The Information Age?
Resource Accessibility for African Immigrant Women

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

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Abstract

There has been an influx in the number of African people entering North America since the 1960's. Despite the fact that women who emigrate from Africa tend to be more highly educated compared to the rest of Canada's population, they are far more likely to be unemployed and low-income (Statistics Canada, 2007: 7). Economic security is linked to decision-making power in many aspects of a woman's life, including personal safety and freedom of choice.

The original research question investigated in this study was *how do female African immigrants in the Region of Waterloo access the services they require to gain economic security?* The intent of the study was to explore how the services in the Region of Waterloo are accessed by African immigrants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, during the interview process the information collected extended beyond the initial research question. The analysis of the research answers three important questions. *What are the various types of resources that women need to access in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency? How do they find out what these resources are? How can they acquire them?*

The qualitative research used in-depth interviews that were conducted with fifteen African women living in the Region of Waterloo. The analysis of the thesis emerged from the lived experiences of the participants following a feminist ethnographic approach. Women were given the opportunity to discuss their personal backgrounds and their reasons for leaving their countries of origin from their perspectives. The barriers to economic security after arriving in the region were analyzed with special attention to the unique barriers women face because of care-taking responsibilities. The impact of the loss of social support networks was explained. The use of government support services was discussed, leading into an analysis of the lack of information regarding support services. Participants identified that there is collective action of African immigrant women in non-profit organizations operating to fill the information gap.

There are a number of important conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First, the women interviewed argued that they felt that it was the government's responsibility to provide economic support services to new African immigrant families in order to help them become established. Second, although the government does have a number of programs designed to economically assist immigrants, they are not accessible nor do they reflect the needs of African immigrant women. Third, non-profit women's organizations in the region are effective in providing information about available resources, and do take the needs of African women into consideration. Fourth, non-profit organizations in the region empower African women locally and help them to integrate into the community. Finally, participants asserted that non-profit organizations should be funded by the government in order to be able to provide sufficient economic support to community members. This research adds to the actions of local non-profit agencies and builds a needed step in bridging that gap between government and non-profit organizations by acknowledging the contribution of non-profit organizations.

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Dedication

    I would like to dedicate this thesis to family. They have given me the confidence and foundation that I needed to follow my dreams. I am forever grateful for their faith in me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background Information

The cultural diversity found in the Region of Waterloo is part of what makes the area a unique and innovative place to live. A full 20% of the population is comprised of first generation immigrants (Region of Waterloo, News Release, Jan. 20, 2004). With an ever increasing level of cultural diversity, the Region of Waterloo is a model Canadian region, particularly when considering Canada's dedication to multiculturalism.

When the Canadian Government first made multiculturalism a policy in 1971, it did so with the intent of increasing cross-cultural understanding and decreasing discrimination (Government of Canada, Canadian Heritage). According to the Government of Canada, the policy of multiculturalism acknowledges the value and dignity of all people currently residing in Canada. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms legally supports multiculturalism by stating that no person living in Canada should face discrimination based upon "race, cultural heritage, ethnicity, religion, ancestry or place of origin" (Government of Canada, Canadian Heritage).

The guarantee of legal equality despite cultural difference is particularly important for the Region of Waterloo. Since 18.3 % of the immigrants who entered the region in 2002 are refugees, they may be less aware of their rights and more in need of social supports (Region of Waterloo, News Release, Jan. 20, 2004). Refugees often have to leave with fewer resources or time to prepare for their departure. Rabrenovic (2007: 351) notes that while people with immigration status typically come with an English or French language background, skills, and economic support, refugees are often less well prepared.

Many immigrants from Africa do not enter Canada as refugees even though they leave for the same reasons as refugees such as a need to escape violence or a dwindling

economy. (Rabrenovic, 2007: 351). When people immigrate to Canada they often come at a time when any social and economic support available to them will be extremely important to successful integration.

Because the Region of Waterloo has a refugee level that was 7.3% above the average for Ontario in 2002 (Region of Waterloo, News Release, Jan. 20, 2004), it must be particularly dedicated to providing social services that meet the needs of all of its residents. All immigrants must be provided with the same access to financial support that would be offered to Canadian citizens. Canada's legal commitment to multiculturalism makes it a requirement to provide social services that are legitimately open to people with diverse life experiences and cultural backgrounds. Providing the required social services may be the only way for Ontario to enjoy the variety of skills and talents that it seeks from a culturally diverse population.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

I first became involved with the African community during my research assistantship through the University of Waterloo with the project "Communities Working Together against Hate Crimes" in 2008. The project led by Alicja Muszynski and Sadia Gassim was chosen because of its capacity to provide information and resources to the African community. In order to obtain funding, the project had to have an action research goal, based on the recommendations given by the Hate Crimes Community Group (Ministry of the Attorney General, January 2008).

Through my work with African community members during the "Communities Working Together" project I heard numerous discussions about a need to improve access to

certain supports and resources within the Region of Waterloo. One's decision-making power and ability for self protection is dependent upon adequate economic resources. Economic self-sufficiency impacts every aspect of a person's life and is a major concern for recent African immigrants.

The intent of the study was to explore how the services in the Region of Waterloo in particular, are accessed by African immigrants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Given the complexity of support services used to foster economic independence, it was important to know what services are effective in helping culturally and linguistically diverse African communities. The aim of this study is to aid in the improvement of the overall well-being of African community members in the Region of Waterloo. Unless otherwise stated, for the purpose of this study the term immigrant will include both immigrants and refugees.

According to McMullin, Davies & Cassidy (2002: 298), women represent a large majority of financially unstable individuals in Canada. Thus the study focused on the experiences of this particular group of people. As a result of child care expectations and family structures, women are more susceptible to economic instability. This is frequently a disadvantage for immigrant women who are likely to have come to Canada without the support of a spouse (Rabrenovic, 2007: 351).

1.3 Regional Background Information

The Region of Waterloo consists of the three cities of Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo. The townships of Wellesley, Woolwich, Wilmot and North Dumfries are also part of the region, although they are not included here. As shown in table 1, according to the 2006 census the population is 473,260, of which 105,375 are immigrants or refugees. The

immigrant and refugee population continues to be a main source of population increase.

From 2001 to 2006, 17,020 immigrants and refugees settled here.

Table 1

Immigrant status and period of immigration	Waterloo (CD)			Ontario		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total population	473,260	233,695	239,565	12,028,895	5,877,875	6,151,020
Non-immigrants	363,795	179,640	184,155	8,512,020	4,197,560	4,314,460
Immigrants	105,375	51,850	53,530	3,398,725	1,620,320	1,778,400
Before 1991	63,395	31,205	32,195	1,884,440	901,375	983,065
1991 to 2000	24,955	12,330	12,625	933,545	443,665	489,880
2001 to 2006	17,020	8,310	8,710	580,740	275,280	305,460
Non-permanent residents	4,085	2,205	1,880	118,150	59,995	58,155

* source Statistics Canada Community Profiles, 2006

Originally Waterloo Region was part of a section of land that was granted to the Six Nations Confederacy by the British Crown who then sold a portion to Colonel Richard Beasley (Kitchener Kiosk, 2009). The first permanent non-native settlement was established in 1800 by a group of Pennsylvania German Mennonite farmers who saw the secluded area as a chance to farm and worship in privacy. The Township of Waterloo was formed in 1816 and enjoyed a steady migration of German-speaking Europeans (Kitchener Kiosk, 2009).

The city center was originally named Berlin in 1833, reflecting the German heritage of the population. However, WWI created an anti-German backlash, which forced Berlin to change its name to Kitchener in 1916. According to Kitchener Kiosk (2009), by 1965 Kitchener had become Canada's fastest growing city and one of the leading industrial and financial distribution centers. New immigrants predominantly choose to settle in Kitchener, which has a population of 204,668. Approximately 25% of the region's population identifies as of German descent but ethnic diversity is increasing, particularly in Kitchener. As table 2

shows, the largest visible minority population in Kitchener is Black, followed by South Asian and Latin American.

Table 2

Visible minority population characteristics	Kitchener, City			Ontario		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total population	202,160	99,740	102,415	12,028,895	5,877,875	6,151,020
Total visible minority population	31,230	15,830	15,405	2,745,200	1,332,995	1,412,205
Not a visible minority	170,930	83,915	87,010	9,283,695	4,544,875	4,738,815
Black	6,395	3,335	3,065	473,765	223,220	250,540
South Asian	6,360	3,290	3,075	794,170	401,900	392,270
Latin American	4,510	2,190	2,315	147,140	71,370	75,765
Southeast Asian	4,010	1,955	2,055	110,045	53,135	56,910
Chinese	2,880	1,450	1,430	576,975	277,500	299,475
Arab	1,885	1,020	865	111,405	58,625	52,785
West Asian	1,665	835	825	96,620	49,275	47,340
Visible minority	1,010	495	510	56,845	26,680	30,160
Multiple visible minority	910	510	400	77,400	37,755	39,645
Filipino	775	335	440	203,215	87,025	116,190
Korean	555	290	260	69,540	33,720	35,820
Japanese	275	115	155	28,080	12,775	15,300

source Statistics Canada Community Profiles, 2006

The religious diversity continues to grow as well. Currently over 78% of the population follows some denomination of Christianity. However, as shown in table 3, the region also has 9,225 people who identify as Muslim. Among the growing number of Muslim residents are African immigrants from countries like Somalia. The region has five mosques including the Cambridge Islamic Centre, ISIJ of Kitchener and Muslim Society of Waterloo (Thaqalayn Muslim Association). However, the Muslim population continues to be underserved without a sufficient number of mosques for the population size.

Table 3

Religious Affiliation in the Region of Waterloo

Religion	Number of Adherents
Protestant	184,995
Catholic	138,205
Other Christian	11,335
Christian Orthodox	10,275
Muslim	9,225
Hindu	4,120
Buddhist	3,705
Sikh	2,515
Jewish	1,045
Eastern religions	605
Other religions	755
No religious affiliation	67,105

* Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

1.4 Canada's Immigration System at a Glance

There are a number of categories that a person can access to become a Canadian immigrant. Applicant categories include Professional or Skilled Worker immigrant, an immigrant entering under the Provincial Nomination Program, a Canadian Experience Class immigrant, Business immigrant, Family Sponsored immigrant, and entering under Refugee Status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

1.4.1 Professional Immigrant

Professional immigrants must have had one year of continuous full-time experience within the past ten years in one of 38 approved occupations including registered nurse, plumber and university professor. If an applicant does not have one year of experience they may still qualify if they have work already arranged in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

Professional immigrants also have to pass a points system. In order to be successful, an applicant must receive 67 points. Points are given for education level, English and French language skills, work experience, age (preferably between 21 and 49 years of age), having arranged employment, and being adaptable. Adaptability is based on factors like a spouse's education level. Applicants and their dependents must also undergo medical examinations and security clearance in order to qualify (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

1.4.2 Provincial Nomination Program

An applicant can enter Canada under the Provincial Nomination Program, except in Quebec, which has a similar Quebec Skilled Workers Program. Under the Provincial Nomination Program provinces can sign an agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada if they want to select an immigrant that meets established requirements. Established requirements include the ability to fill a specific job shortage (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

1.4.3 Canadian Experience Immigrant

The Canadian Experience Class allows temporary foreign workers and international students who have studied in Canada to become Permanent Residents. In order for a temporary worker to qualify, he or she must have two years of skilled or professional work experience within 36 months of the application date and have basic English or French language skills.

In order for a recent graduate to qualify, he or she must have successfully completed at least a two year course at a post-secondary institution in Canada, have basic English or French language skills, and one year of skilled or professional work experience within 24 months of the application date (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

1.4.4 Business Immigrant

The Business immigrant category is designed to attract investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed people from other countries to promote economic development by accessing entrepreneurial skills and investment capital. Applicants can qualify for admittance into Canada if they have business experience and a high net worth. In order to enter Canada as an entrepreneur, an applicant needs at least CAD $300,000 and has to acquire a business in Canada that will maintain the applicant's employment (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

1.4.5 Family Sponsored Immigrant

In order to qualify for Family Sponsorship status, an applicant must meet the family member criteria which include categories like spouse, parent, child, and orphaned niece less than 18 years of age. An applicant must have a sponsor who is over 18 and not bankrupt or imprisoned, who has Canadian citizenship, or who resides in Canada and still intends to reside in Canada by the time the sponsored family member lands in Canada as a permanent resident (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

After sponsoring a family member, the sponsor becomes financially responsible for the applicant's living needs including the provision of food, clothing, shelter, and health care needs not covered by public health services. The needs of a sponsored family member will have to be guaranteed for a prescribed amount of time.

1.4.6 Refugee Status

In order to qualify as a Convention Refugee in Canada a person must meet the criteria established by the *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which states that a refugee is any person who has a reasonable fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (IRB: 2008). Although obtaining refugee status is determined on an individual basis, the Refugee

Protection Division of the Immigrant and Refugee Board of Canada report an increasing

number of refugees coming into Canada with 30,525 referred during 2007-2008 (IRB:

2008).

In order to receive private sponsorship a person must be declared to be a "person in

need of protection" from the danger of torture, a life threatening risk, or the risk of cruel and

unusual punishment (IRB: 2008). If a refugee is privately sponsored, the private sponsor

becomes financially responsible for the basic needs of the refugee for a prescribed amount of

time. Although financial assistance is provided for a period of one year when a refugee is

sponsored by the government of Canada, refugees are often left without financial support

after this time (Amnesty International, 2008). The availability and accessibility of economic

support services is therefore of marked importance for refugees after this period.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Research on the African community is of increasing importance because of the

growing number of African immigrants in Canada. The African population is one of the

largest ethnic groupings in Canada excluding Europeans (Statistics Canada, 2007: 7). The

population increase in African communities is 28% higher than the overall rate of population

increase (Statistics Canada, 2007: 9). According to a Statistics Canada research paper (2008:

6) 70, 000 people immigrated to Canada from Africa between 2001 and 2006. A majority of

Africans choose to settle in Ontario. Statistics Canada (2007: 7) reveals that 60% of people

with African descent live in Ontario, which is 174, 000 people.

Despite the fact that African community members tend to be more highly educated

than the rest of the Canadian population, they are more likely to be unemployed and with low

income (Statistics Canada, 2007: 7). In 2000, 39% of African-Canadian community

members were below the low-income line compared to 16% from the general population. Of

low- income Africans, 47% were children under the age of fifteen (Statistics Canada, 2007: 7).

Facilitating the integration of African immigrants is of particular importance for the Region of Waterloo. According to Canadian census data, the Region of Waterloo contains over 24 different African communities with 3350 people reporting Africa as their place of birth in Kitchener (Statistics Canada: 2001). There has been an influx in the number of African people entering since the 1960's, in part due to the increasing political and social tensions experienced in certain African nations.

The independence movements of many African countries during the 20th century have resulted in conflict because of the colonial and post-colonial legacies they have inherited. Howard (1981: 96) asserts that colonialism has caused much of the political and economic turmoil by creating different territorial boundaries and increasing tensions between various religious, ethnic and tribal groups. Large numbers of immigrants have had to leave countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda and South Africa (Howard, 1981: 104).

The African community in the Region of Waterloo has been identified by the Ontario government as an important segment of Ontario's population. In 2008, the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario gave twenty-three grants to community organizations from across Ontario seeking to address hate crimes (Ministry of the Attorney General, January 2008). Professor Alicja Muszynski and Sadia Gassim (founder of World Wide Opportunities for Women and African Women's Alliance) were given one of these grants in order to address hate crimes against the African community living in the Region of Waterloo. This shows an open acknowledgment of the community's importance to the region.

Waterloo Region has quickly become one of the most desirable destinations in Canada for African immigrants. Being able to provide a good standard of living in all aspects is essential in order to encourage a continued level of immigration that will help the Region of Waterloo thrive.

Interest in the life circumstances experienced by the African communities in the Region of Waterloo is still very new. Despite the fact that the barriers faced by the African communities have been acknowledged through various projects, there is no academic literature that addresses the accessibility of economic supports. Thus the research presented here fills an existing void.

My research fits with the interests of numerous non-profit organizations already operating locally. The research findings will be useful to the organizations that have dedicated themselves to helping immigrant women access needed economic sources.

1.6 Research Question

The research question asked at the outset of the research was: *how do female African immigrants in the Region of Waterloo access the services they require to gain economic security?*

Forms of economic support included, but were not limited to, help securing employment or job training, accessing health care, finding affordable child care, and receiving monetary assistance. It is important that a range of services are available to provide immigrants with a self-sustainable future.

The question initially under investigation made the assumption that women need money to become self-sustaining in Canada. However, as the research progressed, the

interviews revealed much more fundamental questions that hid behind this assumption, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

The research specifically addresses the Region of Waterloo because, even within Ontario, the experiences of immigrants may vary depending on the area of settlement. Since the research looks at resources offered through non-profit organizations, faith based groups, local community members, social networks and government, the informal and formal networks established between groups may not be the same in all areas. It is likely that because the Region of Waterloo has non-profit organizations that work specifically with helping immigrant women in transitioning to the region, that other areas without such groups may offer a different level of support overall.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter contains an introduction and background information, the study purpose, regional background information and information on becoming an immigrant in Canada. Chapter one also includes the significance of the study and the research question. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework that informs the analysis of the work. It discusses socialist feminist theory leading to a critique by African Canadian Feminism that racial minority women are excluded.

In order to attend to the experiences of racial minority women feminist intersectionality is applied to analyze race, class and gender. In particular, the work of bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins is used to inform an understanding of feminist intersectionality theory. The central elements of intersectionality theory are explained, as are the main problems that feminists identify with intersectionality theory. Dorothy Smith's feminist standpoint theory, also stemming from socialist feminism, is discussed. Feminist standpoint theory informs the epistemological background for the thesis. Smith advocates for a woman-centered approach focusing on the lived experiences of women.

Chapter three focuses on the epistemology and method. The methodology section discusses the characteristics of feminist ethnography that was employed, the research design, such as the rationale for the interviews, data collection procedures, participant characteristics, strategies for validating the findings and ethical considerations.

Chapter four analyzes the data, giving an overview of the reasons that participants stated for their immigration and their main barriers to economic security after arriving in the region. Following this, a brief discussion of extended family support burdens and the loss of social support networks is provided. The use of government support services is revealed which leads into an analysis of the inaccessibility of information regarding support services. Subsequently, the use of services offered by faith-based organizations and non-profit organizations within the region is explored. The final chapter, Chapter five, discusses the limitations of the study, followed by the conclusion, and remarks on where the research will go from here.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory was employed as the overall framework for this thesis. Feminism itself is a relatively new term first introduced in the 1890's (Beasley, 1999: xiii). As a framework, the meaning of feminism has varied over time and become fragmented into many different strands. Beasley (1999: 5) contends that one of the main elements common to all forms of feminist thought is that it offers a challenge to mainstream social and political thought. Men's experiences are universalized, which excludes the unique experiences of women (Beasley, 1999: 8). Critique appears to be the common element shared by all feminists who seek to understand gender inequality and the centrality of the male perspective (Beasley, 1999: 3). Feminists have explored issues from social roles and life experience to feminist politics. However, the identified problem areas and suggested solutions vary depending on the strand of feminist thought employed. Socialist feminism was the starting point for this research.

In order to recognize the experiences of marginalized women it is necessary to apply a socialist feminist framework. However, socialist feminism does not adequately take race into consideration, as noted by African Canadian feminism. It was important to establish the conceptual framework of this thesis using research and theory pertinent to the experiences of African immigrant women. In order to attend to race, I describe the theoretical work of bell hooks (1984), a feminist theorist who critically reflects on the disjunction between upper-middle class white feminism and the lived experiences of poor Black women. The work of hooks moves beyond a socialist feminist perspective. From there I look at feminist intersectionality theory, which evolved from socialist feminism, as a way to understand the experiences of those with multiple marginalities paying special consideration to Patricia Hill

Collins' contributions to intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory made it possible to answer the question: *how do female African immigrants in the Region of Waterloo access the services they require to gain economic security?*

By understanding the barriers that African immigrant women face, a more complete understanding of their experiences was achieved. I also explore the difficulties that some theorists identify in intersectionality theory. Table 4 provides a brief summary of the perspective on race and class for each feminist theory discussed.

Table 4

Theoretical Perspectives Summary		
Theoretical Perspective	**Perspective on Class**	**Perspective on Race**
Socialist feminist perspective	- Male dominance and capitalism intersect to create a barrier for women - Women accept care-taking tasks without recognition	- Racial discrimination is used by ruling class to accumulate capital - Current racial hierarchies began with capitalism
hook's feminism	2nd wave feminists excluded low-income women who had limited education	Black women face greater disadvantages than upper-middle class women
Patricia Hill Collins: Black Feminism	- Class intersects with race to create multiple marginalities for women - Class is a binary construct	- Race is socially constructed and changes over time - Race exists in a hierarchy
Intersectionality: "Double Jeopardy " Approach	Poverty increases discrimination for marginalized women	Being a member of a racial minority increases discrimination for marginalized women
Intersectionality: Social Dominance Theory	Men compete with each other to control resources as the dominant gender	Men from racial minorities face more discrimination than women from racial minorities
Intersectionality: Invisibility	A low-income woman with multiple marginalities loses her identity	A racial minority with multiple marginalities loses her identity
African-Canadian Feminism	Class subordination is legitimated using racism	Community involvement can be used to improve the lives of women

2.1.1 Socialist Feminist Perspective

The socialist feminist perspective asserts that male dominance and capitalism intersect in a way that creates a barrier to the equal participation of women within society (McMullin, 2004: 47). The research question asked here addresses how women access the services they require to gain economic security because economic security is intrinsically linked to decision-making power. Women of low income status, in particular, face the greatest barriers to life opportunities. These barriers are a result of capitalist exploitation that operates with the use of a gendered division of labour (Stasiulis, 1990: 37).

Women are systematically blamed for their poverty which ensures that the status quo faces very little challenge. Krumer-Nevo (2005: 87) maintains that women living in poverty have been treated as legitimate targets of systemic suspicion and blame since the 19th century, citing the tendency for women to be diagnosed as psychopaths and treated as the root cause of familial breakdowns.

Feminist scholars who focus on the barriers faced by low-income women often seek to challenge systems and policies that disregard the actual experiences of these women allowing them to explain their own experiences (Krumer-Nevo: 2005: 88). This stance is useful in addressing the often ignored experiences of low-incom women who are often the target of societal wide criticism as a result of gender (Henry, Tator, Mattis and Rees, 2000: 44).

In order to understand the lives of marginalized women Kumer-Nevo (2005: 89) applies two main principles, marginality and the human-woman complex. The first principle is used to understand that women are more likely to face economic subordination because power relations are gendered. There is very little opportunity for women to experience real equality with upper or middle-class white men unless the social restrictions of women's

private lives, like care-taking responsibilities, are considered on a macro level (Kumer-Nevo: 2005: 89).

It is impossible to truly understand the lives of low-income women if their experiences are not part of policy concerns in the work place, and in the allocation of social services. Furthermore, barriers that women face are different where there are differences in class and ethnicity (Kumer-Nevo: 2005: 89). In order to understand the marginalities that women experience, all of these factors must be considered.

The principle of reading the human-woman complex must also be applied to research conducted with marginalized women. The human-woman complex means that although women are marginalized, they cannot be treated as "passive victims" of the status quo (Kumer-Nevo: 2005: 89).

Although systemic discrimination does occur, women are constantly adapting and adjusting to the social arrangements that they live in. While women may internalize some social structures, they also reject others and resist certain forms of oppression (Kumer-Nevo: 2005: 89). Applying these principles in research facilitates empowerment, and takes into account the struggles that consistently occur in the daily lives of marginalized women.

Class is necessarily linked to a society's understanding of gender and race. According to Acker (2000: 196) because the accumulation of capital under capitalism is what drives society, it has the power to shape class relations, as well as gender, and race relations. Class must be considered to fully understand the different social barriers faced by women of different social categories. Acker (2000: 196) refers to class systems as a way to control power and subordinate people, which results in inequality. Since class is created actively, ignoring it makes understanding things like income distribution impossible.

Without an understanding of class, producing any tangible change is out of the question (Acker, 2000: 197). Acker (2000: 198) argues many of the current relations of

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race and gender began with the development of the capitalist mode of production. White upper-middle class men overwhelmingly remain the "ruling class", while poor women of colour are still the most marginalized. The work place is gendered in many occupations, ensuring that women, particularly women of colour, are unable to find work outside of traditional care-taking roles (Acker, 2000: 198).

People in positions of privilege are often removed from the lived experiences of marginalized peoples, which ensure that they are incapable of working towards a mutually beneficial solution (Acker, 2000: 206). The appearance of equal opportunity hides the systemic inequality that persists for women occupying marginalized class positions. Legitimating societal problems or concerns is dependent on recognizing that a structural problem does in fact exist.

The inability to access material goods means that divisions that are compounded by gender become invisible. Acker (2000: 207) explains that class lines are materially defined through separate space like work places and living areas. These material divisions also occur for race and gender. Although this is particularly true in Black ghettos, it also exists for lower middle-class Black people who are steered towards Black neighbourhoods when purchasing a house (Pattillo-McCoy, 2004: 159). Because class divisions create separate spaces, other categories of division are not scrutinized. While it may be simple for people to dismiss the poor as underachievers, the fact that those in substandard housing are more likely to be women of colour is easily missed.

Gender has been used to maintain the economic status quo under capitalism in North America. Leiman (1993: 337) contends that women have been targeted for exploitation. The initial exclusion of women from high opportunity, well paying jobs ensures that the ruling class comprised of white men has control over the surplus value created by working class labour.

However, Leiman (1993: 337) is quick to note that not all women are equally subjected to class exploitation. Many low-income women may work for higher-income women, particularly in domestic fields such as childcare. The socialist feminist perspective is unable to account for the experiences of low-income women who are also part of an ethnic minority. The marginalization that results from race must be considered in order to understand the experiences of African immigrant women.

2.1.2 African Canadian Feminism

African Canadian feminism emerged out of a response to socialist feminism. African Canadian feminism attends to the experiences and perspectives that are unique to Black women. Black women have been working collectively for social change since the eighteenth century in Canada. Wane (2002: 30) contends that Black Canadian women have been instrumental in the fight for equality and dignity of women. Black Canadian feminists have taken up an "action oriented feminism" that seeks to improve the everyday lives of other Black women (Wane, 2002: 31). Patricia Hill Collins explains Black feminist theory as rooted in the common histories of Black women (Wane, 2002: 41).

Black feminist theory is often passed on through generations by providing young women with simple practices that improve their lives. Community involvement is a central element of Black Canadian feminism (Wane, 2002: 43). Black Canadian feminism helps to explain the experiences of Black Canadian women because it does not see their experiences as fragmented.

2.1.3 hooks' Politics of Feminism

Like African Canadian feminists, hooks' (1984: 2) feminist theory was a response to the weaknesses observed in socialist feminist theory. hooks recognizes the fact that classism and racism may be more significant to the daily lives of poor Black women than sexism. hooks (1984: 2) argues that to analyze the experiences of marginalized populations it is

important to start from a specific reference point, rather than generalizing from the reference point of a white, upper-middle class female population.

For many poor Black women racism is often strongly linked with an inability to access sufficient economic resources (hooks, 1984: 3). The comparison group for upper-middle class white women in mainstream feminist research has traditionally been upper-middle class white men. Bannerji (1995: 51) echoes this claim by asserting that without acknowledging experiences of women who are not white or upper-middle class, these women become further oppressed.

Feminist research that focuses on the experiences of a small minority of Canadian women cannot address the exploitation that racialized women experience at the hands of upper-middle class white men and women. Indeed, Bannerji (1995: 52) believes that upper-middle class women are complicit in the domination of low-income racialized women. In order for upper-middle class women to sufficiently free themselves from the family and household, low-income minority women are often called in to take up these responsibilities (hooks, 1984: 1). Consequently, women from ethnic minorities face further disadvantage in many areas, for example the paid labour force (Walby, 1990: 14). Minority women cannot necessarily be seen as sharing the same consciousness as white upper-middle class women.

Feminist research created at the level of academia has often been exclusively created for consumption by equally educated white women. hooks (1984: 108) asserts that the issues discussed in feminist research have not had mass dissemination because of indirect class exclusion, and sometimes direct refusal to make the literature accessible to a less formally educated audience. For instance, middle and upper income white women often assume literacy as a taken for granted assumption (hooks, 1984: 108). Socially disadvantaged women, and new immigrant women, are less likely to be reflected in the topics and issues advocated for by many mainstream feminists.

Conducting feminist research that is inclusive of all women requires an understanding of the differences in life circumstances that exist. hooks (1984: 44) contends that "common oppression" cannot be the starting point for feminist research because not all women share the same type of oppression. Lorde (2004: 71) also argues that if differences among women are not recognized, then only superficial social change can be attained.

hooks rejects the notion of "sisterhood" developed by second wave white middle-class feminists that excludes diverse women whose experiences differ. Instead hooks seeks to develop a feminism that is forged through common beliefs and an emphasis on diversity. hooks argues that "political solidarity" should be maintained in feminist research where advocacy for real change is the desired result (hooks, 1984: 65). In response to concerns about the exclusion of racial minority women, such as those raised by hooks, intersectionality feminism emerged.

2.1.4 Patricia Hill Collins: Black Feminism

Intersectionality feminism has the ability to explain the experiences of a wide range of women. Patricia Hill Collins notes that intersectional feminist theory has gathered a lot of academic interest since the 1990's (Hill Collins: 2000: 156). Patricia Hill Collins is a major contributor to intersectional feminist theory, with a focus on the experiences of Black women in particular. Hill Collins (2000: 157) examines how race, class and gender "mutually construct" one another in a racist and capitalist male-dominated society. By acknowledging the impact of race, class and gender, it is possible to make sense of certain practices that appear "across multiple systems of oppression" (Hill Collins, 2000: 157).

In order to understand intersectionality, Hill Collins (2004: 75) develops several important themes. First, categories like race, class, and gender are socially constructed, rather than stemming from nature (Hill Collins, 2004: 75). It is through a historical process that these categories are created. Second, each construct has a binary like rich/poor. Third,

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each category is part of a social structure that exists in a "system of stratification" (Hill Collins, 2004: 75). Fourth, the categories change over time because they are socially constructed. (Hill Collins, 2004: 76).

Patricia Hill Collins explains that multiple marginalities oppress both men and women (Steady, 2000: 456). Siltanen and Doucet (2008: 177) explain that multiple marginalities can be used to understand how domination based on race, class and gender can affect group interactions and access to various forms of power and privilege. Since race, class and gender intersect and combine in different ways, some women may be advantaged by aspects like wealth, while some men may have multiple marginalities that restrict life chances (Steady, 2000: 456). Even though real oppression results from marginal status connected to race, class and gender, it often remains uncontested. (Hill Collins, 2000: 159).

2.1.5 Understanding Intersectionality

The categories of race, class and gender have real consequences for people's lives (Muszynski, 2009: 45). Muszynski (2009: 51) notes that although overt racism and sexism may be unacceptable, "political correctness" only hides the ongoing sexism and racism that have been historically well established. "Political correctness" has allowed for neo-conservatives to completely deny the existence of racism and sexism, thereby leaving them unaddressed and unchecked. Bannerji (1995: 45) adds that everyday forms of racism become "common sense" when they become invisible.

The dominant wealthy, white, male group has the power and resources to position itself as the "positive pole" while those who do not have power and resources are placed at the negative pole (Muszynski: 2009: 45). Discussing categories like gender, race and class is important because personal identities are formed using these categories (Muszynski, 2009: 45).

Current scholarship in the area of intersectionality theory holds numerous perspectives for understanding the experiences of those with multiple marginalities. One of the main concepts used in intersectionality feminism is double jeopardy. The concept of double jeopardy is used to understand how people with marginalized identities experience cumulative levels of discrimination (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 377)

Research findings in support of the concept of double jeopardy demonstrate the tendency for those with multiple marginalities to be at the bottom of important social indicators, such as wages. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008: 279) specifically note that low-income immigrant women from racial minorities occupy the most disadvantaged positions.

2.1.6 Social Dominance Theory

Separate from the double-jeopardy approach is social dominance theory. Contrary to the previous model, supporters of social dominance theory believe that subordinate men are the target of society's strongest forms of oppression, coming from mainly men in positions of power. Because men already dominate women, men mainly compete with other men to control available resources. Men from racial minorities are likely to face more discrimination than women from racial minorities because they pose a threat to the maintenance of power, while women do not (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 378). Incarceration rates of Black men illustrate the social dominance theory. Even after controlling for other variables, Black men are incarcerated disproportionately more, compared to white men or Black women.

However, critics of this view argue that the overall results of discrimination targeted at men have a similar, or greater, impact on women. Like white women, women from ethnic minorities are dependent on men. Men are the significant others, family members and friends who provide emotional and financial support, and as a result any discrimination felt by a man directly impacts women as well (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 378).

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2.1.7 Creating Invisibility

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008: 380) argue that people with intersecting marginalities are often socially invisible. Because people with multiple marginalized identities do not fit into only one group, their experiences are ignored. The sense of self for people with intersecting marginalities becomes erased when their experiences are not acknowledged. Without a solid identity, opportunity for self empowerment is very limited. People with intersecting marginalities are not a threat to the status quo because they remain on the periphery of society. For example, during the interview process participants discussed an informational barrier that resulted in social isolation and the loss of a formerly established personal identity.

2.1.8 Central Elements of Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality feminist theorists agree on a number of central arguments, even though there is not complete agreement on how to understand intersectionality theory. First, Siltanen and Doucet (2008: 179) view categories of oppression as interrelated phenomena. There are people who benefit directly from a set of social arrangements and there are those who are complicit in it because they benefit as well, even if indirectly.

Second, Steinburgler, Press, & Johnson Dias (2006: 807) assert that all feminists using an intersectionality approach believe that marginalized identities of race, class, gender and sexuality are defined within a historically specific context.

Third, a person with multiple marginalities has experiences that show how intersecting marginalities have a "multiplicative" effect (Steinburgler, Press, & Johnson Dias, 2006: 808). For example, intersectionality is important for understanding why Black female-headed families consistently experience an elevated level of poverty, even compared to other female-headed families (Leiman, 1993: 337).

Conversely, those who occupy dominant statuses both avoid oppression and gain opportunity. Advantage may be experienced through one category like male, while a person may face oppression as a result of another category like race at the same time. As a result, a Black man would receive advantages for being male, but experience oppression for not conforming to the dominant racial group. The central elements of intersectionality theory are summarized in table 5.

2.1.9 Opposition to Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory has been widely used by feminists to understand the intersections of race, class and gender. However other theorists have identified several difficulties, which are summarized in table 5. Wilkinson (2009: 78) asserts that intersectionality theory has focused strongly on the categories of race, class and gender to the exclusion of other categories such as religion. However, Wilkinson (2009: 79) does admit that it would be difficult to explain unequal treatment of Canadian citizens, since Canada prides itself on equality, without applying an intersectional analysis.

Second, some theorists believe intersectionality theory does not sufficiently explain differences within a single category. Post-essentialist theories contest the boundaries of established categories. Dhamoon (2009: 30) claims that post-essentialism is able to make sense of those who do not belong to any one category, such as those of mixed race. In response, Wilkinson (2009: 81) notes that in reality most people of mixed race are treated as a "visible minority", as the dichotomy of race only necessitates a distinction between racialized and non-racialized people.

Third, although the theory pays attention to intersections of race, class and gender there are times when one identity is attended to more than others. Wilkinson (2009: 82) claims that during the U.S. Democratic primary elections in 2008, for example Hilary Clinton was viewed in terms of sex and Barak Obama was defined by race. There was no mention of

the class of either candidate during the course of the election. Wilkinson (2009: 84) correctly notes that there are times when attending to a single category of difference is helpful in understanding a particular social condition.

However, in order to understand the life of a low-income Black immigrant woman, it is necessary to include an analysis of all categories. It is still important when applying intersectionality theory to begin with investigating the significance of race, class and gender without first assuming that the significance exists (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008: 179). African Canadian feminists note that not all men have power simply because they are male. Black men are often the target of oppression for white lower, middle, and upper-class men (Deliovsky, 2002: 73). White women may become the object of ridicule from white men because of their involvement with Black men. The exact meaning of categories like race, class and gender should emerge from the data, rather then being read onto the data (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008: 179).

Table 5

Intersectionality Theory	
Central Elements	1. Categories of oppression are interrelated 2. Marginalized identities like race, class and gender are historically specific 3. Multiple marginalities have a "multiplicative" effect 4. People with a dominant status avoid oppression and gain opportunity
Main difficulties	1. There is not enough focus on other categories like religion 2. It does not explain differences within a single category 3. One identity usually receives more attention than others

2.1.10 Feminist Standpoint Theory

Although socialist feminist theory was the initial starting point for the theory of this thesis, Dorothy Smith's feminist standpoint theory was important for the epistemology of the thesis. According to Stanley (1990: 26), epistemology is a theory of knowledge that attends

to questions about what can be known in the world and who has the capacity to be a "knower". Paying attention to epistemology helped me to establish a point of entry into the research setting, and to uncover previously unknown realities.

Like intersectionality feminist theory, Dorothy Smith's work began as a reaction to the inadequacies of socialist feminism. The feminist underpinnings of Smith's (1977: 13) standpoint theory are supported by three assumptions. First, the starting point of research must be the perspectives and experiences of women. The second assumption is the need to act to end oppression against women. The third assumption of Smith's feminism is that there is a need to create a sisterhood that includes all women, regardless of any other category membership, before a unified position can be established.

Dorothy Smith's standpoint theory was important for understanding the experiences of female African immigrants. Eichler (1998: 5) claims that many theories of knowledge have excluded the perspectives and experiences of women. In many cases, this has been done by accepting a man's experience in the world as a neutral standard (de Beauvoir cited in Smith, 1987, p. 53). Smith asserts that the experiences of women must be treated as distinct (Smith, 1990: 12). While men are often encouraged and expected to concern themselves with matters outside of the everyday world of life maintenance, women are often confined to this realm through their care-taking responsibilities (Smith, 1990: 13).

Although Smith focuses specifically on women, like intersectionality feminists she is aware that women do not represent a homogeneous group. However, she argues that their experiences are partially homogenized by the common domains that they occupy (Smith, 1990: 11). By attempting to understand the experiences of female African immigrants who seek economic support, I was able to obtain a more complete sociological understanding of women's experience.

Through an awareness of the experiences of the women who seek economic support, change can be produced in a larger social context. Smith's standpoint theory requires not only a new theoretical direction, but also a new method (Smith, 1990: 11). Since the experiences of women have been overlooked, method must also begin at the site of lived experience (Smith, 1990: 12).

Beginning with personal experiences is important because the "local" where daily activities occur has been completely ignored by academia. This fact is particularly damaging to women who can never fully leave the "local". Men can enter the "extralocal" realm separated from the body only because women continue to maintain men's bodily needs in the private realm.

If women try to leave the world of everyday life they are met with the alienating force of a "bifurcation of consciousness" as they try to live simultaneously in both the physical realm and the world of ideas (Smith, 1990: 17). Smith does not refer to the separation itself as a critical flaw. Rather, the flaw resides in the massive power imbalance that has been assigned to the spheres. The unobtrusive "bifurcation of consciousness" that occurs for men cannot occur for women in the same way (Smith, 1990: 17). Men have the ability to separate their bodily needs from the world that exists in concepts, thereby creating two dichotomous levels of consciousness that never meet. Women cannot reach the "transcendental realm" free of mundane concerns because these concerns are always in need of attention (Smith, 1990: 18).

Smith does not value the "radical subjectivism" proposed by some sociologists. Instead, she maintains that the subjective observations must always be viewed as only part of a larger social context (Smith, 1990: 12). Smith (1990: 14) asserts that connecting women's experiences to a larger social framework is essential because accepting subjective experiences without an actual grounding in social reality does nothing to alter social

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institutions. Smith (1990: 1) notes that by including the perspectives of lived everyday experience people can begin from their own knowledge base rather than rely on the "relations of ruling".

Smith applies what she calls a modified version of Marx's concept of alienation to explain women's alienation (Smith, 1990: 19). In its most basic form, Marx's notion of alienation states that alienation results when the work that people do under capitalism contributes to their own oppression (Smith, 1990: 19). Similarly, with the current separation of the "local" and "extralocal" realms, women contribute to the strengthening of the power relations that oppress them. Although it is not a positive action, again here it is noted that women do not acquiesce to the status quo. Smith explains that if women work well in their current capacity of mediation between the real world and the world of abstraction, then men never have to leave the world that develops the structure of the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1990: 19).

Smith's theory of knowledge includes a new method that will address issues ignored in mainstream sociology. The approach ensures that the sociology written in texts is not unlike the real world (Smith, 1990: 12). The world expressed in mainstream sociology does not take into account the experiences of women.

I began my research with a particular set of assumption about the world, rooted in feminist standpoint theory. I assumed that there is one real world, where lived experiences occur. I recognized that there were multiple ways to look at the existing world and that the experiences of women were not often included in political decision-making or social research. I began with the assumption that people actively produce the society and social relations that they live in, although material conditions constrain the amount or direction of activity possible. The different experiences of women and men create different social realities, wherein men are benefited and women are oppressed

More specifically, I believed that the experiences of African immigrant women and African immigrant men may differ substantially and need to be explored. I believed that in operating within the existing social structure new immigrant women participated in maintaining the current social order, although there is a real possibility that collective action on the part of African immigrant women could potentially challenge the status quo.

I assumed that gender relations are essentially about the distribution of power and resources, and that women have not been given the opportunity to shape the development of the structure of society in equal part. Consequently, I undertook this research with the assumption that incorporating the standpoint of women is not the only way to understand their unique social realities.

Exploring these various strands of feminist theory, stemming from socialist feminism was a necessary starting point for the current research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Feminist Ethnography

My research was conducted with the use of feminist ethnographic methodology as a frame. Ethnography was originally developed by anthropologists to understand cultural groups (Fetterman, 1998: ix). According to Creswell (2003: 199) it emerged from the work of Malinowski, Park and Boas. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3) state that ethnographers typically focus on a few cases in order to collect in-depth information about a particular community or group and the data produced is primarily qualitative.

Qualitative methods have previously been criticized as lacking scientific rigor. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 7) note that ethnography became unpopular during the mid-twentieth century because it did not conform to a positivistic design. However, many social scientists believe that it is inappropriate to study social phenomena the way that physical phenomena are studied because a positivist research model cannot recognize the meaning that communities or groups attach to various experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 7). A positivist research method would be less effective within the exploratory nature of my research which seeks to understand the experiences of African women and the meanings that they attach to them.

Although ethnographers have a number of data collection techniques to choose from, interviews are one of the most important tools used (Fetterman, 1998: 37). For my research I conducted a series of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are necessary when a researcher wants to understand the motivations behind a group's experiences or actions. In addition, there are some cases where extended participant observation would not be possible or economically feasible.

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The ethnographic approach is used primarily for exploratory studies such as this one. Although ethnographic researchers may have an interest in a perceived problem, the goal of the research is to uncover certain experiences from the perspective of the group members (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3).

For my research, although I had identified the accessibility of economic supports as an issue of interest, I wanted to explore it by understanding the experiences of the African women I interviewed. By letting these women tell their stories from their own viewpoints, it was possible to see what services are accessible and how the government, social service agencies, and African communities can further facilitate economic support.

Ethnographers contextualize the data that they have collected by interpreting the data within a larger social context (Fetterman, 1998: 19). The conceptualization offered by ethnography made it appropriate for my use of feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1990: 14) since I was able to connect the experiences of African women to the economic framework that they live in.

Feminist ethnography is distinct from other forms of ethnography. Joyce (2000: 22) contends that although forms of feminist ethnography began to develop in the 1920's, it was not until the late twentieth century that feminist ethnography was explicitly used. Feminist ethnography is set apart by a focus on collecting biographical narrative data from research participants. Additionally, the researcher frequently conducts a reflexive acknowledgement of her connection with, and impact on, the research participants (Joyce, 2000: 23).

Joyce (2000: 23) insists that most feminist ethnography is connected to feminist standpoint theory even if the connection is not directly made. Feminist ethnographers also consider the construction of gender without ignoring the way that race and class are also constructed institutionally (Joyce, 2000: 24). The methodological cohesion to the feminist standpoint theory made feminist ethnography particularly appealing for my research.

The feminist ethnographic approach used in my research served as a valuable asset for explaining the world view of this segment of the population. Smith (1990: 14) notes that in order to challenge the "relations of ruling", which comprise all bodies and organizations that support the current system, the experiences of women must be known. Acknowledging the lived experiences of these women can begin a process wherein sociology can act as a tool to fight for needed economic support services, or to strengthen existing ones.

In addition, the use of ethnographic interview data coincided with Smith's goal of incorporating the researcher's experience in the topic of study. Smith (1990: 22) states that because it is impossible for a researcher to remain fully objective, the first step in studying social reality is becoming involved with it. The ethnographic approach gave me the opportunity to become involved with the study topic by allowing me to connect with the research participants by sharing their personal experiences.

Ethnographic interviews are often conversational. According to Fetterman (1998: 37) maintaining a more conversational approach during the interview process helps to keep a more natural environment for the participant to discuss the group phenomenon or process under study. Fetterman (1998: 38) states that researchers can use semi-structured interviews in order to compare participant responses and put them into a larger group context. To remain consistent with my ethnographic methodology and epistemology I used a semi-structured interview guide during my interviews, which will be discussed in detail later.

I intentionally created an informal atmosphere where the interviewee's struggles over adversity and accomplishments could be acknowledged. Coinciding with Oakley's (1981: 36) non-masculine interview method, I created an interview environment that was supportive of the needs of both the interviewer and the interviewee, where no hierarchy was observed.

3.2 Role of the Researcher

In order to ensure that the research maintained its feminist framework, my interviews were conducted with a particular focus on reflexivity and attending to my own role as a researcher. Reflexivity was important in order for my research to remain consistent with an action research approach which embraces reflection of the researcher and the participants involved (Berg: 2009: 247). I felt that reflexivity during the interview process provided me with the opportunity to better prepare myself for future interviews. Through my own reflections of the themes that had come out of previous interviews, I was able to explore topics that I had not anticipated.

During the course of the interviews I did not consider myself an objective receiver of information because I was aware that how I conducted the interviews shaped the types of answers and depth of information that I received. By reflecting on interviews that I had done with the women that I knew, I became aware that I was anticipating answers to questions, without allowing for a completely natural flow.

For the interview participants that I had not met beforehand I began to make a particular effort to put the participants at ease. I found that an important part of the interviews was recognizing the emotion of the women who shared their stories with me. This finding coincides with that of Kirsch (1999, 3) who asserts that, in order to fully comprehend the experience of a female participant, the emotional experience must be recognized and validated.

Attention to the emotion of the participants was addressed during the course of the interview process since special attention was paid to the participant's emotional state and to the sensitive nature of certain topics discussed. One interview conducted with a refugee required that particular attention be paid to the woman's emotional well-being. When I asked the woman where her children were currently living she openly talked about four of her

children but only made a short statement about the fifth child. During the conversation, she seemed to direct discussion away from the topic of her youngest daughter.

When I asked what her youngest daughter was currently doing, she appeared to be troubled and flustered. Upon seeing her reaction I told her not to disclose anything that she was not completely comfortable with and in response she said that it was complicated and we quickly pursued another topic. I feel that by respecting her privacy I gained her trust and ensured that she was not upset by the interview process.

After each interview I sincerely thanked the women for their participation and asked how they felt the interview had gone. This was done in an attempt to monitor how the women felt about the interview experience in order to ensure that I had met my goal of creating a conversational interview environment. One woman who had been reluctant to be interviewed stated that the interview was much better than she had expected because she usually hates interviews. On a number of occasions, interview participants seemed very pleased to have the opportunity to share their experiences. One woman thanked me for allowing her the opportunity to reminisce about her journey in adapting to a different country.

Objectivity was never a main goal during my interviews. According to Creswell (2003: 184) qualitative research can never be fully objective because the researcher cannot separate her own interpretations or impact from the interview process. For research where in-depth interviews are conducted the researcher may become personally involved, which introduces a need for further ethical considerations (Creswell: 2003: 184). It is necessary for special attention to be paid to the researcher's connection with the participants and the research setting.

Although I am not part of the African community in the Region of Waterloo, I had developed personal relationships with a number of African women through my work as a

research assistant for "Communities Working Together against Hate Crimes". I had become sufficiently acquainted with members of the African community to understand a number of their main concerns. As a result of the connections I made during this time I felt that I had a sufficient knowledge of the research setting, although I was still considered an outsider.

As someone who is a newcomer to the Region of Waterloo, I was completely unfamiliar with the services that existed to help new immigrants. Being unfamiliar gave me an advantage because of the exploratory nature of my research. I went into the interviews with no personal information regarding the services available, although I had heard on numerous occasions that more support was needed.

During the interview process, I felt that many of the women that I had no previous contact with initially felt cautious in disclosing personal information. However, as the interviews progressed most women appeared comfortable and conversational. Several women remarked that as an outsider, participants may be more likely to be self disclosing because I was not a member of the community. Certain African cultures highly value maintaining privacy. Thus, although they were initially uncomfortable with me, being an outsider actually gave them the opportunity to disclose more about their experiences and their opinions because they knew that I would not judge the information or reveal their identities.

Despite not having any connection to the African community prior to my research assistantship, my research interests are focused on the accessibility of support services for women who are mainly of low-income status. I understand the result of insufficient resources because of my mother's experiences as a low-income single mother during my early childhood. Because of my background, I entered the research setting with a significant amount of empathy for the women who expressed difficulty in adjusting to living in the Region of Waterloo.

The acknowledgment of my own subjective experiences was an important component of my feminist epistemological frame. According to Smith, mainstream sociologists are strongly discouraged from including subjective experience in their work. However, when all human actors are taken out of who studies and those who are studied, concepts appear to be freestanding. Sociological concepts are given independent power; a power named by Smith as "conceptual imperialism" (Smith, 1990: 15). "Conceptual imperialism" forms part of the "relations of ruling" and acts as the "conceptual currency" for the power of the governing body (Smith, 1990: 14). The concepts of sociological research limit how sociologists are able to think about sociology.

The ability to claim objectivity needs to be questioned if sociology is to ever stand independently from the "relations of ruling". Smith believes that the methods applied by sociologists are the same methods that create the circumstances of what is perceived (Smith, 1990: 17). Although objectivity is stressed in sociology, only people who can leave the "local" realm are capable of meeting the established criteria. Objective male researchers never have to consider how what they study becomes visible (Smith, 1990: 16). However, since women cannot pass outside of the "local" realm of their lived experiences, their experiences are never deemed to be adequately objective.

Female sociologists experience an awareness of their own surroundings that is suppressed within mainstream sociology. Smith argues that although the contradiction between the "local" and "extralocal" are hidden by an inherently male sociology, female sociologists are routinely aware of it since they must participate in both spaces (Smith, 1990: 19). Women in sociology are privy to the fact that sociology inadequately explains the everyday subject matter that is its focus (Smith, 1990: 20). Smith claims that since mainstream sociologists do not examine how sociology is maintained they cannot understand their personal connection to the women that become objects of study. By separating concepts

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from the situations where they are observed, the actual experiences of women cannot be comprehended (Smith, 1990: 20).

A prime component of standpoint theory is incorporating the researcher's experience in what is studied. Smith notes that the first step in studying social reality is to become involved in it (Smith, 1990: 22). In fact, since remaining completely outside of a social reality is impossible, standpoint theory acknowledges the researcher's participation (Smith, 1990: 23). If standpoint theory acknowledges the participation of the researcher, what is observed can be called into question (Smith, 1990: 23).

Without revealing the subjectivity of the researcher, any social reality that is studied under the guise of objectivity remains vulnerable to control. Control of the research findings would be in direct contradiction with my use of elements of action research. The direction proposed by Smith begins with "tacit knowledge"; the knowledge learned from the daily experiences that all women share (Smith, 1990: 24). Without incorporating the experiences of those observed, sociology would not be usable in the everyday world.

3.3 Pretest

I began by interviewing my contact as a pre-test. I felt that a pre-test was necessary because I was not very familiar with the African community in the Region of Waterloo. A pre-test gave me the opportunity to alter or exclude questions that African immigrant women would find unclear or unnecessary.

My pre-test participant offered feedback that substantially helped with the development of my interview guide. One important suggestion she made was to exlude any questions that addressed the current immigration status of participants, since not all participants may have acquired proper legal documentation. She also suggested that although my research was being conducted with a qualitative approach I should start with a

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short self-completed survey containing possibly sensitive demographic questions, such as household income or marital status that some women would not want to discuss verbally.

The pre-test allowed me to further develop my own skills as an interviewer, since I was inexperienced in the interviewing process. I feel that although I mainly relied on the initial set of research questions that I had prepared for my proposal during the pre-test, the pre-test prepared me for a less formal conversational approach to interviewing with a greater use of probes. However, the pre-test interview did convince me that a semi-structured interview with a guide was preferable to a fully unstructured interview, particularly since I did not know the interview participants.

Interviewing my contact gave me a preliminary understanding of what she has experienced, as well as what to expect from the interviews with other research participants. As an African community member and an active participant in multiple non-governmental organizations that work with African communities, my contact provided me with an important understanding of the services that exist for African immigrants. By incorporating the opinions of my contacts I was able to ensure, within a reasonable limit, that the questions encouraged the depth of information using a feminist ethnographic approach.

3.4 Sampling

The research participants were chosen using a non-probability snowball sample. A non-probability sample was necessary because even if a full list of African immigrant women living in the Region of Waterloo was obtained, many women would be unwilling to discuss personal experiences with adapting to the region with an unknown researcher. According to Berg (2007: 44) snowball sampling is particularly useful in accessing reluctant populations. Given my previous experience with the African community through "Communities Working Together" I was aware that it was often difficult to access African community members unless another community member made initial contact in order to encourage participation.

A snowball sampling technique was used to ensure that I would find subjects who were easily accessible (Berg: 2007: 43). Snowball sampling allowed me to have my gatekeepers connect me with African immigrant women who had relevant experiences that they were willing to discuss with me. All of the suggested participants were chosen because of their relevant experiences (Berg, 2007: 44); in particular I interviewed women who had to find economic supports after moving to the Region of Waterloo.

The sample was not representative. For instance, not all African countries with members in the Region of Waterloo were represented, but because of the goal of the research this was not necessary. The women I interviewed spoke at length of their personal experiences and opinions about their transitions in the region of Waterloo and the resulting data I collected are meaningful as such.

3.5 Gatekeepers

During my research assistantship with "Communities Working Together against Hate Crimes" I made contact with several African women. I began my interview process by identifying two gatekeepers who I knew previously from my participation in the hate crimes project. According to Berg (2007: 185) it is important to find a gatekeeper that holds an important position in the group or organization under study. The two contacts that I selected were both well known and respected for their contribution and involvement in the African community. My contacts each come from a different African country with a large representation in the Region of Waterloo.

My contacts' positions in the community made them prime choices as gatekeepers for my research. My first gatekeeper provided me with the names of four women that I could interview, after she asked them for permission to provide me with their contact information. The four women that I contacted agreed to an interview, and the interviews were conducted between October 15 and the middle of December in 2008.

My second contact allowed me to make a presentation about my study to the members of the African Woman's Alliance at a monthly meeting on February 7, 2007. The meeting was informal and held at a Tim Horton's with five women in attendance. During my presentation I discussed all of the important information about my study, including the purpose of the study and what I intended to do with the results. I also provided a sample list of questions.

I distributed an information letter that the women could take to learn more detailed information regarding the ethics clearance and my supervisor's contact information. After my brief presentation of five minutes a sign up sheet was passed around and those who were interested gave me their telephone numbers. All of the women present at the meeting agreed to an interview. I followed up the next week and conducted all of the interviews within the next two weeks.

After obtaining an initial set of interviews from the women who had agreed to be interviewed, participants were requested to provide me with referrals of people who might be interested in completing an interview. Three of the participants were able to provide me with one other African community member each.

My second contact also agreed to find possible participants for me and to ask them if I could contact them in order to tell them more about my study, because I did not gain enough participants from my presentation at the African Women's Alliance meeting. My gatekeeper provided me with the contact information of four additional community members who had agreed to meet with me after receiving my information letter from her. Although it was difficult to contact all possible participants because of conflicting schedules, I was finally able to complete all of my interviews by April 3, 2009.

3.6 Participants

In total, I interviewed fifteen women and conducted one pre-test. I chose to interview fifteen women because I felt that this would be a sufficient number of interviews to reach data saturation, particularly because of the in-depth nature of the interviews. Although the women tended to be between 36 and 44 years of age, there were women from 26 to 70 years of age. Appendix C shows the demographic information of participants. A sample of 15 people may appear to be small, but a small sample size using an ethnographic approach still enables the researcher to produce extensive data. Any participant who felt more comfortable being interviewed with another participant who is a friend was provided with the opportunity to do so. Initially I thought a small group interview might be particularly appealing for participants who have had painful experiences and might need emotional support as they recount their stories. However, none of the women wanted to be interviewed with a friend present.

A small group interview was necessary for one participant who required language translation, which will be discussed further in the ethics section. The woman acting as a translator was also required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Although the data collected with the use of a translator may have been edited, particularly because the translator was the participant's daughter, I still believe that the information is valid. I wanted to include the experiences of at least one woman who does not speak fluent English. The interview did bring up a new perspective on topics such as health care that no other participant discussed. Since only one interview was conducted with the use of an interpreter, most of the interviews did not require editing by a third party.

Participants from various backgrounds were selected. During the interview process I was able to interview women from many different parts of Africa including Egypt, Kenya, Ghana, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Sudan. Through the snowball sampling technique I was able

to access women who had settled in the region anywhere from thirty years ago to six months ago.

The participants were not directly asked about their immigration status but the majority of participants offered this information during the course of their narratives. Immigration statuses varied between business immigrants, to women coming with their husbands who were pursuing graduate school and women who came to the Region of Waterloo as refugees. Although only two of the participants that participated in my interviews were refugees, almost half of the participants described conditions in their home country that may have warranted refugee status if other resources had not been available.

I decided to focus specifically on the experiences of female African immigrants, particularly those with children, because of the unique problems they face. Also, in order to reduce any barriers to myself I interviewed mainly women who were fluent in English, so that translation was not an issue. I gathered participants from different religious backgrounds, including Catholic, Lutheran, Dutch Reform, and Muslin, in order to see whether religious community membership provides economic support or services to new female African immigrants.

3.7 Data Collection

The interviews conducted with the female African immigrants were semi-structured based on a fifty-eight question interview schedule. A semi-structured interview was chosen over an unstructured interview because I felt that I was not comfortable enough with my own abilities as an interviewer to conduct an interview without a structured guide. Additionally, I felt that the data I collected would be more easily analyzed if roughly similar questions were asked of each participant. As previously discussed, semi-structured interview guides allow for a clear comparison of participant responses when using an ethnographic approach (Fetterman, 1998: 38).

However, a standardized interview was not suitable because it would not allow me to adjust questions as needed. Berg (2007: 93) notes that a researcher can approach a topic from the participant's perspective by using the same level of language. Semi-structured interviews typically have a standard set of questions that are asked of each participant, but the level of language can be adjusted depending on the person being interviewed (Berg, 2007: 95). It was necessary for me to be able to adjust the level of language used for the interviews not only because the participants had a wide variety of educational backgrounds, but also because some of the participants were not as fluent in English as others.

The use of semi-structured interviews provided me with the solid guide I needed, while also allowing me to delve deeper into topics that were not sufficiently covered. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer the freedom to probe as needed, and to omit probes when an interviewee talks openly at more length (Berg, 2007: 93). The ability to add or omit probes was particularly important for me because I was quite familiar with a number of the participants, but totally unfamiliar with others. I needed to use more probes with women with whom I had no previous communication, particularly at the beginning of the interviews when women did not know what to expect.

As a result of the nature of the questions, a time limit of one hour and a half was placed upon the interviews. Consistent with my previous anticipation, the interviews were all at least 45 minutes in length, averaging a time of one hour and ten minutes. The length of the interviews conducted was consistent with the ethnographic approach.

In order to find out which organizations or groups provide the most support, the questions focused upon several key topics. Initially, I began by explaining that what I meant by economic support services was any source of support that aids in maintaining economic stability or independence. I stated that economic supports may include, but are not limited to,

job search and job training assistance, health coverage, ESL classes, childcare, monetary assistance, educational upgrading and translation services.

I asked questions at the beginning of the interview that allowed the participant to explain her personal history. These initial questions focused on the transition to the Region of Waterloo and personal experiences before living in the region. Second, I discussed educational and work background with the participants, asking about experiences before and after coming to Canada. Third, I inquired about the participants' social networks, in order to find out what kind of economic support was provided through social connections before coming to Canada as well as during and after the transition to the Region of Waterloo.

Fourth, participants were asked to talk about current family and household structure, also focusing on economic issues. Fifth, women were questioned about their knowledge of existing resources for immigrants available in the region from non-profit groups, government funded agencies, faith-based organizations and community groups. Finally, I asked them what services they found the most and least helpful, and differences, if any, in accessing services for male and female immigrants. Appendix A provides a copy of the questions. Appendix B contains the demographic information.

3.8 Recording and Storage

All of the interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, with the consent of participants, all of whom agreed to have their interview recorded. The consent form was initially signed and the participants were told of the recording device before I started. The participants were instructed that although I would be taking notes, should I need more detail or should the recording device fail, they were to keep talking freely even if I was not finished because I intended to transcribe the interview. I provided each of the participants with the opportunity to review their interview transcript.

Data collected during this study will be retained for two years. All of the printed transcripts, or printed materials related to my research will be kept in my locked office. After two years, all of the written materials will be shredded. In addition, the entire computer files containing any information regarding research participants will be kept in my locked home office on my password protected personal computer for two years. After two years, all identifying materials will be erased from my personal files. As soon as the interviews were transcribed, the identifying information was separated from the interview transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. Pseudonyms for the women were picked using names appropriate for the woman's country of origin. The ten most common women's names were found on the internet for each country and one was chosen from the list.

3.9 Transcription and Data Analysis

The transcription of the interviews occurred as soon after each interview as possible, in order to include the highest level of clear detail. During the transcription of the interviews I discovered that I could begin to see patterns emerging in the data. I began using open coding after each interview that I transcribed in order to identify any themes that occurred in the data (Berg, 2009: 348). Themes were identified if three occurrences were noted, which is consistent with Berg's recommendation (2009: 364). The codes that I developed were constantly altered and clarified with each new piece of datum in order to create a cohesive picture for understanding the experiences of the women who participated.

The interview data was coded using NVIVO 8 software after the interviews were transcribed. NVIVO 8 gave me the ability to take pieces of data and weave them together in order to create a coherent picture of the services available to, and used by, female African immigrants (Creswell, 2003: 203). During the Axial coding stage with NVIVO 8 I created a more sophisticated set of linkages between the major and minor codes that I had established earlier during open coding.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

        The interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participants. I provided an option in order to ensure that the participant felt comfortable disclosing her personal experiences. Some participants felt more comfortable conducting an interview with a researcher in a public setting while others wished to have an area that was more private. Some participants wanted the convenience of being interviewed in their own homes, usually due to childcare issues. My office at the University of Waterloo was offered as a space that was quiet where the participant would not have to be concerned that someone might overhear her. However, none of the women who participated in my research chose this option.

        Most of the women who agreed to participate in the research were primarily concerned with finding a place that fit their busy schedules, as most of the participants had children living at home. Although it was suggested to me as a last resort because of my own safety concerns, if the participant stated a preference for being interviewed in their own homes, I complied. I found that slightly over one third of the women I interviewed wanted to be interviewed in their homes, which gave me the opportunity to collect more detailed observational data about their living environments.

        Although all other questions that I asked were answered by all of the women, a significant minority of the women did not want to disclose their household income, or they stated that the household income was average. When I interviewed women at home I was able to garner a sense of their income status, particularly for those women who did not provide the information.

        For the participants who preferred a more public, informal location we agreed on a coffee shop close to the participant's home, making it easier for her to meet me. Although I allowed the participants to choose a location, several interviews took place in atmospheres that were not very conducive. Certain coffee shops were quite noisy and during three of the

interviews the noise level was pointed out by the woman herself. In noisy environments the participant was also afforded less privacy which may have limited the nature of the responses. For instance, disclosing sensitive information such as leaving a country of origin because of an outbreak of war, the participant became quieter so that she could not be overheard by other coffee shop patrons.

3.11 Strategies for Validating the Findings

Several measures were used to ensure the validity of my findings. First, I provided all of the participants with a copy of the transcribed interview, in order to ensure that their experiences and opinions had been adequately represented. Providing a copy of the transcript was also an important ethical component of my research. All of the participants agreed that they had been accurately represented after reading the transcribed interviews. No one chose to change or omit any of the information that they had provided.

Second, I relied on the detailed and descriptive responses that were given to me by the participants in order to accurately convey their experiences in accessing economic support resources, their knowledge of the resources offered in the region, and their opinions on the usefulness of existing resources. I believe that the stories given by the women who participated in the study will provide the reader with an account of the lived experiences of African women seeking economic self sustainability.

Third, I acknowledged my own role as the researcher, paying special attention to my own background and my connection to the African community in the Region of Waterloo. I believe that although I am an outsider, my experiences with the African community have prepared me to give an honest account of the experiences of the women I interviewed.

Lastly, I made sure to include contradictory data gathered during my interviews, even when such data opposed what I had expected to find. Including negative information is an important part in adding credibility to qualitative research (Berg: 2009: 361).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

In order to develop a set of interview questions that were ethically sound, I referred to the work of Berg (2009), Babbie (1992) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, "Ethics Guidelines-Research with Human Subjects" (n.d.). The research strategies that these sources outline provide an ethically sound approach that attends to the best interest of the research participants by creating a mutually beneficial environment. These sources acknowledge the necessity of maintaining flexible communication during the in-depth interviewing process.

3.12.1 Anonymity

I obtained ethics clearance through the office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. A main ethical concern was ensuring the anonymity of the women who chose to participate in the study. In order to ensure anonymity I used pseudonyms for each woman who participated in my study (Creswell, 2003: 64).

Pseudonyms are particularly important when dealing with African immigrants who are members of small communities. It may pose a threat to anonymity for a participant to give specific details about her country of origin and her transition to the region, because of my small sample size. In order to reduce the threat to participant anonymity each participant was informed of this risk and asked to choose whether to reveal certain information in the interview. The consent form specifically included a statement about the risk to anonymity if certain information could be linked to a participant.

Each participant was given the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview and omit any information that she did not want included. Providing the findings to the respondent allowed for the respondent to feel personally empowered by having the opportunity to discuss her story with an attentive interviewer.

While this research was conducted with the hope that the findings will provide information that will improve the economic support services offered to African-Canadian women, participants did not feel pressured into making their identities known. Participants were given an informed consent letter, with full disclosure, in order to ensure that they fully understood the purpose of the study.

3.12.2 Informed Consent

The need for informed consent creates a possible barrier for participants who are not proficient in the English language. Although I mainly interviewed participants who spoke English, I also felt that it was necessary to include a woman who was not fluent in English. Consequently, there was a need to provide translation services for that participant, who also entered the region as a refugee. In order to ensure that the need for translation was met without an added financial cost to me, the woman who could not speak English fluently was asked to be interviewed with her daughter who could provide needed translation. Her daughter was also a trained interpreter.

The woman in need of translation services was identified by my contact, who personally knew this participant. By interviewing the women together it was possible to make the woman with a language barrier more comfortable as well. The woman with the language barrier was more willing to share her stories with her daughter, than with a translator she did not know. I did not believe that financial compensation was necessary where a friend provided translation, as the daughter was interviewed concurrently. The translator served as a research participant. As such, no added time was required from the translator. The translator was given the same opportunity to have her own experiences heard and understood. The translator was also asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

3.12.3 Emotional Distress

The research was undertaken with the understanding that new immigrants are part of a vulnerable population. In addition, some of the participants were refugees, who may have experienced significant trauma or abuse. As a result of conducting open-ended interviews I may have caused participants to relive painful life events. In order to reduce the impact of any emotional distress I needed to be cautious as to what topics of conversation I chose to pursue.

In the event that a participant did show a significant level of emotional distress I was prepared to offer her suggestions of services for victims of abuse or trauma. By offering information about various counselling or support services, I was able to ensure that the interview experience was not without benefit for the participants.

In order to ensure that the services provided were accessible or appropriate for the participants I was ready with a number of services or organizations designed to meet the needs of specific groups. For instance, for certain female Muslim African immigrants it may be preferable to speak with an imam rather than a traditional social service agency like KW Counselling. I also held the interviews during business hours in order to ensure that I could contact my supervisor if I felt that a participant was having an emotional response that I did not anticipate, or was unable to respond to appropriately.

 In addition, through inquiring about the level of assistance received by each participant I had to be cautious about increasing a sense of isolation or dependence. The goal of the research is, in part, to identify any weaknesses that exist in the economic services available to African immigrant women. However, I was careful not to foster a feeling of marginalization or isolation among the women I interviewed. This did not pose a large ethical barrier since my participation with "Communities Working Together against Hate

Crimes" had revealed that many community members were eager to address hardships that

they had as a result of their experiences in Waterloo region.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Data analysis emerges from the lived experiences of the participants following Dorothy Smith's feminist standpoint theory. The women had a wide range of demographic characteristics that impacted their settlement in the region. The demographic characteristics are shown in table 6, including age range, education, religious affiliation, country of origin, number of children, year of settlement in Canada, relationship status, income range, and current employment status.

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss their personal backgrounds and their reasons for leaving their countries of origin from their perspectives. The barriers to economic security after arriving in the region were analyzed with special attention to the unique barriers women face because of care-taking responsibilities. The impact of the loss of social support networks is explained. The use of government support services is discussed, which leads into an analysis of the inaccessibility of information regarding support services. Although support services do exist, they are not accessible for many African immigrant women.

Participants noted that the collective action of African immigrant women in non-profit organizations in the region is much more effective in delivering culturally appropriate information. This finding is consistent with the concept of female empowerment advocated by feminist standpoint theory. Participants argued that the government should be responsible to provide an increased level of funding to non-profit women's organizations, so that African immigrant women can become economically self-sufficient.

Table 6

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION										
pseudonym	Age Range	Education	Religious Affiliation	Country of Origin	# of Children	Year of Settlement in Canada	Relationship Status	Income Range	Employment Status
Gloria	56 +	University	United	Angola	Three	1967	Widowed	36,000-60,000	Retired
Daya	36-45	Trade school	Lutheran	Zimbabwe	One	2008	Single	Did not disclose	Part-time
Salma	56 +	Post-graduate degree	Muslim	Egypt	Three	1988	Married	Did not disclose	Full-time
Vic	36-45	University	Catholic	Sudan	Three	2000	Married	36,000-60,000	Part-time
Kofi	36-45	Post-graduate degree	Christian	Ghana	Two	1992	Married	Did not disclose	Full-time
Mana	46-55	Post-graduate degree	Christian	Ghana	Two	1990	Married	Did not disclose	Unemployed
Chipo	26-35	College	Catholic	Zimbabwe	One	2001	Married	36,000-60,000	Part-time
Nansi	56 +	Trade school	Muslim	Somalia	Seven +	1993	Widowed	10,000-25,000	Retired
Anna	36-45	Post-graduate degree	Muslim	Niger	Five	2005	Married	61,000-100,000	Stay-at-home mother
Alice	56 +	Trade school	Mormon	Zimbabwe	Five	2005	Single	Under 10,000	Full-time
Aliya	36-45	Post-graduate degree	Muslim	Somalia	Four	1993	Married	100,000 +	Part-time
Kaela	26-35	College	Muslim	Somalia	Four	1994	Married	26,000-35,000	Part-time
Susan	46-55	Post-graduate degree	Christian	Kenya	Five	1997	Married	Under 10,000	Part-time
Fifi	46-55	Post-graduate degree	Catholic	Ghana	Two	1995	Divorced	Under $10,000	Full-time Student
Ruth	56 +	Post-graduate degree	Catholic	Congo	Six	1996	Married	26,000-35,000	Retired

4.1 Reasons for Emigration

4.1.1 Leaving a Dangerous Situation

Time and resources invested on preparation are often required for a new immigrant to become economically self-sustaining upon arrival to a new country. Rabrenovic (2007: 351) notes that refuges fleeing from dangerous situations or a dwindling economic structure are not as likely to bring the resources that they require to financially integrate into a new society, as immigrants who enter under more favourable circumstances. Despite the fact that many refugees also come with high levels of educational attainment and an extensive work history, they are at a disadvantage because of the suddenness of the move. African women who enter Canada as refugees are exposed to multiple systems of oppression resulting from their race, class and gender (Hill Collins, 2000: 157).

Four of the women who participated in the research left their country of origin and entered Canada as refugees. Nansi, a widowed Muslim woman who worked as a retired nurse, fled from Somalia and arrived in Canada in 1993. Although Nansi did not have any previous plans to move, concerns for her safety made it essential. Nansi explained that "the war happened and then we escaped. We looked for a secure place and Canada was the country that allowed us security". Although Nansi did not have any previous ties to Canada, she chose to move here because she felt that "It is good because of the international reputation".

Nansi did not have the opportunity to save a sufficient amount of money before she left her home. She was only able to survive when she arrived in Canada because "the government of Canada gave social assistance".

During her interview Nansi also mentioned that at the time she arrived in the Region of Waterloo in 1993 "there were only a small number of Africans. The majority was Somali and most of them came as refugees at that time".

55

Alice, a single Seventh Day Adventist who worked as a personal support worker at a psychiatric hospital in Zimbabwe, also came to Canada as a refugee, after leaving during the war in 2005. Unlike Nansi, Alice initially decided to move to the United States because her son was there. Two other women also lived in the United States before coming to the Region of Waterloo.

Upon arrival in the United States, Alice was told that her visa had expired although she thought it would be valid for another year. "I know the situation in my country is bad. I had just run away from Zimbabwe and they were telling me to turn back. They said if you don't want that, you are going to be in prison. I said that it's better to be in prison than to go back to my country".

Alice was imprisoned for ten days before her son could arrange for her release. After that Alice told her son that she did not want to stay in the United States.

> I want to go to Canada. My son asked do you think they are going to accept you, and I said let me go and I will see at the border. I don't want to stay in America. I have seen enough of America. My son said how will you go? Because when I was in prison they took my passport, and it's still back in America. I said that I will go by bus because I cannot go by air and he said okay, but it's going to be a day and a half in the bus.

Alice's decision to face indefinite imprisonment rather than return to her country shows the level of desperation that many refugees face when leaving their countries of origin. Like Nansi, Alice was not financially prepared to leave her country because she was a refugee. She also relied on government support when she first arrived in Canada. Both women continue to struggle to make ends meet. Nansi's income is just over $10,000 and she relies on family members to provide her housing. Alice has an income of less than $10,000 and has to manage her money very carefully to pay for her expenses.

Although Gloria came to Canada in 1967 from Angola at age 20 as a refugee, she was not financially dependent on the government: "in those days my country was in war because

the African people were fighting for independence". She was sponsored by the United

Church of Canada to attend a boarding college that prepared her for university. The United

Church gave her a scholarship to attend university. Gloria did not have the same type of

difficulties as other African refugee women because "when I came everything was already

preplanned. As I said, I already had a scholarship".

Gloria did not have the same financial hardships that Nansi and Alice had as

refugees. Gloria's experience is consistent with the socialist feminist perspective because it

show that entering Canada with more financial capital provides an opportunity for extended

self-sufficiency. Even though Gloria is now retired, her investments give her an income of

$60,000. She came into Canada directly after high school and was able to achieve greater

economic security over the course of her life than Nansi and Alice who both came with work

experience and post-secondary education.

During her interview Gloria asserted that it was the United Church who helped her

escape her country.

> At the time we didn't have any universities and I had finished my high school but I
> wanted to continue with my studies. I was an ambitious girl. What a lot of us did in
> those days, younger people, if we wanted to continue with our studies we had to leave
> the country. Of course the government wouldn't give you any permission to leave so
> we had to do that under clandestine means. I had help from the missionaries.

Gloria's transition to Canada was not without trouble. She recounts that after she left

Angola she could not go to Canada right away. "I was even in a refugee camp for a year in

the Congo. I spent quite a lot of time before I could get this opportunity to come". Leaving

Angola was not easy.

> Even to cross the border you have to do it at night with guides and you have to know
> what you're doing otherwise forget it. It was quite dangerous. I left with a family, a
> man with his wife who was a nurse, and their six kids. The missionary doctor asked

them if they would take care of me. I was eighteen when I left and he said yes, so I was like a part of their family.

Of the women who did not enter the Region of Waterloo as refugees, four had decided to leave their countries for reasons that could have afforded them refugee status. This may lead to a particularly difficult transition because, without refugee status, new immigrants will not receive the same initial level of government support. If a decision to leave is made without advance notice, it is unlikely that there will be any additional preparation made to ensure economic security simply because refugee status is not sought. The government's distinction between refugee and immigrant does not match the experiences of African immigrant and refugee women. Women immigrating from war torn countries in Africa have similar experiences and barriers as refugee women.

When asked why she decided to leave Somalia at age 18 with her parents and siblings in 1994, Kaela, a young Muslim woman, explained "We didn't decide to come, actually our country was at war and it was my father who came here first. He came to Canada and then he sponsored us".

Kaela's father had originally acquired a Canadian visa during his time as a university student.

> When the war began and there was no government and no nothing, a visa was the only thing he had so he just ran out of the country to Canada. The only choice we had was to go to Canada, but we didn't have a choice in where we would go but it was nice enough that Canadian people actually accepted us and gave us sponsorship because that's why we're here.

Kaela's family stayed with friends of her father, who had also moved from Somalia, for a few weeks after they arrived. "That was the first home we came to, his friend's home. She actually invited us into her house, and she was a nice, nice lady". Without that support it is likely that the transition would have been very difficult for Kaela and her family.

Although the situation was not life threatening for Daya when she left Zimbabwe in 2000, the country's turmoil had created severe economic hardship for her. Even though Daya, a Lutheran, was working as a nurse things were very difficult. She moved from Zimbabwe "because of economic constraints. Things were getting harder and lives was getting harder in my country, so it was better to move out and try to help the family while you are out of the country. Jobs were hard to come by. For me I was working but my income was not enough to sustain me and then to be able to help my family".

Salma, a married successful entrepreneur who describes herself as a moderate secular Muslim, admits that she left Egypt because she was "resenting what was taking place; my daughter was being pressured to wear a hijab, or else her friend wouldn't talk to her and that kind of trend was starting to get unpleasant". Salma also went on to say that although she and her husband had considered moving to Canada previously, she finally decided to begin preparing for the transition in 1986.

> Things were looking scary, in a way, because the president was trying to move towards democracy and people didn't understand that. He had not prepared them for democracy. Therefore, it was being abused and the situation was looking like it would turn chaotic, so we did want to leave.

Because the situation in Salma's country was not critical she had time to prepare and save for the move to Canada, which she made with her children and husband in 1988.

> We were immediately corresponding with the different business development offices, all across Canada. We got an excellent package from the Kitchener Business Office. We were very amazed. They sent us maps to all the lands and units, and everything that we would buy. They gave us details of exactly what the price breakdown was so we were really well informed. We bought a house and we signed our daughter up for school. We had done everything in one month.

However, Salma was quick to point out that her experience was not the "norm" for most women who emigrate from Africa. Salma's experience illustrates that race, class, and gender intersect in a number of ways. An ethnic minority woman may experience advantage

through aspects like wealth and experience that other woman would not (Steady, 2000: 456).
"We were already business people and my degree is in business, so we weren't doing this in
the dark". The fact that Salma was an entrepreneur and an international business woman,
gave her an advantage over other immigrants, even those with higher levels of educational
achievement.

4.1.2 Move for a Spouse

Not all women moved to Canada for personal reasons, even when danger was not a
factor. It is a norm among many cultures in Africa for men to have the main decision-making
power in a family. Five of the participants admitted that they only left their home countries
because their husbands chose to move to Canada for education or employment.

When asked why she moved to Canada in 2000, Vic, a Catholic woman from
Sudan who works with disabled children, replied that she came because her husband attended
school in Canada: "my husband who was the one who decided. I had to agree with him in
everything". Vic added that she "had never even thought of coming to Canada. I was
thinking I was going to be doing my work in Sudan".

Mana, a Christian woman from Ghana, also came to the Region of Waterloo to join
her husband, a student in 1990. When her husband attended school there were other families
from Ghana. However they returned home after completing their education. Mana added
that she would have liked to return as well, but her husband had become accustomed to life in
Canada. "He's comfortable being here. He just got used to it here. He grew up in a smaller
town than I did; I think that's a factor too".

Even though Fifi also moved from Ghana to join her spouse who was a student, she
had a different experience. Her husband wanted to move back to Ghana after some time of

being in Canada. Fifi explained that "It did not seem that moving back was looking like an option for me because of a number of things. I could not have gone because of my daughters and the expectation of genital mutilation". Unlike Mana, the conditions in Fifi's country of origin were not safe for her or her two teenage daughters. Fifi disregarded her husband's wishes and sought a divorce after she was convinced by a number of the women from her church that her husband's overall behaviour was abusive.
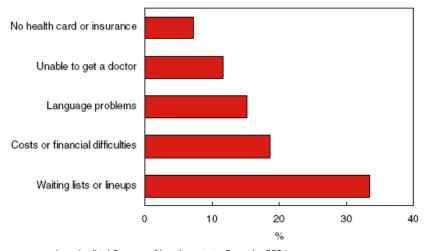
4.2 Barriers to Economic Security

Immigrants new to the Region of Waterloo must navigate many areas of life in order to become economically self-sufficient. The initial research question asked was: *how do female African immigrants in the Region of Waterloo access the services they require to gain economic security?* However, through analyzing the data it became clear that this research question assumed too much. First, it was necessary to answer the question: *What are the various types of resources that women need to access in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency?* The women who participated in the study identified a number of concerns that they faced during the integration process. The top concerns included health care accessibility, acquiring housing, the need for educational upgrading, language barriers, managing child care and obtaining employment.

4.2.1 Health Care Accessibility

The Canadian federal government is committed to providing health services without "financial or other barriers" (Health Canada, 2004). However, three of the women claimed that access to affordable health care was a significant source of trouble for them when they arrived here.

Table 7

The most serious difficulties immigrants experienced when accessing health care services—2001

*Source: *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, 2001*

As shown in table 7, a report completed by Statistics Canada (2003: 21) reveals that of the recent immigrants who accessed health care, 19% said that they faced barriers because the cost of medication or dental services was too high, 15% reported language barriers, and 12% could not find a doctor that would take them as a patient. This is consistent with the finding that immigrants routinely face multiple barriers when attempting to access health care (Asanin & Wilson, 2008: 1272).

The Statistics Canada data are consistent with the experiences of several of the women interviewed. Health care costs were a problem for Vic.

> My biggest cost was health care when I came, because I was sponsored by my husband and if you are sponsored by someone you don't get health coverage immediately. You start having your health coverage after three months and then I got pregnant immediately. Everything I had to buy, like the ultrasound... everything…medicine, everything! That was the one terrible thing. My husband by then was unemployed, so it was hard. It was the most difficult time I had; I don't want to go through that again. I had to pay for everything. You have to go for blood tests, and urine tests. Also, as a new immigrant you have to go through every test, especially when you are pregnant. That was the most difficult part of it, economically.

Vic's claim that health coverage begins after a three month waiting period is valid. Health Canada recognizes that a 90 day waiting period for health coverage for immigrants will apply in some places (Health Canada, 2009). For Chipo, a married Catholic woman in her early twenties who moved to the region from Zimbabwe in 2001, health care was also a large cost.

> It took a long time to get health care coverage. We had to find a private company for that time. Sometimes our private coverage wasn't accepted up front so we'd have to pay cash and then be reimbursed. Usually when it happens you don't even have the money upfront. After the first year that's when we decided to have our private coverage. Still with the private coverage you have to pay some of the cost.

For new immigrants who do receive health care there is a risk that the care received will be insufficient since ethnocentrism has been associated with poor treatment or misdiagnosis (Capell, Dean, Veenstra, 2008: 121). According to a study conducted by Lasser, Himmelstein and Woolhandler (2006: 1303), which used data from the Joint Canada/US Survey of Health conducted in 2002/2003, health disparities exist for Canadians based on race, income and immigration status.

On the other hand, Anna, an upper-middle class woman who moved with her husband from Niger in 2001, expressed her approval of the health care system. "I am glad to say that the government of Canada has done a lot for immigrants, especially in the health system. For health care you can go with an emergency and be treated".

Anna did not have the same concern about the initial cost of health care. The upper-middle class income of her family gave her a privilege that Vic and Chipo did not have. Anna's family has the resources to pay for extra health care needs that are not covered by the health care system.

4.2.2 Acquiring Housing

Ten of the participants identified housing as their largest financial cost. Three women acknowledged that although they first lived in Toronto when they came to Canada, they had to move because of the cost of housing.

Nansi, who is the mother of more than seven children, argued that even in this region "there is a hidden homelessness that the government never addresses". Asked to clarify, Nansi explained,

> Because many Africans have large families, they are not ordinary European sizes. They don't have families with two parents and two children. Most Africans have six, seven, and eight children, and it's very difficult for them to say it. They won't get affordable accommodation for their families. Affordability is missing, we don't have affordable housing. The other thing is that in this community, for the last seven or eight years, they haven't built any new affordable housing. That is true in Waterloo especially. Waterloo city doesn't have social service agencies, they don't have affordable housing and they don't have a lot of services that people need. Waterloo Region is just blind; they don't want to see that they have poor people in this community—no way.

It is apparent from Nansi's statement that the regional and municipal government is not attending to the special housing needs of African community members. Statistics Canada (2001: 18) data revealed that in 2001 11% of immigrants could not find housing that met their needs and one third of immigrants found housing costs to high to manage. However, these numbers would likely be higher if African immigrants were considered separately from other immigrant populations. By not acknowledging the needs of African immigrant women their experiences become invisible. Vaughns and Eibach (2008: 380) argue that people with intersecting marginalities become socially invisible themselves. Without proper housing, many families live in cramped, inadequate accommodation.

This finding coincides with the statement of Aliya, a Muslim woman trained as a geologist who came to the region from Somalia in 1993 with her husband. "When you are a

newcomer there are two main things that are important; you need shelter, and you need food". Aliya mentioned that the cost of housing may not be a major concern for those who enter as refugees. "Most refugees, when they come now, have everything prepared. Now you already have your house waiting". This is a positive step, but it does not protect immigrants in need of housing who do not have refugee status.

When attempting to find housing in the region, Gloria faced an additional barrier. She stated that she was denied housing because she was Black.

> When my friend and I were looking for a place she saw a place advertised and called it. The woman said yes there is a room available, so ten minutes later we were there. She said who needs the room, I said, I do. She said, oh that room is rented. I rented it out already. I said, but we just called! She said, in the mean time, I just rented it to someone else. We knew it was not true! That was hard on me. It was hard but then you forget about it. Not everybody is like that.

The persistence of discrimination can further increase the economic vulnerability of new immigrants. If affordable housing is not provided to African immigrants as a result of discrimination, there may be very few other options available. Gloria's experience confirms Muszynski's (2009: 51) claim that although overt racism may be unacceptable, it continues under the veil of "political correctness". Racism is not dealt with by those in power because it has taken on a less direct form that can be ignored.

4.2.3 Educational Upgrading

For many new immigrants, upgrading educational credentials is essential for finding sustainable, fulfilling employment. According to Statistics Canada, (2001: 23) 66% of African immigrants of prime working age intend to pursue further education in order to obtain a job. Since coming to Canada, ten of the participants have completed some form of education. The majority of women interviewed entered Canada with university degrees and at least several years of relevant work experience in their fields. High educational attainment

is typical of immigrants to Canada, as over half of all immigrants in 2001 had a university degree or higher (Statistics Canada, 2001: 23).

Kofi moved to the region from Ghana in 1992, hoping to find a position as a teacher, since she had five years of teaching experience. However, she found that she was unable to find a teaching position because her education was not Canadian based. After searching for a job for seven years, she decided to go back to school to earn a degree in social work and now works as a guidance counsellor.

> I tell people, you know what, and at this point I can tell you that if within the next two years you don't get a job in your field, please start thinking about some other things. As of right now start researching some other professions that are of interest to you and be prepared if within two years you can't get a job within your own field. Please, go back to school and do something else. I don't want people to go through the same kind of frustration I went through. It was extremely frustrating and depressing.

Gloria agreed that the qualifications of immigrants are not fully used.

> When I worked in the universities as a lab assistant I came across people who had their medical degree and they come here and they end up working as a lab technician, or maybe as a nurse, because the government doesn't recognize their previous education. That's very demeaning.

Kaela, who had just finished high school when she arrived, had an experience similar to that of Kofi. In order to find a job she had to repeat her entire secondary education. "I found that once I had Canadian high school it was a lot easier to get a job". Although Kaela did not have to spend additional funds on her secondary education, the time it took prevented her from seeking gainful employment sooner.

Unlike Kofi and Kaela, Alice has not yet upgraded her education. She is unable to work as a personal support worker (PSW) because she does not have Canadian qualifications. However, her lawyer has told her that her unsettled immigration status prevents her from taking the six month course.

If you are caught doing any course in Canada, if you are not landed, then you will be charged for that, or whatever. Now I think that I should have been doing my PSW but they don't allow me. Even a babysitting course, they don't allow. Most of the things they don't allow you to do until you are landed. That is when the doors open. Now I am here for three years and I did not do anything. I should have done something, it's very unfair. I don't know.

Alice currently works as a cleaner because her refugee status prevents her from obtaining Canadian credentials. Her income is far below that of Kofi and Kaela who have upgraded their education. The government no longer supports Alice as a refugee, because she has been here since 2005, even though her options are still limited by her immigration status.

4.2.4 Language Barriers

Having a language barrier further impedes a woman's ability to access needed resources. According to Statistics Canada (2001: 23) 45% of immigrants listed having a language barrier as a difficulty in pursing needed educational upgrading. Six of the women interviewed said that they could not speak English when they first arrived. However, it should be noted that all of the women interviewed did enter Canada knowing at least two languages, with several knowing five or more.

After her traumatic experience of being temporarily imprisoned in the United States, Alice claimed that "When I first came to Canada you know, I could not even speak English. I don't know what even happened to me. Maybe because I was in jail—I had a lot of stress". This made accessing social assistance difficult. Alice remembered that "even when I went to see my worker, I said I can't speak English and I need an interpreter". However, no interpreter was available, "but my worker was trying to talk to me slowly, slowly. After some time I picked it up and I could speak English myself".

Gloria also entered Canada with a language barrier. During her first months at school Gloria recalled "For me it took two months until I could understand anything that anybody was saying. It was hard for me. I used to cry everyday because you need some kind of communication and nobody spoke my own language".

All of the participants interviewed, with the exception of one who required a translator during the interview, now speak fluent English. Vic noted that the English as a Second Language classes available through several agencies in the Region of Waterloo, such as the YMCA, are one of the most important services available to new immigrants. "A lot of people don't have ESL now. I think Waterloo Region is still one of the best, so far".

Nansi, who still requires a translator after taking ESL classes for six years, did not feel as positively about the quality of the ESL classes provided.

> ESL would be better if they did more intensive programs, so that a person could succeed in a short amount of time instead of going for five or six years. The classes are daily but what happens is that the people are not upgrading. You see the same people in the classes for five or six years. Here the people stay because the school board needs the numbers. If they don't have twelve or fourteen people in the class then they can't teach it, so they want to keep people in. That's tricky too.

It is clear from this explanation that, first, some immigrants are not getting the level of ESL training that they need. ESL classes are not designed for older immigrants, despite the fact that 76% of immigrants taking ESL classes are 45 years and older (Statistics Canada, 2001: 26). Second, there may be a level of politics involved that limits the skills development of new immigrants. Third, all of the participants interviewed discussed overcoming language barriers through their own efforts. None of the participants discussed situations where government translators reached out to them, even when translation was

needed.   Fourth, some of the participants expressed the belief that providing translation services should be something that the government does.

Nansi emphasized that "Accessibility in my language is very difficult, and when you don't have the language it's the biggest barrier to accessing services. It would be better if the government would fund services that help empower seniors to get access to language classes". Nansi came to Canada as a senior citizen and was unable to pick up English as easily as Gloria who entered as a student at the age of 20.

Nansi's experience demonstrates that having a language barrier directly inhibits access to economic security. ESL classes did not cater to her needs as an elderly person. The focus of intersectionality theory on the categories of race, class, and gender does not attend to the exclusion that many older women experience as a result of having a language barrier. Intersectionality cannot be used to fully explain the experiences of African immigrant women without acknowledging language and age barriers (Wilkinson, 2009: 78).

4.2.5 Child Care Burden

Children pose an increased economic burden for parents. This is particularly true for mothers, who remain the dominant caretakers in both North American and African societies. Women often must limit their work in the paid labour force, or sacrifice their careers in some way, in order to care for their children. All of the women who participated in the study had children. The economic cost of raising a child is often even more difficult for immigrant mothers.

Susan, a mother of five children who are between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, explained that she, and her family, had a particularly hard time when they came in 1997.

> We didn't come with savings or something to fall back on, so that was the biggest
> thing. We were like beginners, but when people usually begin they don't have

children, and they don't have big needs. They are just growing with their needs, maybe one child comes and so you can just afford a small apartment, and you are working your way in your profession, and getting better. When you are coming you are supposed to be at more advanced level, where you have worked out the details at the beginning, but you're thrown back into beginner—only this time you don't have the luxury of just the two of us, and the children are just coming. You are thrown years back but the needs and economical realities have not come back, or shrank with you. You are really fighting a difficult battle. It's just so difficult. It's from hand to mouth so it becomes difficult for the children especially because they have needs that can't wait, that are real and for today. Sometimes it may be so discouraging. Sometimes immigrant children happen to be among statistics of children who don't perform well, or who drop out of high school, but I think it is the challenges that they are facing back at home. Some of them are almost becoming adults like parents, and having to take care of themselves because the parents can only divide up so far what they have. That is the challenge that many people meet.

For women like Susan, economic security comes at the cost of time with her children. Even then establishing economic security appears to be a long, hard fought struggle, with numerous sacrifices along the way. Kofi, a school guidance counsellor, sees the same pattern among other immigrant children.

It breaks my heart that some of these immigrant students I am working with right now are having these problems because of things that happened five years, or even ten years ago. When parents are not home, when they leave at five and they come home at six, and they ask you get your stuff ready and go to school, you get up and you look outside and there is snow and you don't want to go to school, so you don't. There was nobody there to say get yourself ready, you are going. I have a bunch of students like that, that simply had grown into the routine of not going because mom and dad were gone. At the early age there wasn't that parental support to get them into the routine of going, and here they are in high school and they are not motivated to do it. It has long-term implications for even the generations that come after these parents that were struggling.

The need to make ends meet in jobs that do not match the economic needs of many immigrant women, creates a cycle where immigrant children are not given the nurturing that they would otherwise have.

Many immigrant women have to rely on social assistance when they have children who are not old enough to attend school, even if they do want to work. Vic notes that many immigrant women can only find minimum wage jobs when they first arrive. "It is always

very difficult. That is why a lot of women don't take it, because of the little kids. You have to go to work to support them, but then you have to pay for childcare. It's hard".

Most of the participants discussed child care as primarily the mother's responsibility, which is consistent with the socialist feminist assertion that women are expected to take on most care-taking duties in the private sphere. However, the capitalist economy refuses to acknowledge the caretaking role and does not provide sufficient financial compensation or support (McMullin, 2004: 47).

If daycare were funded through the government it would give immigrant women more freedom to obtain long-term economic security. Kaela, a mother of four children including a new baby, agreed. "For anybody who has kids it would be nice if they could get childcare cost free, because nowadays childcare is very, very expensive".

For Anna, a mother of five children between eight and fifteen, taking care of her children full time creates an emotional strain. "Most of the time I am a single mother because my husband is not with me, so I give all of my focus on my children. I prepare food for them, I counsel them for hours a night, and entertain them. It's a big job. Taking care of five kids is not easy".

Kaela, who works part-time, now as a PSW, gave up full-time work because she found that managing her job while taking care of the children was too much.

> When I came home I would still have to clean up and cook.   I was full time for two years and I didn't see my kids. They would go to school and come home and I wouldn't be home because I was working. I would go to work at two o'clock and I would finish work at ten o'clock and they would be sleeping; for two years. It was terrible. You don't get to eat even. I used to go into the rooms on my lunch break just to make calls to see how they were doing. I could not manage!

Kaela's experiences are similar to many women who take on the majority of household and child care responsibilities while working a full-time job. The participants with

small children had the most difficult time managing employment, child-care responsibilities and emotional strain.

4.2.6 Obtaining Employment

Finding employment is a necessary step for most immigrant women who seek economic self-sufficiency. By far, obtaining employment was the number one barrier reported by the interview participants. It is noteworthy that while eleven of the participants had low incomes when they first arrived in Canada, almost all of the participants came from an upper-middle, or upper-class background in Africa. As previously discussed, almost all of the participants also had a high educational level of attainment. Immigration to Canada appears to produce economic insecurity for African community members.
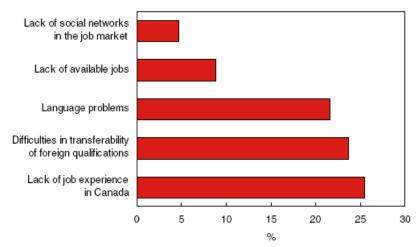
During the interviews, twelve of the women stated that finding adequate employment had been difficult. Of the remaining participants, one entered Canada after retirement, one is a stay at home mother, and one is a graduate student. None of the women interviewed perform the same job in Canada as they did in their country of origin.

Most of the women interviewed have now found employment, although not at the same level that they formerly had, or had anticipated having in Canada. Kofi said that as an immigrant, when you first arrive to Canada,

> You think oh, with your qualifications, you may get something close to the qualifications that you come with. You come with that assumption, or at least that expectation. Very soon you realize, no, that's not the case. Getting a job was the biggest challenge for me. At the time jobs were even in the papers for teachers, but no. I was willing to go anywhere in the country. I applied even to Baffin Island; there was nothing. I would say that was my biggest challenge.

Table 8

The most serious difficulties immigrants experienced when entering the labour force, 2001

Source: Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada—2001

Mana had a similar experience: "in terms of job search, it was a big shock to me. I

couldn't find anything". There are many times that the work experience of immigrants is not

recognized by employers in Canada. As shown in table 8, Statistics Canada (2001: 33)

confirms that not having Canadian work experience is a significant barrier to finding work

for 26% of immigrants. When asked how she overcame her problem finding employment,

Daya exclaimed,

> I'm still having a problem finding a job. I am working part-time at a retirement home,
> but then I have been trying to find an administrative assistant's position and it's been so
> hard. Up until now I haven't got anything and my income right now is very low
> because I work only part-time, so that doesn't bring much.

Obtaining employment was one of the main areas of life that participants felt was

different for male and female immigrants. Ruth, a Catholic married teacher from the Congo,

noted that "There are some backgrounds in Africa that inhibit from accessing jobs,

unfortunately". Women from some African cultures may be reluctant, or unable to work in

the paid labour force if their husbands or family members will not allow it. In such a case,

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the woman is dependent upon the support and economic security provided by her husband or other family members.

Kaela confirmed this in regards to Somalia women. "If a woman marries in Somalia and then comes here the woman will feel that she should stay home and take care of the kids, as that is our tradition back home. A lot of Somali think that way, and again that is up to her and up to her husband, if he is going to let her go to work".

For Kaela starting paid work was a source of personal freedom.

> After that it was amazing how you could work by yourself and make a lot of money without taking social assistance. When I got married the only money that was coming to us was only my husband's income. The man will only provide the home, and he would say we only have this much money. He would say we don't have enough money, and I thought when I start working, I will buy everything. I was like a new person. I remember when I first got the job, he was in Africa and he said what are you going to do with a job, you know I work and you stay home and take care of the kids. I said no honey, we will work together. He was actually mad about it, but then when I made more money he goes, oh this is good.

For women like Kaela finding a job means becoming empowered. By accessing her own source of income, Kaela gained her independence, despite her husband's objections. Unlike Kaela, seven of the women interviewed claimed that female immigrants are more likely to find employment first. Kofi explained:

> Women had a better chance than the men, in the sense that most of us are not too picky when it comes to economics. We need money to survive, and therefore I could go and be the kitchen help for now, I could go and be homemaker for now. In some cases the men try harder to get into their field. They try harder to get into their field by holding on another year, they keep trying. The women are more willing to take on survival jobs. Sometimes you don't blame them because from our background the men were the breadwinners. Then they get there and they can't do that. They think if I do that, how does the family survive? So they keep trying, and five years down the line they are stuck in the same place, and frustrated.

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All five women who stated that women would be first to find employment agreed that it was because women were more willing to work far below their qualifications. In this case, cultural expectations may limit a man's ability to find employment. Salma added:

> One of the major barriers for immigrants was that women were getting employment faster than the men, or sometimes men wouldn't get the jobs at all. The men weren't getting the jobs they deserved. That I would say is a marriage breaker, it is that serious. When you become the breadwinner and the men can't handle it, it's the end of the marriage sooner or later. This is very dramatic, don't take it lightly. Honestly, I don't know of anything more important that that.

While many African men are unwilling to work below their qualifications, Kofi also felt that men would not be given the same survivor jobs that female immigrants generally take. "I believe it's largely due to the stereotype, and therefore the suspicion about the Black man, or the African man". Kofi's statement is consistent with the social dominance theory that argues that subordinate men are the main targets of oppression, since subordinate men are more of a threat to dominant men than women. The social dominance theory is particularly relevant where control of resources is in question, such as access to paid employment (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 378). Easier access to low skill jobs may be one of the ways that some female African immigrants are benefited by their gender, albeit in an economically insufficient and short term manner. Cultural background plays a central role in attaining economic self-sufficiency, which is not recognized by intersectionality theory since the focus is primarily on race, class and gender (Wilkinson, 2009: 78)

There are several organizations operating within the Region of Waterloo that have programs funded through the government to help new immigrants find employment, such as the YMCA. After her own personal experience with job searching, and her training in the social work field, Kofi has become acquainted with these programs. When asked about the value of such programs Kofi responded:

> They are not significant because they are programs that lead new immigrants to

survivor jobs. That is my frustration in the system; so much money is pumped into the system. On paper there are all these programs for new immigrants, but they are not substantial or they are not programs that I would say are worthwhile for the kind of people the country attracts. Programs like how to sew are not useful! If they are going to do programs they should be really serious about it. They should have mentoring programs, because I would not disagree with any employer who said okay, this person is coming from this background and has this many years of experience but does the person know the Canadian work culture. If it's the case that we are not comfortable that they do, then maybe let's give them some training that will give them that aspect, not necessarily the content, but have some exposure to the Canadian work culture, know what to expect. Those basic things should not take any more than a couple of months. Then there should be that mentoring program, so you are teacher -what to know within teaching, or some placement in some social work organization. Something that at least you know okay let me give myself the next two to three years and I will be able to get into my field. That would be helpful for most people, it would be frustrating but at least you would know I can get in within some time.

The programs available within the region do not consider the previous work experience, or educational background, of the African women who enter the region. Coming from a teaching background Kofi was told by the YMCA to open her own daycare out of her home. Kofi concluded by reiterating that "the programs are there but they are not appropriate to meet our job needs, or the kind of people that they bring into the system. Sometimes I feel that the government at whatever level just wants to look like they are doing something, but they don't really care so much for the quality of what they are doing". Kofi's statements show that immigrants recognize the Canadian government as the responsible party for ensuring that immigrants are provided with adequate resources.

The employment options offered to educated African immigrant women like Kofi also illustrates a point made by hooks. hooks (1984: 1) contends that ethnic minority women are expected to take on the care-taking responsibilities of white upper-middle class women. One of the main options presented to immigrant women in the region is opening a low paying home daycare that would be used by other women in higher paying occupations.

Unlike Kofi, Kaela who came as a student with no children did find the services at the YMCA helpful. "If newcomers need to apply for jobs they do the applications for them.

If they need something for the immigration centre they do a lot of stuff for them; they fill out the forms for them". Programs under the YMCA do appear to provide immigrants with some level of support. However the programs do not address long term employment needs of highly qualified immigrants without Canadian work experience. Kaela found the services useful, but did not need to find a job that would support two children and a husband like Kofi did.

4.3 Extended Family Support Burden

For most of the participants, it was expected that extended family members living in Africa would be provided with financial support. This was especially the case for participants who had older parents or young relatives who could not work. Managing the needs of an extended family can be very hard for an economically unstable new immigrant. Eleven of the women interviewed said that they routinely send a portion of their incomes to family members living in Africa.

Sending money back to Africa is a large burden for Alice because of her low wage job. All of her brothers and sisters have died in Zimbabwe and she is the only one left to send money to take care of their eight orphans. Finding a job was very important to her, so that she could take care of her nieces and nephews.

> When I got that job, I just said thank you Jesus, and I sent that money back to Africa for those kids. I am in trouble now because I don't know how to ship things to Africa. When I go to the laundry room if people don't like some of their clothes they just put them there, so I select what is good and I take it thinking of those kids back home, but I don't know how to send those things. I am still trying, one day I will get it back to them. For me, most of the time to survive with my pay, I can only send them $100. Africa is terrible, I wish you could go there someday because then you could see how hard life is.

Susan's family also provides extended family members with financial support. This is a particularly large burden for Susan's family since she only works part-time and her

husband has recently been laid off. She and her family routinely send money to her husband's mother, two brothers and their families. When asked how much Susan's family sends to her husband's relatives she explained,

> Ideally it would have been as much as 25% but we are not able many times to do that so I would put it at 10%. Ideally for him, because he has that position in the family, even at home he was the one, because he is the most educated and the most stable financially. It is not just because he is here in Canada; even at home he would be the one who is the person in charge of the extended family in his case. It is as much as we can afford. I am saying until when his job ended, so he has not been able to meet that. The reason is also because my mother- in-law became ill and so she has needed more medical support for the last two years. He has maintained her medical support. She is on continued medical care.

> Kaela's mother-in-law also requires financial support for her medical condition.

> Actually my husband's mom is quite sick. She has asthma and over there it's very bad. When you're in Africa there's no medication there, well there is but I don't know why she doesn't get it. We do send them money and his family is big. He has five sisters and two brothers and his mom. Those five sisters have their own families so a nephew or niece will call different times and say I need money because I need to go somewhere. It's like, we've sent it already. We do send a lot of money.

> Taking care of extended family members is a reality for many African immigrants.

However, this extra burden is not acknowledged in any of the programs available to immigrants in the Region of Waterloo.   Intersectionality theory needs to extend beyond looking at race, class and gender to include family structure. Family structure is a main source of oppression for African immigrant women due to financial obligations to extended family.

4.4 Loss of Social Support Network

While the responsibilities of the participants did not dissipate after moving to Canada, the supports did lessen. Developing a strong social support network often takes a long time. A social support network acts as emotional support, but also as a connection to employment opportunities. During her interview Aliya, who had worked as a geologist in Somalia,

claimed that "You have lost all of your extended family when you come to a country where you don't know anyone. Another big thing was the network; it was very difficult to lose the network". Like Aliya, after coming to Canada, most immigrants lose the social support networks and community connections that they have established.

Fifi, a Catholic graduate student who came to Canada from Ghana with her husband, explained:

> When I came to Canada I needed to rethink who I was. Where I come from we are very family oriented and we always help each other out. We were never just my parents and siblings, we always had extended family staying with us. Everyone wants to help out and there is no money involved—that kind of community atmosphere has made me who I am today.

Fifi lost a level of support that she had come to respect and count on. Without this network of support, she found managing childcare and economic sustainability more difficult.

A majority of the women interviewed did not know more than two people when they first arrived, and any connections that they had were typically immigrants in a similar position. Mana, who has just recently finished a post-graduate degree, did not know anyone but her husband when she moved with him to the Region of Waterloo. She claimed during her interview that she has found it very hard to get a good job because "my network is all in Ghana. My classmates are all there; even the person who is the Attorney General, who was just a year ahead of me, was a very good friend. My classmates are all doing very well in Ghana and in very high positions".

Mana felt that her career has been limited by not having her network. She pointed out that, like many of the other wives of African students at the time, she first worked in a poorly operated local factory. The factory hired many other immigrants, and operated in a way that Mana described as "sweat shop conditions". She had initially hoped to work as a

translator in Canada because she had just finished her degree in Spanish and French in Ghana.

Mana's experience in the factory illustrates the exploitation that ethnic minorities often face. According to the socialist feminist perspective, exploitation based on gender and race is used to maintain capitalism in North America (Leiman, 1993: 337). White upper-class men are able to control surplus value by ensuring that ethnic minority women work in low level jobs.

Mana noted that none of the African women that she talked to were happy with working in the factory. She detailed one particular incident where a woman who had just completed her law degree asserted "she's a lawyer; she was not going to work in a factory. So, she went back. She left her husband, and she is a judge now in Ghana. It's all about choices".

From Mana's description, the woman viewed leaving Canada as the only way to fulfill her career goals. Since she was unable to find employment even with her level of education, it is apparent that the region is not providing new immigrants with the opportunities that they require for obtaining suitable employment. Chipo also pointed to her lack of a social network as a barrier to employment: "We didn't know anybody. I had problems getting a job".

Salma and her husband were able to begin successful careers even without an established social network. However, Salma revealed that she and her husband were not able to establish an interior decorating business here, as they had in Egypt. Covert racism prevented them from accessing the needed clientele, which illustrates the sense of invisibility that ethnic minorities experience on a daily basis (Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 380)

That kind of society level we have not been able to tap into. I'm sure it exists among the millionaires, who would spend money to do the exquisite things. We as immigrants don't mix with that circle so we have no access to it. A lot of our business there was connections. You are established in the society and you are the son of so and so, and a lot of those things. That kind of gives you part of your prestige, then your work has to do the rest. You come here and you're a nobody. You're a third world immigrant from Egypt and nobody will trust what you're doing. That is where I say there is a lot of lack of education of the quality of immigrants. A lot of us bring a lot of things with us that would really be useful. The strange thing is that this is an immigration country. We are just new pioneers but people don't make that link.

However, not all of the women interviewed lacked the support of a social network. Gloria disclosed that when she first came at age twenty,

Word went around that I was coming and there was a Canadian family that volunteered to act as my parents. It was a Caucasian family and they had their own children who were all grown up, and they were older. Actually I call those people mom and dad. Both of them are dead now, but to their children I am still a member of the family. I am their sister. Every weekend I would go there and spend the weekend with them and that was just wonderful. I felt like I belonged somewhere.

Susan had a similar experience when she moved to a small community just outside of the Region of Waterloo: "the community just reached out. They did most of the things that government services do, of course it is a community so the services are limited but they did their best. They took us from one plant to another looking for a job".

The common element in both Gloria's and Susan's experience is that it was community members who reached out to provide a network of support. Without the generosity of individual community members Gloria would not have felt that she had somewhere to belong and Susan would not have had easy access to available employment opportunities.

4.5 Government Support Services

4.5.1 Social Assistance Usage

For immigrants who cannot readily find adequate employment, relying on government support is often the only available option. When asked what services the government provided to economically support new immigrants, ten of the participants named social assistance. A majority of the women who provided this response, named social assistance as the only service that they were aware of that was provided specifically by the government.

Seven of the participants have had to make use of the social assistance program for at least some time after coming to Canada. All of the participants who had used social assistance expressed a strong reluctance to ever use it again. Alice is particularly concerned about not using social assistance. "I am so careful with my job, because I don't want to go to Welfare again. I know a lot of people need that money".

A number of the participants who had experience with the social assistance program criticized it as being insufficient. Kaela recalled that for the first two years that she lived in Canada: "I remember my dad wasn't working and we were on social services. I remember what if I need to go get my tooth fixed, and they would say just pull it out because we don't have the money. I hated it; I hate it to this day". Extra health and dental benefits are minimal for social assistance recipients.

The socialist feminist perspective can be used to understand why the social assistance program is not subject to change, despite offering inadequate health and dental coverage. Krumer-Nevo (2005: 87) argues that women are blamed for their poverty so the

existing system does not appear to need improvement. Women who live in poverty have been treated as suspicious and inferior for over a century.

When Daya first came to Canada she stayed at the YWCA women's shelter because she came to Canada with no savings. She relied on social assistance for her first year here before she could find employment. During her interview, Daya expressed her opinion that the amount of social assistance itself was inadequate.

> With social assistance, while I do understand that a lot of people do need social assistance, at the same time I also think that you as a tax payer are paying a lot of money and if you need the services you should be able to get better financial assistance. I find that the government is giving social assistance but sometimes you find that it is not enough. For example, when I was getting social assistance they gave me $525 a month. It's barely enough. Apartments are very expensive, living wherever is expensive. The cheapest apartment that we could find to share, with me and my roommate, was in an $800 a month apartment building. I paid $400 and my friend's paid $400 and that leaves me with $125. You've got to eat and if you go to the food bank to get food, most of the food stuff that they give you is canned food, like canned vegetables. You get lots and lots of spaghetti sauce and things that you don't really need. I think that there is room for improvement in that.

The social assistance that Daya was provided with was not adequate to cover her needs. However, as a tax payer, Daya does believe that the government has a responsibility to improve social assistance.

Conversely, Mana, who is currently unemployed, felt that social assistance is something that should be a temporary stepping stone. "Personally, government assistance is not a solution, and it should be just short-term. The problem is getting decent jobs, to make their own living. Ideally, in the ideal world, that is what I would advocate for". Daya agreed that "other than just providing them with financial help, they should provide them with ways to help sustain them".

Mana does not view immigrant reliance on social assistance as intentional. "The job market is not friendly to immigrants, so they don't want to have to rely on the

government". She has been unable to secure a job with her recent post-graduate degree in journalism.

Chipo, who came in 2001 with her husband, noted that social assistance may not be accessible even when it is needed, depending on a person's immigration status.

> If you come as a refugee you have government support right away for one year, but if you come as an immigrant then no. For example, if I should sponsor any of my family members to come, I think there is a ten year contract that they can't go on government assistance, so there is that. I think that there might be one or two other programs around, but I don't have the details.

Since five of the participants were sponsored by their husbands, and one was sponsored by her father, restricting these immigrants from accessing social assistance for ten years may limit the choices of women in particular. None of the women had sponsored their husbands when they came to Canada. The women who were sponsored by their husbands may not be able to seek separation for the ten year period, as a result of financial concerns. African women are marginalized because of their gender in addition to experiencing marginalization as ethnic minorities because their life circumstances are not considered by the government.

Aliya added that refugees may be able to access more resources. "I think that the majority of services are helping refugees". Aliya explained and added that "most refugees when they come now have everything prepared. When I came they didn't have that. Ten or fifteen years ago they didn't have that".

Vic explained that for refugees there is the Reception House available to help with integration. When asked if the Reception House provides housing Vic responded:

> Yes, it's like a motel, or something of that kind. You live there until when you get your accommodations. You have to sign immigration papers, and they do it with you. If you go by yourself to rent an apartment they will not give it to you, because you don't have an income. But the Reception House will give them the information; this is how they come through immigration. You will go first to apartment housing; they submit the papers for them. They submit it immediately when they come, so that if there is any available place then they can move you into it. It could take two years. Reception House you live in for one month, then you move to an apartment.

Refugees have a more formalized network of government support. Vic noted that "one other thing I noticed too was the disconnection between Reception House; I mean they have so many resources but it's only for refugees who come through there".

However, even for refugees financial support is only guaranteed for a period of one year. Financial support is not guaranteed by the government for refugees who are privately sponsored. Private sponsorship is often needed for refugees who cannot meet the qualifications through the government, or for those who are not safe to wait for the government to process their refugee application. If a refugee is privately sponsored, the private sponsor becomes responsible for the economic well-being of the claimant.

Although the sponsorship source was not asked of the refugee participants, Aliya, who is Muslim, noted that there are several churches and Mosques that have sponsored refugees.

> I remember a church in Kitchener sponsored some people. They bring in a lot of African families from places like Rwanda or Zimbabwe, or places like that. Also Catholic churches I think. I used to know one guy who sponsored a lot of people. He sponsored a lot of Rwandans I remember. Vic also knows another guy who sponsored families from Sudan.

4.5.2 Government Funded Integration Programming

Susan discussed the New Canadian Program as a government funded program in the

region that helps new immigrants to integrate and find employment. When she first arrived

in the Region of Waterloo she had been living in Canada for five years in a small town

outside of the region.

> When I moved to Waterloo, we said our previous town doesn't have many
> opportunities and we have qualifications that may not apply in a small town, so we need
> to move to the city. Moving was also for a dual purpose, also to get jobs in our
> profession. When I went to the New Canadians Programs I said but it is also because I
> really need to look for a job here in the city, I've just moved out of that small town and
> I still have to drive back one hour for work and it's general labour. They said we don't
> really help people get jobs, we only help people settle. They said if you already have a
> full-time job, forty hours a week, with medical and dental benefits, then you are not
> needy. We help people who really don't have anything.

Susan acknowledged that it is reasonable that one organization cannot do everything.

However, she felt that the government should be providing immigrants with assistance in

finding accessible employment even if a "survivor job" had been found.

Susan also brought up the Child Tax Benefit as something that the government gives

to all people who have children. This program was noted by four of the other women as well.

However, Susan did not receive the Child Tax Benefit for any of her five daughters because

she did not apply.

> I heard about it but I thought that the government automatically assessed and
> automatically decided if I qualify, but no. I didn't apply for ten years and when I
> applied they said why haven't you applied for ten years? When I gave the reason they
> said, no, that's not good enough. We are not giving it to you now, because you should
> have known. I still have a daughter now who is eligible, but they won't give it to me.
> Susan's experience with the Child Tax Benefit has been negative. Although she may

have the right to appeal this decision since she does qualify, she does not have the necessary

information. The inaccessibility of the Child Tax Benefit exemplifies a "textural relation of

ruling". Smith (1990: 14) argues that "textual relations of ruling" are controlled and created by the governing bodies that make up the "relations of ruling". Women exist in the everyday world set apart from texts and cannot access information contained in them without a mediating body.

4.6 Inaccessible Information

Susan's lack of information regarding the Child Tax Benefit program restricted her from becoming as economically stable as she could have been. Throughout the years Susan described a financial struggle that would have been made easier with additional income that she was entitled to. A lack of available information was discussed by participants as the largest barrier to integrating effectively or accessing needed economic support resources that are available within the region.

Susan claimed that resources available to new immigrants would be difficult to find out about "except by word of mouth". As discussed previously, immigrants may have a particularly hard time because "word of mouth" advertisement requires a social network that may not be available.

Even after seven years of living in the Region of Waterloo, Chipo, who does not have very much contact with the African community, is still unaware of any of the services that the government offers to assist new immigrants to become economically self-sufficient. Without this information Chipo has had to struggle.

> I don't know if there are any programs, but maybe they should offer some more
> help for immigrants economic wise and then advertise them. When I came here I
> didn't see any. Even though we were having problems with our health coverage we
> didn't see anything that could help. We just figured that there was nothing really
> that could help with that.

Mana, who has done volunteer work as a translator for the Multicultural Center claimed that "After I got to know about the Multicultural Center I realized that there were so many things that I could have done if I had of had the information, but I didn't". Mana described how she found the Multicultural Center. "It was by chance, I came home one day and I saw a flyer sitting on the floor".

> I know that the Multicultural Center is a big organization but I don't know if it's visible enough, or exposed enough for immigrant women to take advantage of the services. I don't know how they would fix it, but I just feel like it's inadequate. As I said there isn't much mainly geared towards women, it's always families, so it always points to the man.

A lack of information has directly impacted Kofi's economic security. She believed that not having realistic information about employment opportunities restricted her development.

> Given my own experience, I would say my family's experience; I feel that you need to have somebody who knows the system who will guide you when you come in. Personally if I knew what the system was, if these organizations or agencies were honest with me, it would have been different.

Alice, who actively volunteers with several agencies in the community, explained that now that she has become integrated into Canadian society she is more aware of the support services that are available to her. "I now know that they can help people, but before I was blind and I did not know. Sometimes you don't even know that you have that right. We don't know our rights and that's the most important part". Information regarding services and personal rights is very important, particularly for refugees who may have fled an oppressive government regime. Finding a way to supply information effectively is an integral part in facilitating the self-sufficiency of immigrants.

Kofi agreed that services are not readily available.

> To tell you the truth the system doesn't tell people especially about money. It's not information that they readily give out. For example, if I need information I call and I know some of the people to ask; I can ask how can we find support for such and such a person. They may tell you, but it's not public knowledge, it's not out there. They don't want people to know because if you can survive by doing something else then that's what they want. They are not readily available, they are not advertised.

Susan provided further detail.

> I know that they try to put it on advertisements to say that the government is doing this and the other. I want to say that the government is doing their best; it's just that I don't know if it's reaching everyone. Not everyone has the same access to those advertisements but the government is doing their part and doing it very well. It's just that I think that there is a missing link, maybe some missing individuals or organizations. A link needs to be there to bring awareness in order for people to know that services are available.

Susan contended that this type of information needs to be available. "At the time, when government is taking in immigrants, either those applying to be landed immigrants or refugees; they should include this type of information". Alice made the same recommendation: "when you enter into Canada they just give you immigration papers and they say just go into Canada, you are welcome to Canada. And do what? What am I going to do, you don't know". There is basic information that is needed right when an immigrant enters Canada that is not being provided.

Susan was able to integrate effectively without government support or information because, "the community did for us what the government does. We didn't even know that the government does those things but we were taken care of by the community, so I had a very good experience. Churches, school and the whole community took care of us". However, when community members take on the responsibility to integrate immigrants into the community, they do not receive government funding.

4.7 Cultural Differences

Culture varies greatly among the different African countries. Participants acknowledged that having a cultural difference from Canadians often creates an additional barrier for accessing information and resources for a number of reasons.

For instance, Susan, who is a Christian from Kenya, claimed that in order to integrate,

> The most important thing is for people to know what to access and how to access. The government has really put into place very crucial and important services for new immigrants, but most people don't know what they are, and also there are some cultural inhibitions. Even though African countries normally are underdeveloped and are portrayed as needy, there is also a cultural thing of not asking or begging. Asking, or begging, or needing is almost looked at like shame, not guilt but shame. For that reason people don't ask and people don't know the resources. People suffer, not necessarily because there is no help but they just don't know that it is a different country and it's *okay* to ask for help.

Agencies that provide support to new immigrants must be particularly aware of the various traditions, in order to overcome any cultural apprehensions. For that reason it is important to have people who have a similar background to new immigrants to provide assistance. Cultural difference needs to be considered by intersectionality theory with race, class and gender since those who are culturally different do not have equal access to information and resources.

Fifi, who is a Christian from Ghana, felt that the programs available to immigrants need to change to be culturally relevant, rather than expecting immigrants to adapt to the existing system. "No one has the same experiences. Think of it like raising children, even if you raise children the exact same way everyone will turn out differently."

Salma, a secular Muslim from Egypt, encountered situations where social workers operating in the region have not considered cultural difference.

When I was an interpreter I took the training first. One of their training sessions was to bring in a social worker, and this person comes and sits with us. She started telling us how things should be and it ended with 35 other women telling her how she should learn about other cultures before she starts telling us how things should be. We pointed out to her that where most of us come from, from diverse parts of the world, there is extended family support. It's more of a village atmosphere, where whatever societal ills that she was addressing did not exist. One of the main things here, and that was what I was getting at, was that what she was saying was not culturally relevant.

Recent immigrant women will not use available services if the legitimacy of African culture is not acknowledged. A level of trust must be developed and nurtured for social service agencies to be effective.

4.8 Women's Information Restrictions

The restriction of information is more exaggerated for African women than it is for men. Participants claimed that African men are often the gatekeepers of information, and that women rely on them for details about available supports and opportunities. A greater barrier to information for women is consistent with one of the central elements of intersectionality theory. Specifically, multiple marginalities create a "multiplicative" effect and increase oppression (Steinburgler, Press, & Johnson Dias, 2006: 808).

Mana, who has experience working with immigrants at the Multicultural Center, described that this is not just the case for African immigrants because,

For a lot of the cultures the women depend on the men. The man is the head of the household so he has to get the information before some gets to the woman, there's no guarantee. There isn't anything geared specifically towards the woman, so basically they are at their husband's mercy. There are times that the men are those who have the education and their wives who come here are not educated, or they can't speak English. They always have to depend on the men for information, so if they don't get it then they wouldn't have access to resources in the community.

Fifi, who came to Canada in 1962, reported that she took a long time to feel integrated into Canadian society because her husband restricted her access to information. She reported that her husband had been emotionally, physically and financially abusive,

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purposely restricting her access to education to maintain his control. Fifi claimed that the

restricted access to information for women seems to be typical of most immigrant

populations.

> For most cultures the man has to be the first to check things out. If there is any
> conflict he wants to be the one to deal with it, and he won't let his wife out until he
> has investigated the situation and he feels comfortable. While he is getting
> acquainted with the society, in the mean time it has been three or four years of the
> women just staying in the house. She doesn't even speak English and she should
> have been in ESL classes. Women are so suppressed.

> Fifi explained that new immigrant women need someone like another woman to

come around with them to help them integrate. For Fifi, even going to the grocery store was

a shock, because she was used to cash and carry versus the use of electronic grocery scanners

and debit cards. She also noted that for a recent immigrant to integrate there has to be respect

for cultural background. Vic, who comes from Sudan, agreed that an awareness of cultural

background is very important. "There are lots of women who are very private and they feel

comfortable only talking to people who look like them, so if they have that kind of support it

would be good".

Aliya echoed this assessment and added that government-funded resources do not

acknowledge the needs of immigrant women, "there isn't much mainly geared towards

women, it's always families, so it always points to the man". Existing programs often accept

a man's experience as the neutral standard, which does not take into consideration the unique

experiences of women (de Beauvoir cited in Smith, 1987, p. 53). hooks (1984: 45 notes that

many policies that seek to help women exclude new immigrants, while many policies that

seek to help new immigrants do not take into account the needs of women, especially those

who are responsible for children (hooks, 1984: 45).   Unless specific programming for

women is identified men take the dominant role.

4.9 Faith-Based Organizational Support

Twelve of the fifteen participants belong to a faith-based organization. Eight participants claimed that the organization that they belong to provides support to new immigrants that help them to become economically self-sufficient. However, six of the participants said that most of the services are available to any person in need of support, rather then assisting immigrants in particular. As stated earlier, participants claimed that non-specific services were less effective in reaching African women.

Still, Susan, who is actively involved in her church, admitted that "The pastor of our church helped me to find a job because he took us from one plant to another looking for work". The church members also provided Susan and her family with clothing and furniture.

However, Salma, who is not strongly religious, argued that churches should not be depended upon to provide new immigrants with financial or informational support. "Sometimes you find also that you have to comply in order to be included in the club. You have to dress like they want you to dress and all of those other things". Salma explained that in order to receive help, certain faith rules have to be observed. For example, Muslim women are encouraged to wear a hijab in some Mosques. If Muslim women do not conform to this custom they may not be able to access services or information provided by certain Mosques. Women may be forced to comply with faith rules to make ends meet even if it's against personal desire.

Daya, a Lutheran who has not found a suitable church in the region, mentioned that faith organizations are not doing all that they can and agued that "they could offer shelters, services like food banks, and financial help maybe". Kofi countered that often churches are also financially limited. "I know some Christian groups at Christmas time do shoe boxes full

of gifts and stuff like that. That may relieve some families need in the short term, but it isn't a long term solution".

Gloria, who came with the help of the United Church, explained that faith-based organizations cannot manage the needs of incoming African women.

> A lot of churches have problems financially too. They are always under budgeted and they do what they can. The people I think who should be helping financially are the government really. We all pay taxes and it's all those taxes that should be distributed evenly and adequately to help those who need to be helped. The government should be funding organizations that help immigrants.

A majority of participants claimed that faith-based organizations do try to help financially insecure people. However the services are inadequate in addressing the type of needs and situations that African immigrant women face when adapting. Faith-based organizations do not provide a standard level of support across the region. Faith-based organizations in the region do not have the resources or training required to help African immigrant women to integrate effectively.

4.10 Non-Profit Organizations

It was revealed through the data analysis that participants were not able to easily access information about available resources. Because information is not readily available, a central question answered by this research was: *How do they find out what these resources are?*

Participants identified non-profit organizations as the most accessible information resource. The local non-profit agencies that were found to be most helpful were the Working Center, World Wide Opportunities for Women, and the African Women's Alliance.

Salma expressed that,

> In general, I think the services that are not run by the government are not trapped
> into the bureaucracy. You find that most of the people involved in non-profit
> organizations are altruistic, and that whatever is being done does reach the people
> that need to be served. Whereas, the ones run by the government become cushy
> places for employees.

Salma's support for non-profit organizations was shared by other participants who

believed that non-profit organizations are closer to the grassroots level and more in tune with

the needs of the community.

4.10.1 The Working Center

Seven of the participants interviewed described The Working Center as a very

useful non-profit organization. Although the Working Centre in Kitchener does not only

serve immigrants, it does strive to provide specific programs that are accessible and address

the needs of local immigrants and refugees. The Working Centre is a non-profit organization

governed by a board of directors (The Working Centre). It was established in 1982 in

response to the increasing unemployment and poverty in the region, particularly in downtown

Kitchener.

The centre has maintained its independent non-profit status for over two decades

and strives to increase community development through a number of programs. The

programs include the Job Search Resource Centre, St. John's Kitchen, Community Tools,

Access to Technology, Affordable Supportive Housing and the Waterloo School for

Community Development (The Working Centre).

As stated previously, the biggest concern for most of the African immigrant women interviewed was finding employment. When asked about the best service in the area Salma reported:

> Right now, one of the best run organizations is the Working Center. They are really good. It's not my personal opinion; it's actually the opinion of all the clients that are served there. I heard that from lots of people. They have made their mark on this community. They have been able to pass on the compassion, where the people who are working there all have the helping attitude. The whole atmosphere is good. When a person that I know would go and tell them about a problem, they don't just listen. They will forward it or tell the person what next to do. They have all those computers that they make available to people to come and do job searches. They are not stuffy and you can just walk in and out. You have equal access, and it's an amazing family atmosphere in there.

Alice went to the Working Center when she was searching for a job. "The counsellors are there and they even help you to make a resume. In Africa when you want to apply for a job you have to apply by writing a letter. Here if you go to the Working Center they will ask you what were you doing before and for how long. It's easy to get a job". The job counsellors are sensitive to the cultural differences of immigrant job seekers, which makes it more accessible.

The Working Center also has a housing desk, and a special program that places refugees in temporary apartments. Alice claimed that "when I found about it I even told my friends if you are in trouble go to the Working Center. If you don't have anywhere to sleep you go there and they will help you, they really do a good job".

> I went to the working Center and there was a housing desk there. I was told to go to a certain lady and she said it's okay we have room on Louisa Street, off King Street. I went there and she showed me the room on Louisa Street and I liked it. I took what I had with me and she drove me there, and there were three other ladies living there with me in that building. It was five bedrooms and that place was good for me. Everything was included, they said utensils are here, bed linens, the washer, the dryer, everything is there all you have to bring is your clothes and buy your own food. The rent was good. I stayed and stayed and they said now Alice I think you are able to find your own place. I said yes I am able because I was working. I said for sure I thank you very much, you did a lot.

For Alice, the Working Center provided a way to access housing and employment resources that resulted in the ability to seek long-term economic stability.

Daya, who is still looking for a full-time position, stated: "I have a lady who's been helping me at the Working Center downtown but nothing has come out of it yet. She did give me some assistance though. She has helped me rebuild my resume and to do cover letters, so that is all that we can do for now, nothing much". Daya is happy with the help that she is receiving at the Working Center, but still has not had a positive outcome. "Without more funding for other programs that's the best they can do. They cannot take a job and say here, there is your job. They can only do so much".

Unlike Alice, Daya has upgraded her education and is looking for a position in her field. Daya has experienced more difficulty finding employment than Alice, perhaps because Alice was willing to accept any full-time job that could support her basic needs.

4.10.2 World Wide Opportunities for Women (WWOW)

One of the main non-profit agencies in the Region of Waterloo working on behalf of immigrant women specifically is Worldwide Opportunities for Women (http://www.wwow.org/index.html/). Worldwide Opportunities for Women (WWOW) is a registered charity that was created in 1994 in order to work towards improving the standard of living for immigrant and refugee women and their families (Muszynski and Gassim, 2003).

WWOW has developed connections with social service agencies as well as other social support organizations including the YWCA, K-W Counselling and K-W Sexual Assault Support Center. The existing connections with other organizations that WWOW has acquired make it a valuable resource for communicating information. The organization has

a history of work with African women through initiatives such as housing supports, referrals to existing agencies and advocating for welfare reform (Muszynski and Gassim: 2003).

Aliya believes World Wide Opportunities for Women is able to help women by "giving immigrants a voice. They try to dismantle "them and us"; they show that we are also a part of the community. If anything is done to support the community, it will empower our community. WWOW did a lot of work with immigrants, not only for Africans but for all ethnic groups. They did a lot of work on women's empowerment issues".

Vic, who was previously a member of WWOW, described that other organizations would

> Call us and say that they have a person here who came from Africa and she doesn't know the language here. She needs some support, so we would immediately go there and start helping. We said ok I am available and I will come here and give them help which I can support them with.   That's how we go; we get connected through the other agencies. They call us, like one time there was a women with some problems. She didn't know how to give medications to the kids and then the Children's Services had to call us at WWOW because the woman didn't know how to speak the language. They couldn't explain to her how much insulin to give her son because he was diabetic, so I had to go and then I helped that family with that. Even the doctor himself couldn't explain it to her. It was very difficult for both of them to communicate and the medication that she was giving to the kid was overdosing.

WWOW does not typically have the capacity to provide financial support to recent immigrant women. However, the type of support provided is often an important part of integrating new immigrants, and at times even life saving. Non-profit organizations like WWOW are relied upon by government-run organizations like Children's Services to help recent immigrant women for things like translation support.

4.10.3 African Women's Alliance (AWA)

The African Women's Alliance is a grassroots non-profit organization that addresses the needs of African women and their families. The African Women's Alliance

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was founded in 1994 in order to provide support for first and second generation female

African immigrants (Muszynski and Gassim: 2003). The organization is committed to

empowering African women and their families (Muszynski and Gassim: 2003).

Furthermore, since the organization often works closely with other African national women's

groups, the African Women's Alliance is able to share information with other regions.

The goals and methods of the African Women's Alliance are consistent with African

Canadian feminism. According to Wane (2002: 43), Black Canadian feminism is geared

towards changing the lives of Black women through community involvement.

Participants described African Women's Alliance as an organization that worked as a

strong support for new immigrant women, despite the fact that they are not able to provide

material resources.

Aliya, who has worked in community development for fifteen years, explained that

support is especially needed for new immigrants.

> There are two types of African women. There are women who have lived in the
> region for years and there are new families who come in. All of the Africans who
> stay here are established already so they can support themselves more or less. The
> new ones are very difficult, so what the organizations do is receive referrals from
> the big agencies. They say there is a woman from Liberia and she needs help
> adapting. The organizations go and support people emotionally. It is just that
> supporting each other is very important.

Susan went into further detail and stated that African Women's Alliance support

African women by "doing little things. If somebody has a baby, they bring a gift or

something. It's not so much the financial support; I would say it's so much the social or the

personal connection. They're there to support women emotionally and socially, that's what I

say the group does".

The small gestures that the African Women's Alliance provide give new immigrant

woman some sense that they still have a social network that they can rely on during important

life events. The help that the group provides is typical of African Canadian feminism that advocates simple practices to improve the lives of African Canadian women (Wane, 2002: 41).

In addition to providing emotional support, one of the main objectives of the organization is to provide women with the information that they require to integrate effectively. Vic argued that African Women's Alliance is able to help women so well because

> Women would like to go to the women's organizations. They feel more comfortable talking to women than they do talking to men. You get more information when you are talking to your fellow women. Free information, you talk to them and you ask them questions. Some little things even like cooking. Using the stove, using other things, most of them don't know. You have to give them that kind of information when they come. They don't speak the language and don't know how to operate these things. Then you have to tell them, ok do this, now do that, and this is how you operate this, and this is how you operate that. This is how you use the shower, and how you use the toilet, all of these kinds of things. They cannot ask men. Especially women who come from Africa, they feel shy talking to men. It helps a lot.

The African Women's Alliance is accessible to new African immigrant women because its members are trusted as fellow women who will understand the cultural and informational barriers that they face. The women who access the services provided by African Women's Alliance do not feel a sense of reluctance to tell fellow community members their life circumstances.

Fifi, who is divorced from her abusive ex-husband, acknowledged that immigrant women are less likely to be forthcoming with government agencies.

> The government does not really know about the experiences of immigrant women. African women will downplay their troubles when they are talking to people who work for the government because they are intimidated. Many women come from countries where they were persecuted. They will not tell the truth here because they don't know the system and they are scared to even show their face. They are worried that if they have any problems that they could have their children taken away, for example. Ethnicity is a great resource available to the government that is generally not accessed.

Agencies like African Women's Alliance can serve as a mediator for the government because they are already connected to the community.

Information provides new immigrants with an understanding of the Canadian system, and informs them that they are allowed to access its resources. Information is also often a necessary tool for self-protection. Alice expressed that by knowing her rights she was able to stand up to her employer regarding unfair working conditions.

> Before I used to work seven days when I first started working here, and I had to talk to the resources manager and, oh he was angry with me, I said I cannot work for seven days. Why should I? I said I need my time. He was mad (laughing). You know what happened, when he was mad at me I said even if you are mad at me I am not going to work that much. I said I know my rights now. You can pick someone from the street but you are not going to get my quality. You will get someone who is going to do a lot of rubbish, and you won't like her. You know what he did that week; he put $500 on top of my salary. I said, thank you God!

Not all women felt that the African Women's Alliance was able to reach them when they needed informational support.   Gloria noted that "I have been here for how many years, and I just found out about it last year. They don't have enough money to do proper advertising so nobody knows about it". However, Alice was able to find the African Women's Alliance because "I saw the banners downtown, every year I could see them".

The African Women's Alliance has given women the assistance that they needed to become empowered. Vic noted that after receiving emotional support from the African Women's Alliance she began supporting new immigrants as well.

> I felt that because of myself, as an immigrant to this country, I felt that they are having the same problems which I had when I came. It was good for me when I came; I had help. Some of them didn't know anybody, so I just felt that it was better for me to give them support as an African, as part of the community.

Daya cited a similar experience and claimed that she has joined the African Women's Alliance "Because I could just imagine how the others feel. Once you experience

something, you can actually empathize with the other person. It was my main motivation,

and then that company, helping people with similar background is very important".

Participants acknowledged that through collective action they felt that they could

make a change in the region. Aliya, who is a member of AWA, explained that by

establishing the group, African women

> Could support each other and network. To have me in that town was easy, they could
> knock on my door and then I would go and support them. It was very easy. At that
> time, me and my friends sat together and said how can we help the community? We
> were a growing community of immigrants. We wanted to know what we could do to
> help other immigrants. At that time organizations existed, but we felt that we needed
> to go to those organizations and ask for what we need. Some of those organizations
> were trying to support us, but we felt that the only way that Africans could access
> services, and obtain employment in the community, was to support each other first.
> We felt that at that time it was also important to connect with the system. The system
> is the one that is segregated it's not the people. We felt that in order for us to access
> the system we need to have a dialogue with the system. In order for us to do that it
> took maybe a decade, to open up the system, to tell the decision makers what
> refugees needed, who are different than whites, in this community. We just felt that
> we needed to think positive. We don't need to say that this cannot happen. I've
> learned to organize very well, and if we target what we need I think we will get it.

The members of African Women's Alliance have been able to open a dialogue with

the government. According to Lorde (2004: 65) changing the status quo is often left to those

who are oppressed. Members of the oppressed group often connect with those in power to

promote change when the opportunity becomes available.

Anna noted that the African Women's Alliance is instrumental in addressing, and

even preventing problems for new immigrants.

> I find these organizations are very important because they discuss issues, and solve
> problems. They take issues to the government, like hate crimes. It helps a lot
> because they acknowledge it, and when you first come you are unaware of how to
> deal with issues like discrimination. You never think that people will love or hate
> you before you interact with the community.

African Women's Alliance provides a voice for new African immigrants who may be unprepared to deal with discrimination and racism that persists within the region. Kofi added that the programs available to immigrants through the Multicultural Center have been improved by incorporating the suggestions of African community members.

> They took some suggestions in that regard and they've also done some hiring of people from different communities. When for example, you are an employee from an agency; you know what you want your community members to know. Diversity within the agency itself has helped in advertising them. They've also gone into settlement. They've done settlement before but I think they are doing more of settlement work and they have a good group of settlement workers. They are doing outreach in the community and making more people aware of their services.

The success of the African Women's Alliance proves the assertion of the socialist feminist perspective that even though systemic discrimination does still occur, women are not just "passive victims". The members of the African Women's Alliance actively shape their environment and resist certain forms of oppression (Kumer-Nevo: 2005: 89).

Kofi discussed that the African Women's Alliance has also been able to educate the general public about African Culture through collective efforts. She argued that before African Women's Alliance began community outreach,

> You would find that people reacted to you negatively as an African. There was the famine in Ethiopia, there was a war in Sudan and there was Rwanda and everything about Africa was negative. My personal experience was that you would find some people in the Caribbean community wanting to distance themselves. I went to one school with one person who would always say, I am not an African I am a Caribbean, and I don't blame them. It's simply because the general population was reacting negatively to people from that background because the pictures that people saw were just horrible. My husband says that in North America they think that Africa is a country, the capital is Egypt and the president is Nelson Mandela, that's all. It's like one big country; they think you are coming from the same famine, war torn and whatever. We thought that there was a need for us to educate the public, so it was not so much about us anymore. Yes, we have the avenue to vent and support each other, but some of the things that were causing us stress were the public's reaction to us, and so we decided why don't we do something to educate the public. As an organization we started taking on speaking appointments, and we thought about organizing the festival to let people see some other aspects of African culture, put some positive things out there. I would say we've made some

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significant progress in that area.

Kofi's statement refers to the Afro Festival, which was explained further by Aliya.

> We are currently in the eighth year of organizing the Annual Afro Festival, which is a festival of dance, music, drama, art and African cuisine celebrating the rich cultural heritage of all 52 countries that comprise the African continent. It has become a huge rallying point for all Africans living in this region as well as an awareness and education connection with service providers, researchers, some business organizations and the larger community. We are expanding the scope of the festival this year to include an African children's soccer tournament for genders, life skills workshops, and youth group support. We are expecting over 7000 families and residents from surrounding regions, over 250 agencies, community groups, several dance troupes, traditional storytellers as well as media coverage to attend. We have vendors who sell food, traditional African crafts and clothing. Last year we had 6000 people attend, and that was in the rain.

The Afro Festival provides an opportunity for people to come together for a common goal, while respecting a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The political solidarity of the African Women's Alliance is consistent with the type of feminism that hooks advocates (hooks, 1984: 65). The festival has been a continued success and source of identity for many African community members. However, Aliya added that finding funding is becoming increasingly difficult.

> It's hard to find enough money. This year we received only $3000 from the city, which is much less than half of what we got last year. All of the organizers volunteer their time to prepare for the event. We have no money to pay for an event planner or fundraiser. We have to rely on raising money through vendor's fees and private donations from local businesses, corporations and non-profit agencies.

Salma, who is an African Women's Alliance member, started a magazine that celebrates all cultures living in the region.

> I thought; why don't I let people talk about their faith and their culture so that everybody else can read about it. I was asking people from the faith and from the culture to do it for us. The magazine was actually very successful. A lot of people told me I have this neighbour and I never could ask him why they were doing this, and that, and thank you because now I feel I understand this person more. I had someone from Latin America write about their concerns as a newcomer. I had someone from Vietnam tell me, I am telling you our people feel this and this. I said, if only you knew what you are sharing is from someone from South America at the other end of the world. Human beings are human beings.

The way that participants described their experiences affirms the relevance of intersectionality theory to the lives of African women.   According to Muszynski (2009: 44), exploring race, class and gender makes "empanicpatory sociology" possible. Among other categories, race and gender have real consequences for the lives of the women that were interviewed, which makes using the categories relevant (Muszynski, 2009: 45). Participants described their identities as strongly linked to their cultural and ethnic heritage. Non-profit organizations in the region provide the information and support required for women to find out about available resources. A sense of community and identity are a required resource for self-sufficiency.

4.11 Need for Increased Financial Support

All of the non-profit organizations that operate locally within the region have limited budgets. Out of the three key organizations mentioned by participants, only the Working Center has core funding. However, the funding available to the Working Center is limited. Although there are paid employees, it relies on a strong team of volunteers to maintain services for the six different areas including a job center and a soup kitchen.

World Wide Opportunities for Women and African Women's Alliance do receive funding for programs that are offered but they do not have core funding. Core funding refers to the funding that is needed to maintain the infrastructure of an organization including staff salaries, office facilities, equipment and daily expenses (Open Society Institute).

World Wide Opportunities for Women had core funding from 2000-2007, with an office located in one of the houses owned by Clarica Insurance. Without core funding the members currently meet in the Catholic Centre for Family Counselling in Kitchener. WWOW is currently conducting energy audits in low-income and immigrant households

through its program entitled Home Energy $avers. Except for the experts hired to perform home energy audits, World Wide Opportunities for Women does not pay staff members. African Women's Alliance is currently planning the July 25, 2009 Afro Festival. African Women's Alliance is also completely operated by volunteers. The meetings for the organization are held in a Kitchener Tim Horton's because affordable office space is not available.

Participants felt that being a part of organizations like WWOW and African Women's Alliance was a source of empowerment, but it is also a daunting task. Dorothy Smith explains that women are left to care for the needs of those in the private realm of daily living, which appears to be the case since sufficient information and resources are not otherwise available (Smith, 1990:113). Smith argues that women are expected to mediate between the real world and the abstract world of information. The more successful the mediation is, the more the struggles of everyday life become invisible (Smith, 1990: 113).

The work of WWOW and African Women's Alliance means that the government is able to rely on non-profit organizations without changing its services or increasing its program funding. Even though the women who volunteer for WWOW and African Women's Alliance live on modest incomes themselves, they are responsible for others in the same situations that they are in.

Participants discussed a need for non-profit organizations to be funded by the government. Mana stated:

> I think that if the different groups get more funding then they will be able to support other people, but it is very difficult to even get funding. It is like trickle down, sometimes someone will give you a bit of what they have, that kind of thing. There is a huge disconnect between the government and female immigrants. They just lump all of us together even though we have different needs.

Mana argued again that it is important to offer culturally specific services, rather than just services available to immigrants in general. Vic agreed that local non-profit organizations need more funding because the services offered "are beneficial in a way because you get free information and you are not charging anything. The only thing is that they don't have any money to offer them and sometimes that is what people need".

Anna argued that to be more effective in helping African immigrant women, organizations need:

> For the government to provide sustainable support. Municipalities have to have programs that they fund through the grassroots organizations, that way grassroots organizations can do the work. A lot of grassroots organizations don't have any funding. The government doesn't have anything to do with non-profit organizations.

Aliya asserted that African Women's Alliance in particular,

> needs funding from the government so that they can help these newcomers in different ways, because these people are more open to them. Women tell them what kind of experiences they are going through, and they can help them a lot. They can do so many things; they can do counselling or help them in other things, even daycare itself. Women need people who can talk to them and help them in other ways because some people go into depression. It's hard, it's hard for them. A lot of people think why did I come here? I should go back home, I was happy back home and now, so many kinds of things. These kinds of people need help.

According to Aliya, the government has a responsibility to fund non-profit organizations that can assist African immigrant women integrate. Participants noted that the non-profit organizations currently operating already have community trust and the technical and informational capacity to effectively provide needed services to immigrant women if funding was provided.

Although not originally included as a research questions, the analysis of the data answered the question, once women find out about the resources: *How can they acquire them?* The data analysis revealed that with the help of non-profit organizations in the region,

women are able to find some degree of self sufficiency. However, all of the participants

described a long struggle, and many still struggle to access support resources today. Without

proper funding, local non-profit organizations cannot adequately fill the information and

resource gap that exists.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

The African community in Waterloo Region has been increasing and developing for over four decades. African immigrants come to the region with the desire to integrate into society and contribute to the community's development. This research began by asking the question: *how do female African immigrants in the Region of Waterloo access the services they require to gain economic security?* However, as stated during the introduction, the preliminary research question made an assumption about knowledge access.

During the interview process, women revealed information that extended beyond the initial research question. The analysis of the research answers three important questions: *What are the various types of resources that women need to access in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency? How do they find out what these resources are? How can they acquire them?*

As shown in table 9, there are a number of important resources that are needed for an African immigrant woman to become economically self-sufficient. However, none of these resources are currently adequate or they are inaccessible. A number of policy recommendations based on the findings of this thesis have been provided for each identified barrier.

Table 9

Resources needed to obtain economic self-sufficiency
1. Access to free health care
2. Adequate housing
3. The opportunity for educational upgrading
4. Help in overcoming a language barrier (ESL classes and translators without fee)
5. Affordable childcare
6. Suitable employment
7. Extended family support
8. Outreach service funding (core)

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First, African immigrant women need access to free health care. One of the features that distinguish Canada from the United States is a public health care system. However, immigrants are unable to access health care without a fee for a period of three months. African immigrant women, particularly those from war torn countries, may be unable to pay for the cost of health care or needed medical tests. The provincial government must provide immediate health care coverage for immigrants who intend to live in Canada.

Second, a basic necessity of life is access to adequate housing. In order to address the housing needs of new African immigrant women, the region needs to create more affordable housing. However, if the needs of African immigrant women are truly taken into consideration, affordable geared-to-income housing must also be available for people with large families. Large family sizes are a reality for many African women. With ever increasing numbers of African immigrants, the needs of all of the region's residents need to be considered.

Third, in most cases even highly educated African immigrant women need to upgrade their education to find suitable employment. Although educational training may not be globally uniform, the province of Ontario must take additional steps to ensure that the abilities of highly educated immigrants are not being ignored. Although cultural bias is likely to exist in a uniform test, providing immigrants with the opportunity to write an exam in their educational field would be preferable to requiring new immigrants to completely re-do their education.

Fourth, women who cannot speak English need help to overcome language barriers. Language barriers restrict people from accessing every needed resource to secure economic self sufficiency. For those who require translation, particularly when accessing government supported programs such as social assistance or health care, translators must be available without a fee. Canada is dedicated to being a multicultural society and must provide services

to realize this goal. The government at all levels has a responsibility to ensure that all residents are given equal access to available services, especially because the taxes from all working residents contribute to existing services.

Although ESL classes do exist in the region, they do not meet the needs of all segments of the population. Classes should be geared towards the learning style of the students. In particular, classes specially created for elderly learners would be more effective in helping elderly people develop English language skills. Elderly African immigrant women are currently more isolated because their needs are not being addressed.

Fifth, women need accessible and affordable childcare. The financial and emotional burdens of childcare are not unique to African immigrant women. The cost of childcare limits the ability of all women in Canada to seek employment and economic self sufficiency. However, immigrant women are likely to face greater hardships because they have not established themselves. African immigrant women are also more likely to have a larger number of children, which increases the financial strain on them. The provincial government must work towards creating more daycare spaces at an affordable price.

Sixth, African immigrant women need to find suitable employment. Currently African immigrants are unable to acquire suitable employment within a reasonable period of time. Not having Canadian work experience is one of the largest barriers to finding employment. In order to provide immigrants with the opportunity to acquire work experience relevant to their fields, government-funded programs, such as those offered through the YMCA, should focus on mentorship programs. Mentorship programs would give immigrants the opportunity to learn about the Canadian working environment and gain relevant work experience in their chosen field. Government funds are currently being allocated to programs that do not take the previous work experience of highly educated immigrants into consideration, which leads to "survivor jobs".

Seventh, extended family support services are needed to help those who care for a large number of family members. Many African immigrants are the main source of financial support for extended family member's still living in African countries. The provincial government currently does not acknowledge this kind of increased financial responsibility, which makes it very difficult for African immigrants to become economically stable.

A new financial support program that takes extended family care into consideration needs to be established. In the short term, the extended family members of immigrants who require a large amount of financial support should be considered dependents. For immigrants who require social assistance this would increase the monthly benefit. Immigrants in the paid labour force would be able to claim more dependents for taxation purposes, which at the very least, would be a step in the right direction.

Finally, non-profit organizations that provide outreach services need core funding. Currently, African Women's Alliance and World Wide Opportunities for Women do not have core funding. However, these were two of the main organizations that were identified by African immigrant women as helpful in establishing economic self sufficiency. Core funding must be given to these organizations so that they can continue to operate in their current capacity and expand their services.

African Women's Alliance and World Wide Opportunities for Women are unable to reach all of the women who need help, or offer the kind of material help that is needed, because the volunteers simply do not have the financial resources themselves. Volunteer members contribute their own labour without charge and often their own financial resources without any core funding from the local government. However, the local government continues to depend on local non-profit agencies as important allies.

New immigrants and refugees have to find out what they need to know in order to find out what resources are required to become economically self-sufficient. Information

accessibility presents a large barrier to finding out what resources to access and where to find them. An inability to access basic knowledge is precisely what Dorothy Smith (1990: 17) points out with the concept of bifurcated consciousness. New immigrant and refugee women exist in the local realm of everyday lived experience. The relations of ruling exist in the extra-local realm where knowledge is created and accessed. Without help from someone who can access the required information immigrants and refugees cannot gain economic self-sufficiency, or even basic self-empowerment.

It is here that non-profit agencies like World Wide Opportunities for Women, African Women's Alliance and the Working Center help in providing basic information. Non-profit agencies bridge access between information and the everyday lives of immigrant women. Especially important are the knowledge resources of women who have gone through the process themselves when they first arrived in Canada. Immigrant women who have established themselves have a standpoint that allows them to reach out to women like themselves and to articulate what it is they need and how to ask for the resources to fill those needs.

The self-empowerment experienced by the women who participated in non-profit organizations resulted from their efforts to support others like themselves. Dorothy Smith (1977: 13) contends that women's collective action is a necessary step in ending oppression against women. The local non-profit women's groups addressed in the research are an effective site of collective action because they are organizations that were created and run by African immigrant women.

Smith (1977: 13) adds that collective action must have a unified position that does not discriminate against other categories of membership. World Wide Opportunities for Women and African Women's Alliance provide a venue where women from different African countries, cultures and religions can share information and support. Group members

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share common experiences while celebrating differences. According to Smith, (1990:11) women's experiences are at least partly the same because they must maintain the everyday world.

Intersecting marginalities of race, class, and gender create social invisibility and strip away a formerly solid sense of self (Vaughns and Eibach (2008: 380). By joining organizations like WWOW and African Women's Alliance, African women are able to reclaim their identities and become visible, both figuratively and literally. African cultural heritage is maintained in these organizations by sharing it with other African women and the wider community, during events like Afro Festival.

The use of intersectionality theory is valid for this thesis because the intersectionality of race, culture, class and gender does appear to negatively impact the economic self-sufficiency and informational resources available to African immigrant women. However, this research offers the critique that intersectionality theory does not go far enough. In order to fully explain the lived experiences of African immigrant and refugee women aspects like culture, family size, age and religion must also be included.

Access to information was severely limited for women whose cultural background was more patriarchal and necessitated that a husband must acquire all needed resources and act as the sole earner. However, women from other cultures were expected to perform outreach. Several women were the first to get jobs in their family because they were more willing to get "survivor" jobs than were their husbands. Language, one of the most basic components of culture, is the largest barrier to information and resources for many African women. Language is the basis of communication and a language barrier can make even basic settlement impossible.

Family size directly impacts the amount of resources and information that a woman needs. A woman with children often has a more urgent need to access basic necessities like secure housing, employment and health care. Additional information needs to be found, such as how to apply to school and where to find affordable child care. Extended family support burden can also pose a threat to self sustainability.

Providing support to extended family members is a reality for many African immigrants. Many African cultures are rooted in a strong sense of community. In addition, because it is part of the Global South, many countries in Africa do not offer a social safety net. Routinely sending a portion of employment income is an expected necessity for many African immigrants and refugees.

Age impacts an immigrant's ability to adapt to a new living environment. Language barriers may be more difficult to overcome for an elderly person, particularly because ESL classes are not designed with this population in mind. The elderly are also more likely to be isolated. Without forming social connections elderly people are less likely to make connections with people who can offer assistance in finding needed programs and resources.

Religion is also a key component of identity for many African immigrants and refugees. Several nations in Africa are predominantly Muslim. The discrimination experienced by participants on the basis of race was compounded by religious discrimination for Muslim participants. For some of the women interviewed, religious conflicts were the reason that they had to leave their countries of origin.

The findings of this research make visible the importance of the actions of local non-profit agencies and identify a needed step in bridging that gap between government and non-profit organizations.

5.2 Limitations of the Thesis

The main limitation of this study was that it only focused on the experiences of African immigrant women living in the Region of Waterloo. This research revealed that African immigrants view the Region of Waterloo as a slower paced, more affordable alternative to living in a larger city center, such as Toronto. However, Waterloo Region does not have the same infrastructure available to new immigrants that Toronto may have since immigrant populations in Toronto are so much larger. African communities in Toronto developed much earlier and the services available may have evolved accordingly.

A future comparison with African immigrant women living in Toronto would provide a greater depth of analysis. It is important to know whether or not African immigrant women in Toronto also feel that local non-profit organizations in Toronto are more accessible sources of support. It could be the case that government economic support services provided in Toronto are more aware of the unique cultural needs that African women have. However, like the Waterloo Region, economic support services and information may be mediated by community members.

The Region of Waterloo could benefit from knowing how economic support services are accessed in Toronto, since the African community has a longer history of residence there. Waterloo Region may be able to incorporate Toronto's effective services, or information sharing models, or learn from ineffective services or areas that have been neglected in Toronto.

Future research could also include a comparison with a smaller town or city. The analysis of this research revealed that African immigrant women view non-profit organizations as more able to address the needs that African community members have in

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accessing economic support services. Many small towns or cities do not have an organized African community, and do not have the non-profit organizations that are found locally in the Region of Waterloo. Without organizations like the Working Center, African Women's Alliance and World Wide Opportunities for Women, African women in small cities may find accessing economic support resources very difficult. In this case, it could provide smaller communities with information that would facilitate community empowerment and collective action to develop needed intermediaries.

An additional limitation of this work is that the participants interviewed were very highly educated. Ten of the fifteen participants had a university or post-graduate degree and none of the participants had less than trade school education. The participants interviewed likely have different experiences than immigrant or refugee women who enter the region with very little or no formal education. Women from very remote rural areas in Africa are likely to have very little educational opportunities.

It is likely that because of their educational backgrounds, the women I interviewed had a basic level of knowledge about what resources to ask for, and what would be available to them in Canada. Even those who did not speak English and who had not planned to come to Canada would be able to navigate the system to some degree. However, women with no formal education and no English language skills may be completely unprepared to find the required resources. As a result, some African immigrant and refugee women are likely to remain isolated and unable to find non-profit organizations that can offer information or assistance. The informational barrier would be the strongest for these women and future research needs to address their concerns in particular because their economic instability is likely longer term and more complete.

Finally this research is limited because it could not possibly portray the complexity of the experiences of the women who were interviewed. The women interviewed all shared some common experiences, but every woman also faced unique challenges and barriers. By careful analysis I was able to express the lived experiences of the women interviewed. Using qualitative research methods enabled me to produce rich data. However, each of the women interviewed had such complex experiences that their stories could have been looked at in more depth. This research is useful as a beginning point for understanding the lives of African immigrant women in the region.

5.3 Moving Forward

This thesis has revealed gaps in the service delivery of economic support services for African immigrant women. I intend to work in collaboration with the African Women's Alliance in order to discuss how to proceed with the dissemination of my research findings.

The members of the African Women's Alliance will have a direct say as to how the research findings are used. In order to discuss my research findings I will make a presentation at one of their monthly meetings. According to Berg (2008: 256) the sharing of information is an integral step in empowering the group or people who are under study.

I will be part of an ongoing effort to design and implement recommendations for change based on my research findings. As a member of the Board of Directors of World Wide Opportunities for Women I will work closely with African Women's Alliance to assist in facilitating open lines of communication between relevant organizations, community groups and government bodies to strengthen economic support services for African immigrant women.

5.4 Last Words

When I began this work I had a very limited understanding of how African immigrant women in the Region of Waterloo accessed needed economic support services. Through my thesis research I have learned two key things. First, I am now aware of the barriers faced by African immigrant women as they attempt to access information and economic support services. Second, this thesis project has helped me to gain a valuable understanding of the support that is provided by African women to their fellow community members on a daily basis. It is through this thesis that I have learned first hand the empowerment that can come from the collective action of women discussed by Dorothy Smith in her work on feminist standpoint theory.

Appendix A. Interview Guide For African Community Member

Interviewer's Name: _____

Person Interviewed: _____

Consent Form Signed: Yes_____ No_____ (Why Not?)

Date of Interview: _____

_____

YOU MAY DECLINE TO ANSWER ANY OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS. YOU MAY ALSO DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES BY ADVISING THE INTERVIEWER.

Economic support refers to any source of support that aids in maintaining economic stability or independence. Economic supports may include, but are not limited to, job search and job training assistance, health coverage, ESL classes, childcare, monetary assistance, educational upgrading and translation services.

QUESTIONS:

This fist set of questions will focus on your move to the Region of Waterloo.

1. Have you lived anywhere other then your home country and Canada?

2. Tell me about how you first decide to come to Canada.

3. When did you first decide to come to Canada?

4. Who did you know in Canada when you first arrived?

5. Why/why wasn't Canada your first choice to move to?

6. What border did you first arrive at when you came to Canada?

7. Provide detail of where you first lived when you came to Canada.

8. When did you move to the Region of Waterloo?

9. Describe where you live now.

10. How did you first find out about the Region of Waterloo?

11. What were the main difficulties that you had in adapting to living in the Region of Waterloo when you first arrived?

12. How did you overcome the difficulties that you faced when you first settled in the region?

13. What form of economic support or resources do you feel are the most critical for new immigrants?

14. What organizations are you affiliated with?

15. Why did you first begin to help other community members obtain needed economic support or resources? **(if applicable)**

The next set of questions will focus on your work history before and after you moved to the Region of Waterloo.

16. Describe your work experience before you came to Canada.

17. How did you support yourself when you first came to Canada?

18. Explain your biggest economic difficultly when you first came here.

19. Can you tell me about your work history in Canada?

20. Where are you currently working?

21. Did you have a job waiting for you when you first arrived in Canada?

The next set of questions will focus on the African community and friends you knew when you first arrived in the region.

22. How many family members or friends did you have living here when you arrived?

23. Which family members or friends helped you with your economic expenses when you first arrived?

24. Can you tell me what expenses your family or friends helped you with when you first arrived?

25. What was your knowledge of the African community here in the Region of Waterloo when you first arrived?

26. Tell me about how you found others in your community.

27. Explain what expenses your community helped you with?

The next set of questions will focus on your family composition.

28. What is your marital status? **If not currently married skip to question 48**

29. Where does your husband live?

30. Can you tell me where your husband is working?

31. How many children do you have? **If no children skip to question 51**

32. What are your children's occupations?

33. How many of your children do you economically support?

34. Where do your parents live currently? **If no parents skip to question 53**

35. Do you financially support your parents?

36. How much money do you send to family or friends in Canada/worldwide?

The next set of questions will focus on your household.

37. How many people live in your household?

38. Who in your household is employed?

39. How many people in your household do you financially support?

40. Describe how the people in your household help to contribute to the overall household expenses like bills.

41. Does the number of people living in your household change within a one year period?

42. What is the range of your household income?

43. Is your household income stable?

44. What are your largest financial costs?

The next set of questions will focus on programs or social services offered by the Region of Waterloo to help African immigrant women.

45. What programs are you aware of that the government offers to economically support immigrants?

46. How did you first find out about these programs?

47. How could these programs be improved?

The next set of questions will focus on programs or services offered by non-profit organizations in the region.

48. What non-profit organizations are you aware of that offer economic support to female African immigrants?

49. How did you first find out about these non-profit organizations?

50. What type of economic help is available to female African immigrants from these non-profit organizations?

51. Why/why don't you feel that these programs are adequate?

The next set of questions will focus on programs or services offered by faith groups in the region.

52. What faith groups/ faith are you affiliated with?

53. What services are you aware of that your faith group offers to female African immigrants in need of economic support?

54. Why/why don't you feel that these resources are adequate?

The last set of questions focuses on your overall evaluation of services available in the Region of Waterloo.

55. How do you think that the experiences of female and male immigrants differ when attempting to access economic support in the Region of Waterloo?

56. What area organization/ service that we have discussed need the most improvement in the Region of Waterloo?

57. What programs or services within the region do you find most helpful?

58. Did you have a language barrier that prevented you from accessing services that would provide you with economic support or resources?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER MY QUESTIONS. I WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH A TRANSCRIPT OF YOUR ANSWERS FOR YOU TO REVIEW AND A SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY ONCE IT IS COMPLETED.

Appendix B. Demographic Information Questionnaire

YOU MAY DECLINE TO ANSWER ANY OF THE QUESTIONS.
YOU MAY ALSO DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME
WITHOUT ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES BY ADVISING THE
INTERVIEWER.

1. What is your age range?

a) 15-30

b) 26-35

c) 36-45

d) 46-55

e) 56 +

2. What is your income range?

a) under $10 000

b) 10 000- 25 000

c) 26 000- 35 000

d) 36 000- 60 000

e) 61 000- 100 000

f) 100 000 +

3. What is your highest level of education?
a) Unsure
b) Some elementary school/elementary school
c) High school
d) College
e) Trade school
f) University
g) Post-graduate school

4. What is your marital status?

a) Single

b) Married

c) Widowed

d) Divorced

e) Common-law

5. How many people live in your house?

a) 1

b) 2-3

c) 4-6

d) 7+

6. Where are you from? (Specify)

_____

7. What is your first language?

a) English

b) French

c) Arabic

d) Amharic

e) other (Specify)

_____

8. How many children do you have?

a) 0

b) 1-3

c) 4-6

d) 7 +

Appendix C. Demographic Information

Participant Age Range	Number of Participants in Range
15-25 yrs	0
26-35 yrs	2
36-44 yrs	5
46-55 yrs	3
56 + yrs	5

Marital Status of Participant	Number of Participants with Status
Single	2
Married	10
Widowed	2
Divorced	1
Common-law	0

Participant Income Range	Number of Participants in Range
Under $10,000	3
$10,000 -$25,000	2
$26,000 -$35,000	1
$36,000-60,000	3
$61,000-$100,000	1
$100,000.00	1
Chose not to disclose	4

Range of Household Size	Number of Participants in Range
1 person	1
2-3 people	5
4-6 people	7
7 + people	2

First Language of Participants	Number of Participants
African language (different for each participant)	7
Shona	3
Somali	3
Arabic	2
Number that also listed English as a first language	6

Highest Level of Educational Attainment	Number of Participants at Level
Unsure	0
Some elementary/ elementary school	0
High school	0
College	2
Trade school/ vocational training	3
University	2
Post-graduate school	8

Number of Children Per Participant	Number of Participants
0 Children	0
1-3 children	8
4-6 children	5
7 + children	2

Appendix D. Telephone/Verbal Script

P = Potential Participant;

I = Interviewer

I - May I please speak to [name of potential participant]?

P - Hello, [name of potential participant] speaking. How may I help you?

I- Hello my name is Jenny Flagler and I am currently completing my masters at the University of Waterloo in sociology. I am conducting research under the supervision of Alicja Muszynski on African immigrant women. Is this a convenient time to speak with you?

P-No, could you call back later (agree on a more convenient time to call person back).

OR

P-Yes

I- I have been given your name and contact information from Sadia Gassim with your permission, who feels that you may be interested in participating in an interview for my research. You are invited to participate in this study because of your experience as an immigrant in the Region of Waterloo. For my thesis I am conducting a study that addresses the level of economic support that is made available to African immigrant women who have recently moved to the region. Economic security can mean a range of things such as help securing employment or job training, access to health coverage, finding affordable child care, or receiving needed monetary assistance. I am very interested in your perspective on this topic and I would like to hear your personal story of transition to the Region of Waterloo. Is it a convenient time for me to tell you more about the interviews?

P - No, could you call back later (agree on a more convenient time to call person back).

OR

P - Yes, could you provide me with some more information regarding the interviews you will be conducting?

I - Background Information

59. I will be undertaking interviews starting in November 1, 2008.
60. The interview would last about one hour, and would be arranged for a time convenient to your schedule.
61. Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary.
62. The questions are quite general for example, why did you first decide to move to the Region of Waterloo? You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time. Although I do not anticipate any risks associated with taking part in this study, it is possible

that some of the questions might have the potential to upset you. However, any negative effects are expected to be quite temporary. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide will be considered confidential. The data collected will be kept in a locked cabinet in my locked office at the University of Waterloo in the PAS building, and disposed of in 2 years time. I will offer you a transcribed tape from your interview so that you can review it before it is incorporated in my thesis.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact Alicja Muszynski at 519-888-4567, Ext. 35187.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics. However, the final decision about participation is yours. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

After all of the data have been analyzed, you will receive an executive summary of the research results.

With your permission, I would like to mail/fax you an information letter which has all of these details along with contact names and numbers on it to help assist you in making a decision about your participation in this study.

P - No thank you.

OR

P - Sure (get contact information from potential participant i.e., mailing address/fax number).

I - Thank you very much for your time. May I call you in 2 or 3 days to see if you are interested in being interviewed? Once again, if you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at jflagler@uwaterloo.ca, or alternately through Alicja Muszynski's voice mail at 519-888-4567, Ext. 35187.

P - Good-bye.

Appendix E. Information Letter

University of Waterloo

February 7, 2009

Dear Participant:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Alicja Muszynski. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Over the past few decades, the Region of Waterloo has enjoyed an increasing level of cultural diversity. A full 20% of the population is comprised of first generation immigrants, many coming from over 24 different African countries. It is important that a range of services are available to provide new immigrants with assistance that will improve current life circumstances, and provide a stable future with the opportunity to contribute their skills.

The proposed research will focus upon the avenues used by African immigrant women for receiving economic support during times of need. Forms of economic support may include help securing employment or job training, access to health coverage, finding affordable child care, or receiving needed monetary assistance. The intent of the proposed study will be to explore how services in the Region of Waterloo in particular, are accessed by African immigrants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is important to know what services are effective in helping culturally and linguistically diverse African communities. Therefore, I would like to include you in my study. I believe that because of your experience as an immigrant in the Region of Waterloo, you are well suited to speak about the various issues that occur. The interview will include questions about your transition such as: When did you first decide to come to Canada? Were you able to find employment related to your previous education or work experience within the region? Where do your parents currently live? How many children do you have? If you do not speak English fluently then a person of your choice could act as your translator for the interview, this person could be a friend who also would like to participate in the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty by advising the researcher. If recalling certain events during the interview causes emotional distress you will be encouraged to contact an imam, priest, minister or counselling organization in the Region of Waterloo and a list of services will be available from the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis, presentation, or report resulting from this study, however, with your

permission anonymous quotations may be used. If you feel that by including certain information, such as country of origin, you could be identified you can choose not to provide this information. Data collected during this study will be retained for two years in a locked cabinet in my locked office in the PAS building at the University of Waterloo. Only researchers associated with this project will have access to the data.   Although some of the questions regarding your transition to the Region of Waterloo may cause some emotional upset, it is expected that any negative reactions would be temporary.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at jflagler@uwaterloo.ca or alternately through Alicja Muszynski's voice mail at 519-888-4567, Ext. 35187. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Alicja Muszynski at (519) 888-4567 ext. 35187 or email alicja@watarts.uwaterloo.ca .

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca .

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other voluntary recreation organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Flagler

Appendix F. Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jenny Flagler of the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo, under the faculty supervisor Professor Alicja Muszynski. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am aware that because certain African communities in the Region of Waterloo have a smaller population, it may be possible to identify participants based on a description of experiences and country of origin despite the fact that pseudonym will be used. The researcher will not publish any information without the participants consent. The researcher will provide you a copy of the information that is to be included in any final report, presentation, or paper, to confirm the accuracy of the information that has been written. I have been informed that if recalling certain events during the interview causes emotional distress I am encouraged to contact an imam, priest, minister or counselling organization in the Region of Waterloo and a list of services is available from the researcher. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact Dr. Susan Sykes Director of the Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca .

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.
            YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.
            YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.
            YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)
Participant Signature: _____
Witness Name: _____ (Please print)
Witness Signature: _____
Date: _____

Appendix G. Confidentiality Statement

I understand that as an interpreter for a study being conducted by Jenny Flagler of the Department of Sociology, University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Alicja Muszynski, I am privy to confidential information. I agree to keep all data collected during this study confidential and will not reveal it to anyone outside the research team.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Witness Signature: _____

Appendix H. Feedback Letter

University of Waterloo

July 25, 2008

Dear Participant:

I would like to thank you so much for your participation in this study. It is very important that the wider community become aware of the barriers to economic security that is faced by African immigrant women. Your participation has helped us gain a broader understanding of how immigrant women access the services they require to gain economic independence in the region.

The data collected during the sixteen interviews conducted will contribute to a better understanding of the services that are offered in the Region of Waterloo. In order to pursue policy change or program reform, a solid understanding of the available services must be obtained. Any barriers to economic support services that have been discovered during the course of this study can now be addressed. I believe that research of this nature is a large step in the direction of change.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through conferences and journal articles. In the Region of Waterloo I also intend to provide a copy of my thesis to African community leaders, relevant social service agencies and non-profit organizations such as African Women's Alliance and Worldwide Opportunities for Women. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at the email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like to see the results of this study, when it is completed I will send it to you. The study is expected to be completed by April 30, 2009.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca . Thank you once again for your time.

Jenny Flagler

University of Waterloo
Department of Sociology

jflagler@uwaterloo.ca

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