs or feminized low-paid occupations (Ng and Shan 2010; Suto 2009). Second, the support of the extended family is rarely available for two main reasons: Canadian immigration policies that favor skilled and younger immigrants and gear down family sponsorship, and the increasing age of extended family members who become consumers rather than providers of care (Chai et al. 2018; Remennick 2007). In addition, under neoliberalism, social reproduction services shift from a public domain/welfare state to unpaid women's work, which, thereby, creates heavier workloads and responsibilities for women, especially in dual earner families (Adkins and Jokinen 2008; Bezanson 2006; Dobrowolsky 2009; McDowell 2004). It is safe to expect, therefore, that these structural changes may challenge some gender practices and lead to alterations in established work/family arrangements.

5.3. Women's Experiences in Toronto

The participants provided gendered stories of women's experiences in Canada. For some participants, although they were participating in waged work, their domestic role was stressed as a core of their gender identities. In other words, the universal heterosexual notion of gender roles informed the participants' construction of women's subjectivities and experiences in Canada. The dominant discourse in their stories stressed that immigration to Canada benefited women in that Canada provided opportunities, primarily economic ones, that were not available in the Soviet Union. In addition, women's identities did not undergo existential change, in that women combined paid employment and social reproduction roles in the Soviet Union and continued to do so in Canada.

Other participants related alternative narratives of the burden women carry in a society that stresses productive and skilled paid labor and does not recognize the organization of caring responsibilities in the family. These participants argued that employment demands were more intensive in Canada than in the FSU, and that, although combining professional employment with domestic roles was not new to them, they were challenged by the intensity of juggling multiple responsibilities in increasingly demanding or precarious employment with their unpaid work in the home and communities. Although women were able to regain their middle class/professional pre-migration privilege, the burden of combining the demands of the employment with the responsibility for the survival, well-being, and happiness of their family members increased as well. As a result, women did not feel liberated or empowered. In addition, the participants reported changes in couples' relational experiences as a result of the alterations in the established work/family arrangements. These relational experiences are reported elsewhere (Morgenshtern Marina 2014).

5.3.1. Dominant Discourse: Improvement of Women's Lives

Some literature on the experiences of immigrant women from the Third World suggests that women experienced greater autonomy and improved quality of life post-migration because of increased financial independence and greater decision-making powers within the family (see, for example, Jibebe and Hynie 2012). Similarly, some participants in this study believed that Canada provided women with better opportunities, which, in turn, offered women independence and control over their lives. For example, some participants talked extensively about more opportunities and access to better services for women, richer consumer choices, and higher living standards. According to these participants, the availability of household products and services allowed women to spend less time on chores with more time for themselves. Consumerism was equated with women liberation.

It seems to me that women here have more opportunities than in the Soviet Union . . . They drive a car that they couldn't, say, in Russia: no one would let them behind the wheel. They have their own cars; they are practically independent of their husbands. They do a lot of things for themselves, go to dance, do yoga, or whatever. They have life of their own, because they spend less time on chores. They don't stand by the stove all day long, they don't have to do the washing or dishes . . . they spend less time on these and have more spare time; they take care of themselves more . . . women are doing great here . . . I'm just . . . I just love women here (Volodya)

While some participants stressed the improvement in the socio-economic realm of women's lives, others emphasized the continuity of feminine gender identity that did not require any adaptation with immigration. The following response of Dima, who was asked about women's experiences in Canada, reinforces the universal heteronormative view of gender roles: "Yeah, what happens to women? What can happen to women? Women have kids."

Hence, these participants considered women's caring work as the only signifier of their experience and, consequently, viewed women's lives following immigration characterized by continuity and betterment facilitated by the new context. It is striking that the employment experiences of women were rarely acknowledged by these participants. Women's experiences of juggling employment and caring work were not included in the construction of their experiences. The representation of women's experiences of waged work as "a natural extension" of their familial duties supported the dominant Western construction of immigrant women's experiences of improvement.

5.3.2. Alternative Discourse: Devaluation of Professional Credentials and Labor Market Experiences

Other participants offered alternative stories and conveyed that immigrant women in Canada, while receiving more opportunities, also encountered more responsibilities. These participants spoke about women's employment as playing an important role in their experiences in Canada in order to ensure a decent standard of living for their families. For some women participants, being unable to achieve professional accreditation meant being relegated to the 'feminized workforce' and/or demoted to factory work. This is consistent with other research findings regarding the employment experiences of immigrant women (Banerjee and Verma 2012; Meraj 2015; Ng and Shan 2010; Suto 2009). For example, Lora, an electronic engineer in Ukraine, was forced to take a part-time position as a childcare assistant in Toronto. This traditional female occupation was more accessible to her than one in the male-dominated niche of the labor market in which she was qualified but where her professional credentials were not acknowledged. This low-wage and physically and emotionally demanding job, however, gave Lora income that was crucial to the family's ability to achieve and maintain their middle-class status.

I admit, I earn little, but my money is necessary. I used to come home tired and upset after work. I cried. And Eric would say, "But you pay the mortgage". Really, if I didn't work, we wouldn't be able to afford this condo. My earnings, although not big, contribute a lot.

Women stories also conveyed the challenging nature of their employment experiences as they assumed the responsibilities of productive labor. Although essential for family income, the nature of their jobs and their experience of deskilling often had a detrimental effect on their emotional and physical health (Martins and Reid 2007). Ira had 17 years of education and worked as a radio technologist in Israel, but was forced to take a factory job in Toronto in order to contribute to the family income. The demands of an unskilled, monotonous job were emotionally challenging for Ira and the working conditions at the factory appeared to be adverse for her physical health.

It is this factory, where he [her partner] works. I spent three months there. I had to quit. My whole body rebelled . . . doing this monotonous work. And this dust in the air, oils, dirt, chips on the floor . . . For three months of working there I had fever, I was catatonic. Then, I realized, if I want to be

alive, I should quit. I just couldn't [bear it]. I would pass out, faint, fall asleep—it was hard labour in the fullest meaning of the word. (Ira)

Those women who were able to achieve Canadian professional accreditation experienced the demands of the labor market as much higher than in the FSU. Their experiences are described in the next subsection.

5.3.3. Alternative Discourse: Hurdles of Professional Employment

A heteronormative understanding of gender roles informed the experiences of some women participants' privilege. Because feminine identity was constructed by the participants primarily around caring roles and because the pressure to provide was not as strong for women as it was for men, some women had the opportunity to regain upward mobility through Canadian education. This is in contrast to other immigrant professional women who usually experience a shift to domestic responsibilities only (Guo 2009; Meraj 2015). In order to access the local professional labor market, 10 out of 11 women in the sample went back to school to supplement the education they already had or to enhance it. Central to their decision to 'Canadianize' their education and training was the experience of their non-Western educational and professional credentials devaluation and the neoliberal requirement for productive and skilled labor (see Ng and Shan 2010). For example, Tanya completed a college program to substitute her credentials in biochemistry, Ira and Janna took a graphic design program, Inna studied health information management, Natasha earned her MBA, and Larisa invested long hours to receive her license as a psychologist. Once they overcame the hurdle of finding a job, these women experienced the demands of the labor market as much higher than in the FSU, which is similar to other professional immigrant women (Ng and Shan 2010; Suto 2009). As immigrants looking for a professional job, they were ready to accept any professional job offer, despite feeling they, because of their immigrant status, were given the most challenging tasks to perform and were expected to invest extra effort. Natasha, an information technologies project manager, was given the responsibility for managing the weakest team in the company. She affirmed that her "*skills were put to the fullest of tests.*" As a manager, she traveled frequently between Canada and the United States and was at home "*only for the weekends.*" Stella, a college professor, described various professional challenges and the anti-immigrant sentiment that she faced at the beginning of her college career in the following way.

The first year was absolutely terrible. Ninety students in class, and I can't understand what they're saying, and they make fun of me amongst themselves. And the main thing, I was given a lab that was in a very bad condition. I had two weeks to get familiar with the equipment and to get ready to teach a course that I had studied 25 years ago. In general, it was scary. Hard, very hard. It is standing in front of the class that is stressful.

Tanya's professional job as a chemical technologist at a factory was physically challenging. Tanya was happy to secure a professional job after graduating from college and spending six months looking for a job. She soon found out, however, that this job required a very considerable physical effort that she would never have associated with a professional job a woman would do. Tanya characterized this job as "*not a job for a woman.*"

[A] very demanding job; just physically hard for me. My job is to test the raw materials: go to the warehouse and uncork absolutely all the containers using hard tools. Imagine jars-this-big. Open containers, take samples, run the tests, fill in the paperwork, and enter it all into the computer. I am running around at the speed of light. I get so tired that I would crawl out of work, sit in my car, and lay my head on the steering wheel. For ten minutes, I would sleep just so that I could start the car and drive home. And it is like this the whole day, without a minute of rest.

The demands of professional jobs described above were not "simply" a result of women's immigrant status and the resulting discrimination in being given the most challenging tasks. Their

stories in the next sub-section suggest that these professional demands do not diminish with time and are characteristic of the Canadian neoliberal job market.

Furthermore, as a result of landing a professional role, these women often became de facto family breadwinners, which is a dramatic change and/or turning point in their lives. For example, Lana, a nurse who was professionally accredited in Canada, spoke about her occupation allowing for a higher income and economic stability compared to her partner's unskilled job in construction: *"I found a nursing job and started earning well right away. It happened that, since then, we've been always covered from my side."* In the FSU, although employed full-time in professional jobs, the women had often been poorly paid and accorded subordinate status, with their social status accrued from their husbands' professional careers and income. Their professional employment in Canada provided them not only with higher income, but also with higher individual social legitimacy and status, which enhances their personal autonomy. As Valera, Sveta's partner, stressed, *"[i]f I don't bring money tomorrow, my wife won't be hungry and won't have to live in the street"*.

Hence, professional employment enhanced the women participants' spatial mobility and autonomy and paved the way for them to become their families' means of achieving middle class status. It also required them to negotiate their family's contacts with the external environment and to invest in the building of their social capital. This meant that women found themselves under multiple burdens in the form of the demands of professional employment as well as household and caring responsibilities (Bezanson 2006; Dobrowolsky 2009). The women participants also related narratives of a more significant burden that they carried in a society that stressed productive and skilled paid labor, but did not recognize the organization of caring responsibilities in the family. These experiences are described in the next subsection.

5.3.4. Neoliberalism and Heterosexual Privilege: Increasing Women's Subordinate Status

The women participants were able to achieve middle-class status in Canada by securing and maintaining professional jobs but did not speak of their lives as "liberated." They spoke of combining ambitious and demanding employment with the "natural" role of social reproduction and caring in a context in which support from extended family was not available, due to immigration policies that hampered family sponsorship.

When I worked full time, it was a real crazy house. The youngest [child] spent long hours in the daycare and the other two were on their own for half the day. The extracurricular activities were in an unspeakable condition: we rushed after work; I was tired to death, the life turned into a disaster. I cooked dinner and prepared lunches for the kids in the middle of the night, at 2 a.m. . . . When you are working for the whole day with no flexible schedule till 6 p.m., then you are rushing to the daycare, dragging the kids to their activities and tidying up the house, this becomes a horror". (Tanya)

Stella's story of being the main provider of instrumental and emotional support to her parents and in-laws demonstrated that gendered notions of responsibility for caring work were reinforced and reproduced in Canada, leaving women limited opportunity for leisure.

I've been the head of the family since '91 and carrying the weight of it on my shoulders. I do not live, I do not relax. Now, I feel guilty for not grading those exams yesterday. I told you that I was going to mark, and I didn't, I went to bed and slept for 2 hours. Well, just because I do not have time. All these kids' activities and the rest . . .

These stories clearly demonstrated that women found themselves carrying the burden of combining the demands of the employment with the responsibility for the survival, well-being, and happiness of their family members.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study add important nuances to the dominant discourse for the improvement of women's lives following immigration to the west. Although some participants, and some literature,

describes women's experiences in Canada as facilitating their independence, closer examination of the stories also suggests that women experienced an increased burden with regard to fulfilling their responsibilities at work and at home. What was constructed as better opportunity, e.g., better jobs, in fact, appears to be the subjection to the demands of the highly formalized neoliberal labor market operating on the principles of market economy, competition, and individual responsibility. To maintain their pre-migration professional status, these women embraced the central neo-liberal goal of becoming a "successful entrepreneur of oneself" (Walkerdine 2003, p. 241) in the context that first accepted them on the grounds of their educational and professional credentials in the skilled immigration category. The context then stripped them of their class privilege by devaluing or not recognizing these same credentials. Some women were demoted to dead-end factory jobs or relegated to low paid feminized jobs. However, because the pressure to provide was not as strong on them as it was on men, and because their feminine identity was constructed mostly around caring roles (Dua 1999), women had more opportunities and social legitimacy to regain upward mobility through Canadian education. They first invested in Canadian educational credentials to substitute those from the FSU and then invested significant effort toward fulfilling the most challenging sectors of their professional jobs. Other women shouldered semi-professional or unprofessional careers to share the responsibility for family income with their partners. While professional employment often led to greater integration with the external environment, their increased spatial mobility and professional status required that they take on the role of negotiating this external environment on behalf of the family. Furthermore, women were expected to retain childcare and household duties. While these appeared to be easier to fulfill due to the availability of consumer choices, balancing domestic and career goals resulted in more responsibility due to the lack of affordable childcare and absence of support from extended family. Hence, these women found themselves dealing with the multiple burdens of demands of professional employment and household and caring responsibilities, since transformations in gendered employment arrangements were rarely accompanied by a redistribution of gendered household labor tasks (Dobrowolsky 2009).

The heterosexual privilege reinforced these women's subordination: through heterosexual privilege, they had access to Canadian educational credentials and professional employment, which then resulted in even greater subordination at home as they had more tasks to fulfill. Thus, even though immigrant women's experience in Canada is often constructed as one of improvement, the participants' stories testify to both the privileges of professional employment and the multiple burdens in combining professional employment, childcare, and household duties as well as communication with the outside world. These accounts indicate de-familiarization and re-familiarization patterns: women are both autonomous subjects/workers and responsible for providing care for the household and its members (Adkins and Jokinen 2008; Bezanson 2006; McDowell 2004). Immigration was a mixed blessing for these women. However, it was constructed by some participants as the betterment of life and de-traditionalization. The material conditions of many women's lives may have changed, but the traditional moral associations between femininity, domesticity, and maternity remained strong (Dua 1999; McDowell 2004), even if for some women, a good deal of the physical (and emotional) labour previously assisted by their mothers was transferred to the market economy (McDowell 2008).

To sum up, the findings of this study challenge the representation of immigrant women as "a singular, monolithic subject" (Mohanty 2003, page 17). They bring visibility to the complex and contradictory realities of different groups of immigrant women and allow us "to theorize the ways inequality structures values, desires, and needs for different groups and classes of women" (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, p. xvi). They highlight that the experiences of Jewish immigrant women from the FSU are both similar to and distinct from the experiences of other immigrant women in Canada. Similar to the experiences of the Third World immigrant women described by Mohanty (1997), FSU Jewish immigrant women were constructed as mothers, wives, and supplementary workers despite the fact that most of them worked full-time and earned at least as much as their husbands. Despite the ideas of domesticity that were highlighted, these women

saw their jobs as a source of upward mobility of their families, which is similar to the women in [Alexander and Mohanty \(1997\)](#) study. However, unlike those women, FSU Jewish immigrant women were privileged with choice and the opportunity to acquire Canadian educational credentials that allowed them better chances for upward mobility due to the gendered and classed histories of the Soviet Union, their whiteness, and the tenets of neoliberal ideology. This privilege and consequent gains in social legitimacy and status co-existed with the multiple burdens and subordination informed by patriarchal and heteronormative ideals of the nuclear family institution.

6.1. Implications for a Service Provision and Policy

Mental health and counselling practitioners' should enhance their understanding of the complex lived experiences of immigrant women. Appreciation of the socio-political context and role of power and inequality in structuring immigrants' lives, i.e., structural understanding of the relationship between different social groups, should replace a concentration on the cultural/ethnic and psychological characteristics of individuals, which is a focus that ultimately essentializes them ([Alexander and Mohanty 1997](#)). An appreciation of the complexity of the immigrant experience should replace a dichotomization of these experiences. FSU Jewish immigrant women simultaneously participate in different levels of privilege and oppression, where the dimensions of whiteness, middle-class status, heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness interlock with the dimensions of gender, age, Jewish identity, and immigration from the FSU. It is important to recognize the combination of these dimensions since it locates individuals in the social world, shapes their social experiences and the meanings they make of these experiences, and defines the economic and social rewards available to them ([Baca Zinn 1990](#); [Dua 1999](#); [Hulko 2009](#); [Juan et al. 2016](#); [Mohanty 2003](#)). Recognition of the role of interlocking dimensions in facilitating immigrant women's experiences will enhance practitioners' appreciation of heterogeneity in the experiences of women in this ethnic group. It is also important to untangle and understand the role of each separate structural dimension in order to effectively define areas that require intervention. Women's individual responses to problems and challenges should be externalized and explicitly connected to dominant social discourses and social mechanisms of power in the particular social context of their lives, in order to help them develop alternative, less oppressive stories about their experiences ([Falicov 2009](#)).

The discourse of structural exploitation or subordination is not easily visible or accessible to FSU Jewish immigrants, since narratives of meritocracy, individual responsibility and upward mobility are dominant. This may mistakenly prompt healthcare practitioners to use universalistic mainstream concepts and interventions, especially when these immigrants present themselves as adopting dominant discourses. The socio-political narrative of structural barriers and systemic issues, and conversations about culture, changing roles, and identities, along with resistance to dominant values/expectations, should begin to function as a counter-narrative of the experience of the transition to a neoliberal society and the nuclear family way of life ([Falicov 2009](#)). [Almeida et al. \(2007\)](#) suggest integrating socio-education into work with immigrants as "essential to the task of developing critical consciousness and changing family dynamics" (page 188). They suggest making visible the normalizing effects of the dominant discourses and then deconstructing and de-centralizing them. In this study, the participants' stories reflected the discourses of individualism, meritocracy, and the nuclear heterosexual family. It is important, thus, to extend the repertoire of credible and institutionalized narratives available in a particular social space, because these are "the means by which we receive, rationalize, and understand our particular experiences in the world" ([Saleebey 1994](#), page 352). This task can be approached through an explicit focus on the messages that inform the understanding of the role of social location in structuring experiences before and after immigration. Making such links explicit may enhance the facilitation of conversation on the role of structural forces, in the form of institutions and socioeconomic conditions, that determine how individuals live and what they do ([Saleebey 1994](#)).

Another important consideration is legitimating immigrants' human capital. Class, race, and political variables shape the kind of social capital available to individuals and communities, and, thus, illuminate the political dimensions of inclusion and well-being (Manderson 2010). As state agents, mental health practitioners and policy makers possess symbolic power to legitimate the different capitals that immigrants hold. In order for this capital to gain value, it should be converted into symbolic capital, i.e., be legitimated by those in power (Skeggs 1997). Recognition is a significant moment in the construction of subjectivity (Skeggs 1997). Therefore, policies, services, and programs that recognize, legitimate, and reinforce immigrants' cultural and social capitals should be developed instead of existing forms that characterize immigrants as deficient, which adds further to their social marginalization. The effective integration of skilled immigrants requires collaboration between various stakeholders such as the immigrants themselves, social services providers, researchers, policy makers, governments, and employers (Kaushik and Drolet 2018). The experiences of skilled FSU Jewish and other immigrants struggling to find their place in the Canadian labor market underscores the need to relax policies for licensure and accreditation of foreign professionals on the federal and provincial levels (Remennick 2006), to incorporate a "prior learning assessment as a way to assess, acknowledge, and 'package' for Canadian employers the work experiences of women whose career experience is in non-regulated professions, and to encourage the creation of post-secondary programs to assist migrants with upgrading their skills and education and facilitate credential and/or professional recognition and licensure" (Suto 2009, page 427). These changes are necessary in order to ensure fuller utilization of immigrants' human capital.

Lastly, women's social reproduction responsibilities should be acknowledged, validated, and addressed. The discussion of unpaid care and domestic work should become recognized and valued through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. Creation of a federally-funded child care strategy to provide low-cost care for newcomers to Canada, as well as to all residents and citizens, is one such improvement (Suto 2009). Advocacy should be exercised to shift norms around care in the minds of social policy makers and change conventional fiscal policy frameworks to provide universal public care services, as well as to improve the wages and working conditions of those in the market. This division of responsibility should not be treated as a private matter to be worked out by individual men and women at a household level (Rhodes and Capraro 2017).

6.2. Limitations of the Study

Transferability of the findings (e.g., applying the processes identified in this study to immigrants from other backgrounds in Toronto or other parts of Canada or with other characteristics) should be approached with caution since the aim of this study was to explore the in-depth meaning of women participants' experiences rather than to focus on the representative nature of the sample. Many factors are likely to influence the process of rebuilding life in a new context. Several limitations of this study related to the sample characteristics should be taken into consideration. First, this study sample included fewer younger participants whose immigrant and gender experiences might be different since they socialize into the capitalist context and deal with the distinctive developmental tasks of their life stage (e.g., raising small children). This study did not distinguish issues specific to the human lifespan. Second, the study focused on the experiences of married women and did not explore the experiences of single individuals. Third, women in this study were well-educated and the experiences of immigrant women with less education are not included. Fourth, the couples in the study appeared to be functioning well and, thus, the findings concentrate on the experiences and gender dynamics of the couples who have maintained their couplehood despite immigrant adversity. The experiences of struggling and/or stressed or divorced couples were not explored. A study of stressed couples might reveal more problems as couples attempt to negotiate changing gender and power dynamics. Fifth, this study explored the experiences of immigrant women from the European part of the FSU and did not include Jews who immigrated from Caucasus or Central Asia republics of the FSU since

their familial and cultural values and experiences as well as the influence of the Soviet state on their lives were somewhat different. Lastly, this sample of participants included only heterosexual women and did not distinguish issues specific to sexual orientation or the experiences of women who identify as queer.

Another limitation is related to the method used to collect the data. The researcher only met once with each participant to collect information about their experiences and reflections. Although there was good rapport with each participant in the study, there was not sufficient time for participants to develop a trusting relationship with the researcher. This lack of trust may have limited their responses to those that fit dominant ideologies. A more prolonged engagement might have facilitated different responses.

6.3. Directions for Future Research

Some of the limitations listed above inform future research of immigrant women experiences using intersectional theoretical framework. For example, what are the experiences of rebuilding life for single or divorced women? What are the specific challenges they face? How do they live out gender and heteronormative practices?

Another potential area of study is to explore the immigrant experiences of queer individuals and the dynamics of how they negotiate roles and identities with immigration. How do dominant ideas of sexuality structure their experiences in a new context? What is the role of homophobia and heterosexism in their pre-immigration and post-immigration experiences?

Lastly, the experiences of non-Jewish immigrant women from the FSU should be considered. How do they, who did not experience the oppression of the state anti-Semitism in their country of origin where they belonged to the dominant majority, experience a new acquired minority status, make sense of their social experiences, and negotiate their identities?

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