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Alone in Paradise: Exploring the Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, Single Motherhood, Social Class, and Immigration
Seules au paradis : explorer les intersections entre genre, ethnicité, monoparentalité, classe sociale, et immigration

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ABSTRACT
There is a paucity of research that is centred on cross-cultural transitioning for single mothers who immigrate to Canada. Focusing on the intersections of gender, ethnicity, social class, single motherhood, and immigration increases the understanding of challenges affecting single, immigrant mothers. As part of a qualitative description study, we examined the complex experiences of immigrant women who had navigated cross-cultural transitions and single motherhood through the lens of their intersecting cultural identities and social locations. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit single, immigrant mothers from multiple counselling agencies in a western Canadian city. Content analysis of six semi-structured interviews elucidated the women's experience experiences of gender and mothering discourses within various social contexts, the impact of intersectionality on their acculturation processes in Canada, their relationships with their children, and the challenges of economic and psychosocial acculturation. One overarching theme that was related to the contrasts between the women's former world and new world formed a lens through which they made meaning of their lived experiences. Implications for counselling and social services are provided.

RÉSUMÉ
On trouve peu de travaux de recherche consacrés au processus de transition interculturelle des mères seules qui immigrent au Canada. Cibler les intersections entre les facteurs de genre, d'ethnicité, de classe sociale, de monoparentalité, et d'immigration aide à mieux comprendre les défis auxquels font face les mères seules immigrantes. Dans cette étude descriptive qualitative, nous avons examiné les expériences complexes des mères seules immigrantes en matière de transitions interculturelles et de monoparentalité à travers le prisme de leurs multiples identités culturelles et positions

sociales. Un échantillonnage déterministe a été utilisé pour recruter des mères seules immigrantes auprès de divers services de counseling dans une ville de l'Ouest canadien. Une analyse du contenu de six entrevues semi-structurées a fourni des éclaircissements sur les expériences de ces femmes des discours en matière de genre et de maternage dans divers contextes sociaux, les répercussions de l'intersectionnalité sur leur processus d'acculturation au Canada, leurs relations avec leurs enfants, et les défis de l'acculturation économique et psychosociale. L'un des thèmes principaux portant sur les contrastes entre le monde antérieur de ces femmes et leur nouvelle réalité a servi de prisme à travers lequel elles ont donné un sens à leurs expériences. On a fait état des répercussions sur le counseling et les services sociaux.

Single, immigrant mothers have multiple intersecting identities that shape their experiences of acculturation and motherhood (Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). Acculturation refers to a process of cultural, social, and psychological changes that result when different cultural groups interact together (Berry, 2005; Berry & Hou, 2016). Intersectionality theory is an integral part of enhancing cultural awareness, knowledge, and responsiveness to single, immigrant mothers (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012), whose various dimensions of cultural identity include immigration, gender, ethnicity, single motherhood, and social class. Counselling and mental health service providers would benefit from understanding how intersectionality theory is foundational to working with single, immigrant mothers and with other vulnerable populations (Collins, 2018b; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). Through an intersectional lens, counsellors are more likely to increase their awareness and knowledge of single, immigrant mothers and to respond more effectively to this population (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012).

Statistics Canada (2019) did not break down the 1,612,805 single-parent families by citizenship or immigration status in the 2016 census, but this agency did identify 1,262,340 of these (78%) as single-mother families. Further, in 2016, 37.5% of children under 15 were from first- or second-generation immigrant families, which is 3% higher than it was in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2019). The 2011 National Household Survey identified single, immigrant mothers as making up 9.8% of immigrant women (Hudon, 2016). Hudon (2016) projected that the number of immigrant women and girls in Canada will grow to approximately 5.8 million by 2031, which would reflect a concomitant increase in the number of single, immigrant mothers. Therefore, research is needed to reveal and to gain a better understanding of the unique challenges that single, immigrant mothers face, including how multiple layers of intersectionality can influence their experiences and self-perceptions. For example, social class and ethnicity need to be considered in informing our understanding of single, immigrant mothers. Immigrants are three times as likely to have low income than the Canadian-born populace (Crossman, 2013; Picot & Lu, 2017). The highest rates of chronic low

income in the immigrant population are among seniors and single parents (Picot & Lu, 2017). Ethnicity also plays a role, given that newcomers from East Asia and South Asia tend to have lower income than newcomers from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines (Picot & Lu, 2017). Because single, immigrant mothers are so highly under-represented in the literature (see our review of this literature in Lam et al. [2020]), more understanding, attention, and awareness are needed to give voice to these women's experiences of acculturation, mothering, and social class (Vesely et al., 2015; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012).

In this article, we make a case for the need for deeper understanding of the lived experiences of single, immigrant mothers. We position their cross-cultural transitioning from a strengths-based perspective, which requires attention to the intra-personal, interpersonal, and contextual experiences that shape engagement in broader economic, educational, and social pursuits (Belford, 2017; Collins, 2018d; Sinacore et al., 2015). We then present the result of the qualitative study designed to fill in some of the emergent gaps in knowledge and service, followed by recommendations for counselling practice. In order to counter dominant, power-over discourses that affect single, immigrant women in negative ways, we follow Collins (2018a) in not capitalizing *western* or *white* while capitalizing specific non-dominant ethnicities such as Black.

Intersectionality and Cultural Discourses

Gender, ethnicity, and immigration intersect for single, immigrant mothers because of the discourses about and the lived experiences of gender and gender role socialization in countries of origin and in Canada (Curry Rodríguez, 2014; Palmerin Velasco, 2013). These discourses influence all aspects of women's lives, including their choices and expectations about mothering (Wong & Bell, 2012). Whether they immigrate before or after becoming single mothers, the process of cross-cultural transitioning evokes contrasts and sometimes tensions among these varying gender discourses and norms (Browne et al., 2017; Palmerin Velasco, 2013; Zaidi et al., 2014). The *good mother* ideology (Caplan, 2000; O'Reilly, 2004; Schafer, 2006; Wong, 2018), for example, is founded on socially constructed stereotypes and myths that confine mothers to rigid and set standards (Jamal Al-Deen & Windle, 2017; Zhu, 2016). In Canada, these standards are based on norms of the dominant white, middle-class family, and consequently, single, immigrant mothers fall short of that norm and are subject to judgment from society (Jamal Al-Deen & Windle, 2017; Zhu, 2016). In many non-dominant cultures, single mothers are considered immoral and are financially disadvantaged (Afifi et al., 2013; Ayubi, 2010; Yu, 2011); in Canada, single mothers have been described as selfish and incompetent (Wiegers & Chunn, 2015). Often, single mothers internalize these messages of not being good enough (Jamal Al-Deen & Windle, 2017; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015).

Impacts on Psychosocial and Economic Acculturation

Stereotypes about single motherhood also form barriers to social and economic opportunities (Liegghio & Caragata, 2016; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015). These barriers are particularly salient to single, immigrant mothers, who are faced with balancing dominant discourses and perspectives from both their former world and their new world (Zhu, 2016).

Immigrant families may experience acculturative stress and intergenerational conflict due to socio-cultural and economic barriers (Browne et al., 2017; Nassar-McMillan, 2014; Renzaho et al., 2017). Acculturative stress is a response to cultural, psychological, and social stressors that are associated with acculturation (Nassar-McMillan, 2014; Renzaho et al., 2017). When newcomers transition to a new society with unfamiliar cultural discourses, they may experience distress and disorientation from sudden changes in beliefs, values, and world views (Collins, 2018e). This type of culture shock is often experienced by immigrant mothers (Renzaho et al., 2017). In many cases, different rates of acculturation can lead to intergenerational challenges (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Guo et al., 2016; Rodriguez-Keyes & Piepenbring, 2017). Intergenerational conflict refers to the dissonance between immigrant parents and their children, which can be characterized by poor communication, conflicting values, and power struggles (Renzaho et al., 2017). The relationships between single, immigrant mothers and their children are influenced further by the intersections of their multiple non-dominant identities (Curry Rodríguez, 2014; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). As a result of these intersections, single, immigrant mothers face unique challenges that affect their children's development, mental health, and lived experiences (Holumyong et al., 2018). The impact of acculturative stress and intergenerational conflict on family relationships has been explored in the literature (Belhadj et al., 2015; Curry Rodríguez, 2014; Daryanani et al., 2016), but little is known about many aspects of the relationships between single, immigrant mothers and their children.

It is important not to make assumptions about single, immigrant mothers based on one aspect of their identities (i.e., single motherhood, gender, immigration). Their mental health in the face of isolation, marginalization, unemployment, and loss is complicated by their intersectionalities. For example, single, immigrant mothers are at high risk for depression, anxiety, and postpartum disorder because of the multiple ways in which they are marginalized (Aydin et al., 2017; Guruge et al., 2015; Muhammad & Gagnon, 2010; Sawers & Wong, 2018; Thomson et al., 2015; Vigod et al., 2017). To improve cultural competency and to meet the specific physical and mental needs of single, immigrant mothers, counsellors and other health care providers must develop a better understanding of this vulnerable population and appreciate more fully the complexity of their intersectionalities (Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). To respond to these gaps in the literature, a qualitative study was undertaken to examine the lived experiences of

single, immigrant mothers in a western Canadian city. We asked the following question: How does the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, immigration, single motherhood, and social class influence the mental health and acculturation of single, immigrant mothers?

Method

Intersectionality Theory Within a Critical/Transformative Paradigm

In this study, we embraced intersectionality theory, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to address the discrimination and marginalization of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991; Warner et al., 2016), as our conceptual framework. Intersectionality assumes (a) that participants' multiple social identities (e.g., gender, social class, ethnicity, immigration) shape their lived experiences, (b) that these influences cannot be fully understood in isolation from one another, and (c) that multiple forms of marginalization shape health outcomes (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Cheshire, 2013; Collins, 2018b; Crenshaw, 1991; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012; Warner et al., 2016). Applying the lens of intersectionality increased our consciousness of the dynamics of ethnicity, gender, and social class in understanding the lived experiences of single, immigrant women as they are shaped within socio-cultural hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991; MacKinnon, 2013). We positioned intersectionality theory within the complementary critical/transformative paradigm in order to investigate the impact of socially constructed norms and their related forms of socio-cultural marginalization in the lives of single, immigrant mothers (Glesne, 2016). We also used a critical standpoint epistemology that foregrounds social constructions and power discrepancies (Glesne, 2016; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012) in order to examine the role of power in the social locations and experiences of single, immigrant mothers.

Qualitative Description

Qualitative description research is well recognized in nursing, midwifery, and health sciences (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000; Willis et al., 2016). This methodology is used to increase understanding of lived experiences, particularly where there are gaps in existing knowledge (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009; Willis et al., 2016). Qualitative description was selected in order to provide a rich and meaningful description of the lived experiences of single, immigrant mothers (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009). In their systemic review, Kim et al. (2017) described qualitative description as an epistemologically and theoretically flexible, low-inference approach in which content or thematic analysis methods are used to keep researchers close to the data. Given the gap that currently exists in research related to single, immigrant mothers, qualitative description offered the research participants an opportunity to share their stories and the researchers an opportunity to identify emerging

themes. The epistemological flexibility of this approach allowed us as researchers to frame our inquiry and analysis in a way that fostered an understanding of this population's social positioning in the context of dominant discourses related to gender, social class, and mothering (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Neergaard et al., 2009).

Researcher Positioning

Gia Lam, this study's primary researcher, designed and implemented the research process in consultation with the other members of the research team. Sandra Collins, Gia's thesis supervisor, applied her expertise in culturally responsive and socially just counselling practice to the analysis and interpretation of the data. Gina Wong, a thesis committee member, reviewed the data analysis and contributed to the research publication based on her expertise related to immigrant mothers and mothering. From a critical standpoint epistemology (Neergaard et al., 2009), we recognize the importance of situating researchers in the study. Gia Lam is also the daughter of a single, immigrant mother as well as a counsellor. She used her education and lived experiences as a way to enhance the researcher–participant relationship, develop interview questions, gather information, and analyze data from a social constructivist perspective. There are many benefits to situating the researcher in the study as well as to recognizing potential biases and differences in interpretations. As such, peer review of the findings and debriefing by the research team were used to enhance rigour and to mitigate potential biases throughout the data analysis.

Recruitment and Data Collection

After the proposed study received institutional ethics approval from a university research ethics board, participants were selected according to the following criteria: each participant had to (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identify as a single mother, (c) be raising one or more children, (d) speak and understand the English language, (e) have immigrated from any country, and (f) have lived in Canada for a period of less than 5 years. Participants were asked to self-exclude from the study if they had experienced war-related trauma or persecution. Through purposeful sampling, six participants were invited into the study. Different organizations and community services assisted in recruiting potential participants from different cultural backgrounds, which served to reduce the potential limitation of selection bias (Mertens, 2015) that may have resulted from snowball sampling within particular ethnic groups. The consent form included information about risks and benefits, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal from the study without prejudice or consequence.

A qualitative description approach (Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000) was used as a guide to developing meaningful and relevant interview questions that would examine the beliefs, values, world views, and lived

Table 1
Demographic Information

Country of origin	Israel, Syria, Venezuela, Pakistan, India, Malaysia
Years in Canada (range)	1–4
Number of children (range)	1–3
Age of children (range)	1–18
Employed	3
Unemployed	3
Annual household income (range)	$9,852–$55,000
Relationship status	4 divorced, 1 single mother by choice, 1 separated

experiences of single, immigrant mothers. In qualitative description, researchers engage in a semi-structured interview process in which interview questions are developed in advance with the intent of increasing understanding of under-represented issues or populations (Kim et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009). This approach allows researchers to draw on their lived experiences, education, and existing research in order to develop open-ended questions or probes that will guide each interview. The interview questions in this study were developed by the research team, were professionally edited for readability, and included the following: *What is your experience of motherhood in your country of origin? Describe your relationship with your children. How have messages you received from your country of origin and from Canada influenced these relationships?* To ensure that participants had a safe space in which they could share their stories, interviews took place at an immigrant services agency that offered private office space and resources to participants. At the end of the interview, participants were given a list of resources from various service providers in an attempt to minimize harm. To increase confidentiality, the interview transcripts from each participant were identified by code numbers only. For the purposes of understanding participants' intersectional identities (i.e., single motherhood, ethnicity, immigration, social class) and positioning their perspectives within the broader scope of immigrant and refugee experiences, demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to code and categorize data in order to identify themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). This method recognizes the importance of using participants' perspectives to formulate a description and thus makes space for an intersectional and critical lens (Clarke & Braun, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). The concise steps in content analysis adopted for this study were as follows: (a) read

the data (i.e., interview transcripts), (b) design an initial coding structure, (c) use the initial coding structure to code the data, (d) make notes, (e) categorize codes into themes, (f) create a mind map, (g) find similarities and differences within the data, (h) review the data, (i) enhance thematic categories to reflect generalizations, (j) revisit generalizations, and (k) produce the final report (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Clarke & Braun, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Neergaard et al., 2009).

Methodological Integrity

The following criteria from Mertens (2015) and from Milne and Oberle (2005) were used to ensure research rigour: (a) credibility—peer debriefing within the research team ensured the value and trustworthiness of themes generated from the data analysis (Milne & Oberle, 2005; Mertens, 2015); (b) criticality—examining critically each decision made throughout the study (Milne & Oberle, 2005); (c) authenticity—ensuring fairness through purposeful sampling and participant-driven data collection (Mertens, 2015; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Neergaard et al., 2009); and (d) integrity—revisiting researcher bias and providing participants with a summary of their stories to ensure validity and clarity (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Neergaard et al., 2009). The interviewer provided an oral summary at the end of each interview to offer participants an opportunity to make clarifications, provide additional details, or remove inaccurate information.

Results

Although seven main themes emerged through the analysis of the interview data, one of the seven influenced each of the others substantively. For this reason, we positioned it as an overarching theme, former world versus new world, that highlighted key differences between each participant's experiences from her country of origin (former world) to Canada (new world). We used the concept of *world* to refer to the lived experiences and perceived realities of single, immigrant mothers based on their physical and social location. Each participant's perceptions of her new world were greatly influenced by her experiences in her former world (see Table 2). The title of this manuscript, "Alone in Paradise," introduces the paradox of perceived good fortune in immigrating to a country in which the single, immigrant mothers in this study experienced safety, freedom to leave abusive relationships, and opportunities to redefine themselves as women and as mothers, while experiencing the loss of family and of cultural supports as well as unfamiliar expectations of self-reliance and independence.

The remaining six themes that emerged from the data revealed the ways in which the intersections of multiple cultural identities influenced mental health and acculturation for single, immigrant mothers: (a) gender discourses, (b)

Table 2
Overarching Theme: Former World Versus New World

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Economic and political turmoil versus safety and opportunities	The majority of participants perceived Canada as an asylum from adversity and a land of opportunities. They described their former worlds as patriarchal, economically and politically unstable, and sometimes unsafe.	"Because here in Canada they give you a better life. So I feel here I am happier than in Syria. Even he was work, but I don't like the feeling that he is the powerful in the family. I can do whatever I want here. Nobody will tell me what I have to do.… Situation is not like Canada because Canada they offer help, but in Syria there is no government, there is nobody to help them. So all people said you are lucky because you are here in Canada." "Really, always, always. I thank God. I'm very, very, very thankful to be here. To be in Canada. I feel safe. I feel like granted. I feel very comfortable. I never have any fear. I mean, nobody harms me. Nobody can hurt me." "It looks to me like a dream, like a dream. Always am very thankful. I feel safe. I feel like granted, if now, if I die always with my children or if I die with something, I never be afraid. Nobody hurt my children." "When I started working here and then I figured out, oh my God, this place is, you know, they have support everywhere if you reach out."
Increased self-reliance and independence	Without family or a partner in Canada, single, immigrant mothers are placed in a position that necessitates self-reliance and independence.	"You have more independence here. You have more support as if what you want to do. What makes you happy? You can do those things. It's not that there's a particular expectation that you're a woman, you have to do this. No. You choose what makes you happy, what's good for your family. So you have an advantage here." "One time my son gets sick during the night and I feel how I can go. It's very dark. How can I go by myself? It was hard. But finally I say to myself, the better way I call the emergency, because if they came it would be safer for us. I can go. Sometimes you feel that you, that is something, you can do it by yourself."

Sub-sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Dependency on men versus self-reliance	In their countries of origin, participants were more likely to be emotionally and financially dependent on their male partners (most often their husbands). Although there is a strong and positive desire to be independent, some participants viewed this as a barrier, particularly when it involves raising children alone.	"For single mom, I think it's she had to do the both work, like, you know, it's hard for them because when you are with husband, it's easy because you both are working together and you like emotionally and you know, financially you can help each other, and can share your problem with each other." "They believe that women, people think are weak or you know, dependent with their husband."
Dependency on family versus self-reliance	In their countries of origin, participants depended on their family for decision-making and child care as well as for financial, economic, emotional, and psychological support. The loss of family in a new country necessitated increased self-reliance.	"Because if she want to go work for example, who will take care of her children? So hard. She should have the family, her mother, her sister. But then if I were in Syria, for example, or my family with me, I can leave my children with my mother for example and go to work. But here in Canada, no family. So you will have to pay to the daycare." "Mom, my sister, my brother is the oldest looking after my childrens 'cause they are small, there's our grandparents. So your uncle, your auntie tends to look after the childrens. They help a lot around you. But here I don't see that. You are on your own."

mothering discourses, (c) mother–child relationships, (d) economic acculturation, (e) psychosocial acculturation, and (f) the important role of service providers. The data were interpreted as a result of participants' experiences within their countries of origin being juxtaposed to their experiences within Canada and were drawn from the overarching theme of former world versus new world. A logical ordering of the themes and sub-themes emerged by considering first the shift from the culture of origin to Canadian culture, then a focus on broader to narrower issues (e.g., gender discourses and, within those, mothering discourses), then participants' lived experiences of cross-cultural transitioning and the subsequent economic and psychosocial consequences, and finally the implications for services. The themes and the sub-themes are illustrated in the tables below. Since it did not seem culturally appropriate to assign pseudonyms to the six participants, we tracked the source of each quote by numbering participants as a way to support the interpretation of the data; we removed those numbers in the final results to maintain the study participants' privacy.

Table 3
Theme 1: Gender Discourses

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Gender roles and positioning within society	The idea of womanhood was heavily associated with the traditional roles of mother and wife. Across cultures, participants indicated that there is a familial and societal expectation to get married and to have children.	"Well, my mom always said to me, you know, 'Once you have your child, that's your responsibility to look after them and after your husband. You have to feed them.' This is sort of exactly what she said to me. 'You have to do everything for your child.'" "After you marry, you have to have children. You have to give birth. That is your purpose."
Patriarchy versus equality	Participants pointed to patriarchal family structures within their cultures of origin. They experienced a recognizable power shift in Canada, in which women are treated more equal to men.	"This view from Canadian to the women and girls because they considered them as a man. No one is better. No one is the powerful, uh, equal—yeah, I like that." "I seen that the girls or woman here. Yeah. More freedom. No, I have another word … we have equal.… You can see and back home I think is you still have this a little bit because I'm coming from Muslim country, but here is like our woman is a man is look like it's the same."

The first theme, gender discourses, captured participants' perceptions of what constitutes the *good woman* or girlhood/womanhood in general, which varied between countries of origin and Canada. These discourses affected gender roles, women's positioning within society, and women's sense of equality to men (see Table 3).

The second theme, mothering discourses, described ideologies of mothering that varied between the participants' countries of origin and Canada. These discourses defined women's choices, behaviours, and experiences surrounding motherhood. Often, mothers felt guilt, shame, and incompetence for not meeting the unrealistic demands of the *good mother* ideologies (see Table 4).

The third theme, mother–child relationships, revealed how these relationships might be affected by various factors, including immigration, single motherhood, parenting style, dominant ideologies, and gender role socialization. The necessity of self-reliance identified in the overarching theme of former world versus new world undergirds the participants' comments (see Table 5).

Table 4
Theme 2: Mothering Discourses

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Culture of origin discourses about single mothering	Single motherhood is often discouraged due to stigma and to dominant mothering ideologies. Participants consistently received the message that mothers are better off economically and socially with a husband.	"Being a single mother in India—I'm talking about India—I don't know about other countries—for now it's a social, usually we call it social taboo. That is something that is not accepted. If there are concerns between you and your partner, you still have to make an adjustment because that is something that is expected from you for the sake of your child that you have to be in a relationship so that the child doesn't suffer even if it makes you unhappy." "Even if your husband is violent and or something, they said all you have to be patient. You have to be—if he has another woman outside, you have to be patient. You'll have to carry him. You are a woman. Even he beats you. You don't have to scream. You have to be quiet. You don't have to tell anybody because otherwise, you are not good woman."
Shift in power from mother to child	The mothering discourses participants were exposed to in Canada led them to perceive a power shift from the mother to the child. This perceived ideology holds conditions that conflict with the parenting beliefs and values from their former worlds.	"It was a culture shock for me. I come from a country where we have our particular way of raising on kids. Right? How my parents raised me, they had their way, like I said, we all be there, we follow, they decide everything. They are the decision-makers, but then when I came to Canada, it was totally different here. The children, they have their say, they get to decide if whether they weren't things or not. If they like it or not. Even if it's good for them, like I know this might be best for them, but then the kids can decide that if they wanted or not so they can go against that decision. So that was another big culture shock." "So how to handle them because in our country we scream and here you are not supposed to do that. But here it's totally different. You have to be like friend of your kid and talk with them as a friend. But in our country you have to give order. No—no means no, right?"

Shift in power from mother to social institutions	Society creates a set of rules for mothers to follow; as a result, power in terms of how mothers should raise their children is given to social institutions and taken away from mothers. This occurs for those who do not meet the ideal mother ideology in both Canada and their countries of origin.	"They were like, the preference should be given to what are the laws here and what neighbours or society think about it. If a child is crying, don't let your child cry because you police or Child and Family services can come knock on your door. Well, if my baby's crying. Kids—the newborn baby cries all the time. So I was scared all the time. I was more scared of how not to break the law than how to take care of my child because I was worried—'Oh my God, my child is crying.' It's very natural for a child to cry. But then I was more worried about what people would say, so I would be focused on that rather than taking care of my child. So that was something really difficult that I learned here. That's what motherhood is. Worrying more about the laws and the neighbourhood." "They will threaten you, want to take my kids away, because it said that I'm not a fit mother because of my daughter mental state because she was stressed. Now it's okay. I dealt, I fought with them and if you read the report notes and I'm not a fit mother. I'm not a fit mother, uh, not good mothers. Why would they put into their book? Because I'm not fit mother. She said that because my daughter was stress. My kids both of them were witness of trauma in their life. How the days my ex abused me and instead of chasing him, they come after me and then she brought me to the court again because system is only always one side. The judge not going to listen to me. They will listen to them because they agency, whatever they say, they will listen to them. Even again, the report that she has is completely wrong."

Table 5
Theme 3: Mother–Child Relationships

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Gratitude for children	Children play an active role in the experiences of single, immigrant mothers. Participants expressed immense gratitude for their children's ability to demonstrate autonomy and provide practical support.	"They are very good children also. They are supporting me with not too much things but like dishing wash or making laundry or like grocery, some things they, they helped me and they are very responsible also for their homework, for their study, for their school." "Well, I'm very grateful for them. They never giving me hard time. They woke up they own; they go to bed around their bedroom. They do, they clean and they would the bedroom."
Friendship with children	In most cases, participants described the mother–child relationship as a friendship, in which they can confide and share stories with one another.	"We are, like you say a mother and child, of course that's the first relationship. We are on good terms. We are each other's best friend, since I'm the only person who is in his life and he's the only one in my life. So we do everything together. We share everything." "With my children. We are like not only mother and children, like friends really. They are my best friends, my best friends. And they are. They have good minds. I never hide anything from them."
Fatherless family in a two-parent society	To compensate for missing fathers, single, immigrant mothers face socio-cultural pressures to take on the roles of mother and father. Feelings of guilt and incompetency arise when they believe they do not live up to these demands.	"There is also still challenge, especially like Father's Day.… I never have place to hide to, to skip that day is, you understand? But not for me. But for children, especially for my son really. I tried to do so many things to not to feel bad." "But if immigrant you have to like for a single mom, you know, you are a mom, you're a dad, you are, you have more responsibilities, you have more to do. I sometime get lost and we don't know where to start."
Prioritization of the child	In the mother–child relationship, the child will always come first.	"Children are the priority. You take care of them. They are—it doesn't matter who needs your help. Children comes first. Husband, in-laws, parents know they go in the back seat." "Being a mother, well, there's a huge responsibility. You're not going to look after yourself anymore because you have to look somebody else. Your child will be number ones in your life." "Especially for the children. Always my heart pain me about them because I think always they will not feel like the other children. I don't think so. So that's the thing that hurts me a lot. I don't want this to affect their personality."

Table 6
Theme 4: Economic Acculturation

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
The complex road to employment	The need for meaningful employment increases for single, immigrant mothers. Many single, immigrant mothers see employment as survival or security, but most cannot afford child care.	"She said that's really affected her I guess employment aspect because she can't—she went from working to not only studying if she—even if she wanted to work, she doesn't have anyone to look after her kids" (translator). "But then getting a job—it's not easy because you don't have Canadian experience. Right. So yes. Being a single mom does affect your unemployment. And I was in so much debt—I have my credit cards were going up. I had to ask friends for help, like, I had to study so that I am not unemployed—that led to student loan. That's another debt. So that it affects—and same way, if you're working, it also affects because you have to figure out the job that works with your schedule. You have to make sure that they don't have odd hours. It at least pays enough money so that you are, have you pay your bills and take care of child's need, schooling, daycare and everything. So yes, it affects both ways, whether if you're employed or not employed."
Systemic barriers to employment	There are systemic barriers and economic disadvantages to immigrant women with academic credentials from countries outside of North America. Their education, work experience, and credentials are assumed to be inadequate against Canadian standards.	"Yeah, like uh, schooling because um, I did a bachelor's from my back home, but when I came here, like I transfer, transfer my transcript, but they push me like tourists bag. But now I, I had a high school degree if I transfer from Canada, so now I have to go for more education and for a good job and for that I have to go over loan or stuff like that." "So the biggest challenge is of course getting a job because that's totally biased. You don't have Canadian experience. People think that you studied in a different countries, so your education is different. It's not up to the same level as what is Canadian education." "I go for a job, like apply for jobs and they see it like it's really frustrating for me, because I put my resume because I had teaching experience in Pakistan. I never work here … but when I go for a job and they're calling me for interviews and they say you don't have any experience. So they are not giving the job as if I don't have experience."

Balancing economic acculturation with mothering	Participants struggle to schedule and manage career, school, and life demands with caring for their children and being available to them.	"Last year I was working full time and I was studying full time the same time, so 16 hour every day I was outside. That means how can I be with my children?" "Honestly, because of my daughter, I'm all the time thinking, I need to work and school. I want to do something in school because the timing—I can't just go evening shifts because no one is there to take care of my daughter. I can't, like you know, if I go for studies, I don't, I can go for weekends. I had to some limited hours, limited options. So I'm just, I'm just tired.… After school she can stay but after 6 and I want to come home, spend time with her too. I have more responsibilities. I have to give her time, too; I don't want to be busy all the time because I am the only one here and if I keep myself busy with this stuff she would be lost and I don't want that." "But yeah, of course, there is so many challenges, especially if you are single mom, to afford the life. You have to work hard. If you work hard, you don't have much time to be with children."

The next two themes were economic acculturation (see Table 6) and psychosocial acculturation (see Table 7). Economic acculturation processes were complicated by the necessity of work to survival, by systemic barriers to employment, and by tensions between work, school, and parenting responsibilities. Economic acculturation is also inextricably intertwined with contrasts between former world and new world experiences, particularly the loss of social support. Psychosocial acculturation for single, immigrant mothers included adjusting to the loss of social support, language barriers, discrimination against single and immigrant mothers, barriers to resources, culture shock, and mental health concerns.

The last theme was the important role of service providers. Counsellors and other service providers are essential to the overall well-being of single, immigrant women as revealed through this study. Initially, service providers appeared to be their main or only sources of support (see Table 8).

Discussion

Single, immigrant mothers in Canada face specific challenges that affect their emotional and mental well-being. These challenges include adapting to western ideologies of motherhood, feeling pressure to maintain healthy relationships with their children, finding meaningful employment, and connecting with a new society (Jamal Al-Deen & Windle, 2017; Knoef & van Ours, 2016; Renzaho et al., 2017; Wang, 2013; Zhu, 2016). Examining these challenges requires an intersectionality perspective because the combined effects of multiple group identities can

Table 7
Theme 5: Psychosocial Acculturation

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Loss of family and social ties	Loss of social support was more amplified by single motherhood, particularly for mothers with strong familial values.	"So immigration, of course. It is a big change because back home in my country, I had a settled life, I had home, I had job, I had family, everything. Right? You have everything back home. When you come here, you have nothing. You start from the scratch. No family. Job. Yes. It takes time, but then of course, no job experience, everything. So it's a big change. It's like basically being born again and starting everything from scratch." "I don't have anybody.… I don't have a job. I don't have family. I don't have friends. I only have you guys."
Language barriers	Language barriers posed problems for single, immigrant mothers, because being unable to communicate with others resulted in further isolation.	"Maybe you ashamed by yourself, maybe your phone is ringing in the train. You can't answer because you are not sure about your language. So you're afraid." "I think the language. Communication because in Pakistan, history, like it was hard subject, but it's totally different. So when I came here, people were talking, I was just looking, I couldn't understand, I didn't get what she's talking about. But the language was, yeah, even I can't communicate with them."
Prejudice and discrimination	Participants reported that they have experienced prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender, single motherhood, and immigration.	"… bigger discrimination was just because my name is immigrant name. That doesn't mean that I have no education or I have no English. People don't understand that. And sometimes they have asked me directly. How long have you been in Canada? So I say like couple of years and they'll like, then how come your English is good? How did you learn your English? Why do you have good English? Well, English is knowing universal language. People don't realize that. So, yes—those discrimination. I have had lots of." "Being a single mom accommodation sometime it becomes difficult because if I'm trying to rent out a place, they are like single mom, how can I pay your bills? Uh, why do you need to live in a house? You can live in a basement but then they don't—like, they start judging you on your being a single mom or why do you need things for your child? They are like, you can manage in small, why do you need to go for big? But then I know what's best for me and my child."

Information and resources	Many newcomers are not aware of the resources that exist for single mothers and immigrants. It was hard for them to find information.	"I think the hard part was not having the information. So when I—when my problems started or when I was looking for support, I had no information. Like, what are the options for me? So I—that was the reason that I had to stay in a very poisonous situation for a long time because I just had no information. I was scared—I thought I had no support. So that is the biggest struggle, I think." "Not easy. You have to work hard. There's nothing easy in—this is not no shortcut. You know—you know it better than me. There is no shortcuts. I never expect anything to come. Just like a chance. You have to locate all. You have to work hard."
Culture shock and cultural barriers	When participants arrived in Canada, they felt unsettled with the unfamiliar culture, parenting style, and way of living.	"So for first year I had enough time to learn. Like I said, there was a culture shock and I was confused what to do." "When I left my country or leave everything behind, I left my job. All what I have. Like my family to come here and at the beginning I was, there it goes. It's like I have like a kind of culture shock also when I arrive here."
Mental health	Participants experienced anger, depression, stress, fear, guilt, and a sense of incompetence as a result of their intersectionalities.	"I would just share because I never had a depression pills, but now I'm taking because of a lot of stress and I have really mentally—honestly I feel very angry. I never feel angry because even my family knows like as all the time cool. But now if my daughter do something small, like I feel angry because of anxiety or—I don't know—depression and I went to doctor, I talk to them. So then I'm on medication now every night I'm taking because of lot of things, you know, like it's too much. So it's physically I think I'm not like, I can't think like a normal person before I was because I don't know. I'm thinking too much about future and how, what would it be? You know, it's hard and even I'm taking thyroid medicines too—this is also because of depression and I had, um, like delay of my period and stuff like that. I just doctor also say because of depressions." "Oh, that was, I think, very stressful for me. You just don't know what to do. You try your best. Even if you don't want to do anything, you try to adjust things. Great. You want to try new things. Just to make sure that this relationship works. So of course that was very stressful. That was sleepless nights. I will say. Yeah, I do. Pretty depressing. Yeah."

Table 8
Theme 6: The Importance of Service Providers

Sub-theme	Sub-theme definition	Verbatim quote
Nature of services required	Participants indicated that support and allyship are needed in relation to language, transportation, employment, and social support.	"I think from the first day I came here, there is a counsellor. I like her too much. She gives me a lot of support and she and I speak Arabic and she told me a lot of things. How I can buy Arabic food, where I can go if I need anything. And I am contacted until now because she always told me, 'If you, whatever you need, call me and I can help you.' Look who else is there. The friends, too. I have friends but at the beginning I have a friend, same me. So all of them depend on the counsellor." "The agencies were my support, because they were the one who helped me, who helped me transition from my home to shelter or help me understand what else I can do. So like taking those parenting classes, taking support groups to talk to people about my problems. About my concerns. So that was my social group."
Child care	Participants expressed a need for affordable child care as a key factor to reducing barriers to employment and work–life balance.	"I have to pay daycare for, to have children and the daycare is very expensive here in Canada. So I said I should have a high wage so I can cover. So that why I am stunned—you know, you want improve myself because when I get a salary it should be high to cover the take it." "And back home, another thing is that the child care or things like that, of course you pay for them and then they are not so costly as compared to what we are paying here. So costly. And if I have to find somebody for—let's say I'm working Saturdays, the babysitter, all those things are very, very like that's another money. But back home you have support, you can ask a friend, you can ask your mom or somebody to help you out. So there you have support, but here you don't—that's—yes, that's a challenge."

Delivery of supports	Single, immigrant mothers expressed a need to learn more about Canadian customs and how to develop skills for employment, parenting, and relationships. Some suggestions include providing information and care through workshops and support groups.	"One if there is something like, like workshop or something, you know, to—to like, here in immigrant there's so many workshop but like to call them to the children to be near there, uh, to share experience, to talk together, you know, like to know there is another people also like them. You know, sometimes you feel like only you but there is also so many people like you even maybe worst. I told them sometimes if, but if we have that, it will be easy, good." "I connected with the agencies. They made me realize that even if you don't have your own social group, there are community groups that can help you and settled down."
What did not work	Some participants expressed dissatisfaction about how institutions (i.e., government agencies) and service providers (i.e., counsellors) serve single, immigrant mothers in Canada.	"I was in shelter; I was on Alberta Aid and Alberta Works and things like that. But that's not enough. They think they are enough. No, it's not. You're just living on the edge. You cannot do anything. Uh, for me it was even a struggle for them because, uh, Alberta Works helps you, but then they are like, they see your education, they see your everything. But then is that education getting me a job? They don't consider that for me. They would always say, 'You are very employable. You're very employable [so] go get a job.' So I—I—that was another stressful phase for me." "Oh my God—I was so stressed, so stressed to lose my kids. Those system have to be changed in Alberta Work. They need to change. Not Alberta Work. The children services. They need to change the system because not every situation is fit with their—what they are doing is not fit for me and my kids. Maybe if it was somebody, but you have to investigate and check what's going on with this family. You have to support them, not separate the family. That's what I tried to do. They try to separate my kids from me. Why don't you support me? Right. Support me and then you don't separate us. We need a stability and for the kids and the mom, this what we have issue here too. Uh, lots of them here with the mother when the children's services and then a mom have struggling to keep the kids safe and then here's these people come bugging them. 'Hey, you're not a fit mother. You unfit mother. We need to take your kids away.' That's their job, take the kids away and give to somebody else? Somebody else get the money. This is all money about business. It was, I was always so struggling."

create distinctive experiences (Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). Intersectionality also foregrounds single, immigrant mothers' experiences of oppression as a result of their multiple and often marginalized dimensions of identity (Aydin et al., 2017; Fleck & Fleck, 2013). Applying an intersectional lens to this study extends beyond the contributions of the literature in which immigration and single motherhood are examined more typically as two separate experiences. Although researchers have studied the impact of immigrating to a new host country or transitioning to single motherhood, this study advanced understanding of the intersectionalities of gender, ethnicity, cross-cultural transitioning, single motherhood, and social class (Browne et al., 2017; Gherghel & Saint-Jacques, 2012). We explore below the themes and the sub-themes from this study, drawing connections within and across them. We also rely on the professional literature to highlight potential roles of counsellors and other health care professionals who interact with single, immigrant mothers.

Alone in Paradise: Former World Versus New World

The title of this article, "Alone in Paradise," introduces the juxtaposition of former worlds and new worlds that ran through the stories of the single, immigrant mothers we interviewed. These women arrived in Canada with the anticipation of enhanced security and economic opportunities (Vesely et al., 2015). Many of the participants spoke of Canada as a paradise compared to their former worlds. Although their expectations were met to an extent, they also faced unexpected challenges (e.g., acculturation challenges, loss of family and friends) and disappointments in themselves (e.g., relationships breaking down, guilt over their children not having a father), in others (e.g., Canadian communities, service providers), and in the broader socio-cultural contexts and systems they encountered (e.g., gender and mothering discourses, barriers to economic security). The overarching theme of former world versus new world became a lens through which the women made meaning of their lived experiences and through which we interpreted other themes and sub-themes. The challenges these single, immigrant women encountered, including potential discrimination, were interpreted through their experience of Canada as relative paradise.

Freedom and Responsibility: Gender Discourses in Cultural Contexts

Many societies continue to confine girls and women to traditional female roles (Palmerin Velasco, 2013; Wong & Bell, 2012; Zaidi et al., 2014). Women in this study were expected to follow patriarchal rules (e.g., get married, have children, care for their homes) and were positioned as "lesser than" the men in their lives. The results indicated that when women internalize these gendered messages (Lawson et al., 2015) from their countries of origin, they were more likely to depend on male figures (e.g., male partners, fathers) for decision-making and security. However, these gendered messages are fluid, variable, and dependent

on the changing world. When the women in this study transitioned to single motherhood, most often shortly after relocating to Canada, they had to take on new roles that required independence and self-reliance.

In some cases, the multi-layered processes of cross-cultural transitioning (Belford, 2017; Sobre-Denton, 2017) were positive and empowering, as reported by D'Souza et al. (2016). At the same time, some participants had difficulty adapting to an independent identity. Individuality and independence precipitated culture shock for some because the values of dependence and collective thinking had been so ingrained in their former world experiences. Collins (2018d) defined cultural distance–similarity as a multi-dimensional subjective appraisal of the degree of difference between one cultural lived experience and another. In this study, the degree of cultural distance–similarity between home and host countries may have affected their experiences of culture shock, as suggested by Belford (2017).

Because many immigrant women value collectivism (Baum & Nisan, 2017), they may have a difficult time adapting to an individualist identity (Collins, 2018d; Lenz, 2016). Single, immigrant mothers in this study struggled with the idea of navigating many aspects of their lives in the absence of the interconnectedness of extended family and cultural communities, as they were accustomed. Many counsellors, however, hold beliefs and values that are derived from individualist world views (e.g., personal responsibility, autonomy; Lenz, 2016; Paré & Sutherland, 2016), and as a result, counsellors' world views can limit their effectiveness in supporting single, immigrant mothers, who may lack experience navigating various tasks on their own. As with all clients, newcomers' acculturation processes can be deeply affected by counsellors' imposition of values or world views on their clients (Collins, 2018e; Collins & Arthur, 2018; Socholotuik et al., 2016). One participant reached out to a counsellor because she needed to take her sick child to a doctor's appointment. Her counsellor printed out a map with directions and instructed the client to take the bus. Although the client was apprehensive, the counsellor insisted that she could do this on her own. This mother and her sick child got lost outside on a cold, snowy day for three hours. She called her counsellor and knocked on doors but received no response. This newcomer eventually made it home but isolated herself for three months and did not feel like living anymore. She expressed her feelings to the service provider, after which she was connected with a new counsellor. The second counsellor rode the bus with her, taught her the routes, and fostered her independence using more incremental steps.

This story and others like it are reminders to counsellors to be diligent and discerning when navigating cultural differences between a client's new world and former world and when making suggestions based on the counsellor's cultural understanding. Collins (2018c) pointed to the importance of cultural responsivity, which requires active and ongoing attention to clients' cultural identities, world views, and social locations. The difference is stark when counsellors provide

appropriate support. For example, one Arabic-speaking participant said she felt considerable support from her counsellor because the counsellor spoke Arabic, showed her where to buy Arabic food, and continued to maintain contact as needed. In this study, participants' acculturation processes and perceptions of Canada were influenced by the nature of the support given to them. When this support met their specific and cultural needs, they felt more confident and comfortable in Canadian society. Their stories reinforce emergent calls for counsellors to expand the roles they assume, which might include stepping outside their comfort zones as well as outside their office environments (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014), in order to be maximally responsive to client needs, goals, and cultural understandings.

The Struggle to Fit Within Socio-Cultural Norms and Expectations Related to Mothering

Another theme that emerged within the broader context of cross-cultural transitioning from former worlds to new worlds involved tensions related to mothering discourses. Single, immigrant mothers are expected to follow gendered norms concerning motherhood, regardless of the society in which they live (Curry Rodríguez, 2014; Palmerin Velasco, 2013; Wong & Bell, 2012). This study supported the literature on the *good mother* ideology, in which women's self-perceptions and experiences are influenced by how well they conform to social standards of motherhood (Caplan, 2000; O'Reilly, 2004; Schafer, 2006; Wong, 2018). In this study, participants reported that they struggled to conform to parenting models that challenged their cultural norms and struggled to maintain what they saw as valuable approaches to parenting from their cultures.

Models of "proper" parenting were promoted through workshops, schools, and counselling sessions. Lavell (2018) argued that these ideas about proper parenting often align with individualist and middle-class values and world views. In reality, however, many parents—specifically working-class parents—do not have the privilege of time or energy to negotiate rules, talk about feelings, or supervise after-school activities. The women in this study reported receiving similarly ethnocentric messaging that seemed to place higher value on new world beliefs about parenting than former world beliefs. No evidence emerged of attempts to explore or foreground helpful parenting norms and practices from their cultures of origin. Lavell's (2018) writing on working-class parents parallels the parenting values and day-to-day realities of the single, immigrant women in this study, who often found themselves positioned at a socio-economic disadvantage and focused their time and energy on survival and on meeting the basic needs of their families. These mothers were caught in a double bind of both the societal imposition of parenting values that did not align with their world views and the practical barriers to living up to these new standards.

As evidenced in this study, mothers who do not meet these dominant Canadian parenting ideologies may experience prejudice from middle-class society (Saha, 2015). Women in this study described both overt and covert messages that positioned them as the other who did not meet social expectations. Lavell (2018) stated that working-class parents worry that their authoritative parenting style may be judged as abusive. Similarly, single, immigrant mothers from our study worried about institutions (i.e., government, child and family services, police services) taking away their children due to their parenting practices. This type of power-over messaging stems from ethnocentric and classist values that foster othering instead of foregrounding cultural responsivity and respect for diversity. Some participants took parenting workshops to learn how to raise their children in Canada, but these psychoeducational groups reinforced values and standards that were not a good fit with their cultural norms and world views. Lavell (2018) stated that working-class parents are often judged against similar dominant parenting discourses and, unfortunately, those mothers do need to worry about how they discipline their children due to the risk of being labelled as unfit mothers. This study suggested that single, immigrant mothers were not invited to express their cultural values and parenting norms or to negotiate a goodness-of-fit with middle-class parenting values. As a result, they found themselves trying to live up to unrealistic expectations and living in fear.

Some of these women carried forward an expectation from their former worlds that society dictates the norms they must follow, which left them vulnerable to oppressive standards that were not a good cultural fit for them. It is vital for counsellors to consider the impact of dominant discourses that pervade the helping professions as well as society as a whole (Combs & Freedman, 2018; Doyle & Gosnell, 2018), on the lived experiences of single, immigrant mothers and to deconstruct the ways in which social class can intersect with immigration and single motherhood. Ignoring or disregarding the role of intersectionality can significantly hinder counsellors' ability to understand clients' needs and experiences, which can have a deleterious impact on these mothers' experiences and coping.

In many cultures, mothers are expected to raise their children in two-parent families (Wang, 2013; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015); single motherhood is both a taboo and a disadvantage for mother and child (Afifi et al., 2013; Ayubi, 2010; Wang, 2013; Yu, 2011). All but one participant in the study could not have imagined becoming a single mother one day. Due to unforeseen divorce or loss, these single, immigrant mothers were, by default, placed in positions that challenged dominant mothering discourses and social norms. Although divorce is much more common in Canada, these single mothers also faced unfair biases in Canadian society (Liegghio & Caragata, 2016; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015). The double bind of persistent and oppressive mothering discourses in both former worlds and new worlds negatively affected the participants' perceptions of themselves. Most participants felt guilty, stressed, or incompetent because they

were unable to provide their child with a father figure. The belief that children are supposed to be brought up in two-parent families amplifies discrimination against and the stigmatization of single, immigrant mothers (Afifi et al., 2013; Ayubi, 2010; Wiegers & Chunn, 2015). Despite these challenges, participants viewed the relationships they had with their children positively. The relationship between mother and child is unique and valuable to single, immigrant mothers, and therefore, service providers need to support these relationships in their work with vulnerable populations.

Social Class and Economic Acculturation: Navigating the Double Bind of Caregiving and Providing

Most of the participants in this study experienced shifts in social class, through immigration or through marriage breakdown, that positioned them to struggle to meet the demands of economic acculturation. Participants in this study encountered another double bind in their attempts to balance employment and caregiving (Zhu, 2016). They carried forward values from their former worlds that positioned the well-being of their children as a mother's greatest priority. Yet to provide for their children in a new world characterized by their sudden self-reliance, they must secure employment or financial support. Despite their commitment to provide for their children, single, immigrant mothers in the study faced great barriers to meaningful employment and financial security. One participant pointed to the challenges of finding a daytime job that would allow her to spend evenings and weekends with her daughter.

A clash of new world and former world values emerged between the expectation to take whatever employment was available to them during whatever hours and these mothers' cultural belief in the importance of prioritizing their children and being available to them. The occupational choices of single, immigrant mothers residing in Canada without family and friends were dependent on child care, but child care proved to be beyond their means. In the province where this study was conducted, child care costs were about $1000 a month (Macdonald & Friendly, 2019). One study participant pointed out that if she made $15 an hour and paid $15 an hour for child care, she might as well stay home with her children. A crucial role exists for counsellors, service providers, and governments to address these types of systemic barriers that privilege some social groups and marginalize others (Hargons et al., 2017). Practitioners can support successful economic acculturation (Sinacore et al., 2015) by advocating for affordable child care in community and professional agencies across Canada.

The idea of a 9-to-5 job may sound desirable, but the likelihood of single, immigrant mothers obtaining this type of employment—or any employment—is substantially lower than for members of dominant populations (Khanlou et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2017; Ratts et al., 2016; Saha, 2015; Sinacore et al., 2015; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). In this study, participants shared many experiences

that appeared to be a result of discrimination and that had a direct impact on their employment opportunities. For instance, like many other immigrants (Sinacore et al., 2015), these single, immigrant mothers were told that their education, experience, and credentials from their countries of origin were not accepted or applicable in Canada. These women were asked to apply again once they had Canadian experience or knowledge of the Canadian work culture, which was yet another double bind given that such experience can be gained only by working.

Although discrimination was a theme that emerged in the study, few participants identified these systemic barriers as discrimination. Perhaps, from a critical perspective, the social construction of what counts as valid experience and valid credentials has become so normalized in Canadian culture that the process of acquiring Canadian qualifications is perceived as simply a necessary step in integrating to a new country. This observation highlights the importance of allyship in supporting single, immigrant mothers. Paré and Sutherland (2016) described allyship as the process of standing together with clients who have been marginalized and culturally oppressed. In this process, the counsellor can take on multiple supportive roles and advocate for client well-being and social justice needs (Paré & Sutherland, 2016).

Psychosocial Acculturation: Navigating Multiple Non-Dominant Identities

As a result of applying an intersectionality lens, discrimination toward single, immigrant mothers can be seen to exist in many forms. Multiple marginalization can increase a person's vulnerability to social determinants of health (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Warner et al., 2016). Individuals with multiple non-dominant identities are more likely to experience increased oppression as they navigate hierarchical systems of cultural positioning and power (Warner et al., 2016). As a result, single, immigrant mothers face greater risk of mental health concerns than do married white women born in Canada (Muhammad & Gagnon, 2010; Warner et al., 2016).

This study pointed to several key themes in single, immigrant mothers' experiences of mental health. First, study participants felt stressed, worried, and afraid about being in an unfamiliar country with different rules and expectations. One participant reported that she had experienced culture shock because of how different it is to raise her children in Canada compared to in her country of origin, where parents are positioned as the decision-makers. Second, one participant stated that, since moving to Canada, she had to take anti-depressants as a result of her anxiety, anger, and frequent worries about the future. In her case, her distress was clearly tied to the combination of cross-cultural transitioning and unexpected single motherhood. On top of the stress of cross-cultural transitioning, these women had to deal with economic and psychosocial challenges while taking care of their children, who were also suffering. They were greatly affected

by their children's pain. Another study participant revealed that her depression was due to anxiety and fear over not meeting expectations from those around them.

Single, immigrant mothers' experiences of mental health are also influenced by their social support systems. Participants experienced stress as they balanced responsibilities of single motherhood and the acculturative demands of immigrating to Canada without family or friends here (Guruge et al., 2015; Msengi et al., 2015). These women were accustomed, in their former worlds, to having family support in most areas of their lives (e.g., child care, financial care, emotional stability). Without this social support, they were lonely and isolated. One woman from the study stated that, in her home country, she had had a community on which to rely in the event of illness, but in Canada she felt lonely and stressed because there was no one to rely on for support. These results aligned with Msengi et al.'s (2015) observation that social support is necessary for managing stress related to identity conflict, mothering, and acculturation. Speaking of newcomers generally, Saleem and Martin (2018) underscored the importance of access to group counselling or psychoeducation, which not only addresses particular psychosocial and mental health issues but also encourages relationship building for social support. Some of the women in this study described the importance of connections they had made through these types of resources to other single, immigrant mothers.

Recommendations for Counselling Practice: The Important Role of the Service Provider

We have integrated throughout our discussion glimpses into what these single, immigrant mothers had to say about service provision. We now revisit this final theme in order to expand on the implications for counselling practice, over and above those already presented within each theme, and to make some recommendations for service providers. Most importantly, findings from this study reaffirmed the urgent need for both additional research and counselling services that apply an intersectional lens in order to gain a better understanding of vulnerable populations with multiple non-dominant identities (Collins, 2018b; Nerses & Paré, 2018; Ratts et al., 2016). This lens is particularly needed when working with single, immigrant mothers (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012), whose intersectionalities are so understudied and under-represented in the literature. It is clear from this study that it is impossible to have full understanding of the challenges faced or the strength and resiliency exhibited by these women without attending to the ways in which gender, single motherhood, immigration, and social class interplay in their lived experiences and in their ways of making meaning of those experiences. For example, although there is a call for psychoeducational and group counselling for members of non-dominant populations, including new immigrants (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Robertson et al., 2015; Saleem & Martin, 2018), it is important to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Women in this study could not live up to the parenting norms with which they

were presented, due to the intersections of their multiple non-dominant identities. Working with them in a culturally responsive way (Collins, 2018c) requires counsellors to attend purposefully to several concerns simultaneously, including gender discourses, mothering discourses from both former and new worlds, and unavoidable demands related to economic survival. Failing to do so may result, as evidenced in this study, in an increase in stress levels and acculturation challenges.

There is considerable attention in the counselling literature to gender role socialization, socio-cultural discourses related to gender, gender oppression, and the need for counsellors to be active in deconstructing gender discourses with clients (Chew, 2018; Collins, 2018d; Russell-Mayhew, 2019; Wong, 2018). Still, less attention has been paid to mothering discourses, particularly as they pertain to women from non-dominant cultural groups such as immigrants, who face the additional layer of culture-specific mothering norms and expectations (Wong, 2018; Zhu, 2016). As a result of this study, we recommend that counsellors "[take] into account the client's individual circumstances" and then "[help] them understand themself within the context of the larger society" (Davis-Gage et al., 2010, p. 117). Counsellors can encourage mothers to free themselves from prescriptive social expectations of motherhood and coupledom while maintaining respect for clients' cultural values and while understanding the power imbalances that can keep mothers imprisoned to social norms (Wong & Bell, 2012). It is also imperative that counsellors recognize the challenges that single, immigrant mothers face in accessing and initiating counselling services (Saleem & Martin, 2018). Counsellors should make their services more accessible to single, immigrant mothers (e.g., offering sliding scale or pro bono services; considering office location, accessibility, and hours; welcoming infants during sessions; ensuring continuity of care). Counsellors should also enhance their knowledge about perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) through training or supervision, due to the fact that immigrant mothers have a higher risk of developing PMADs than native-born mothers (Falah-Hassani et al., 2015).

One of the foundational principles of all models of multicultural counselling is counsellor self-awareness (Collins, 2018b; Collins & Arthur, 2018; Ratts et al., 2016). Deconstructing gender and mothering discourses requires counsellors to be aware of their cultural socialization and the influences of their cultural identities and social locations on how they position themselves relative to these cultural norms and expectations. Counsellor self-awareness related to gender and mothering discourses necessitates reflective practice, which is integral to ethical and competent work (Collins et al., 2010), particularly when working with single, immigrant mothers. We invite counsellors to reflect *in and on action* (Schön, 1991) related to in-the-moment practices as well as to salient personal experiences that influence and shape the counsellor (e.g., culture, world view, ethnicity, religion, life experiences; Wong-Wylie, 2007). Reflective practice

enables counsellors to respond more sensitively and appropriately, in ways that are culturally responsive and socially just (Wong, 2018).

Regarding gender and mothering discourses, peer debriefing, reflective writing, and active attention to motherhood scholarship and to gender discourses all enhance the practice of counsellors. We encourage counsellors to recognize and acknowledge their subjectivity (i.e., the ways in which they bring their social locations and their cultural selves into their work) and to be aware of how their stories may "converge, diverge, intersect, and transect" (Wong, 2018, p. 117) with clients' stories. Cultural self-awareness and reflective practices instill humility and foster a not-knowing stance (Wong, 2018) that allows counsellors to empower and respect clients' expertise in their own lives.

This study also reinforced the importance of cultural curiosity (Bava et al., 2018; Mikhaylov, 2016) and of cultural responsivity (Collins, 2018d; Paré & Sutherland, 2016) in aligning services with clients' cultural contexts and beliefs, in order to create an environment that encourages single, immigrant mothers and others to express their cultural identities and strengths. Within a culturally responsive environment, single, immigrant mothers may develop the power to challenge and resist dominant discourses and norms in active ways. It may also be important for counsellors to engage actively in challenging and dismantling these oppressive discourses and ethnocentric lenses within society as well as within counselling theories and practices (Hook & Watkins, 2015; Paré & Sutherland, 2016; Scheel et al., 2018).

Further, Collins (2018a) pointed to the importance of applying a contextualized, systemic lens to understanding client needs and lived experiences, which then opens the door to the possibility of engaging with clients in culturally responsive and socially just change processes at micro (i.e., single, immigrant women and their children), meso (i.e., schools, organizations, or communities), and macro levels (i.e., broader social, economic, and political systems). The findings suggested that single, immigrant mothers faced socio-cultural expectations, norms, and ideologies, including gender and mothering discourses, which were unattainable and idealistic. Counsellors and service providers must attend to the locations of single, immigrant mothers (Collins, 2018d; Dollarhide et al., 2016; Ratts & Pedersen, 2014) in order to appreciate fully the impact of these messages on their mental health and acculturation processes. Without this contextualized lens, practitioners are at risk of reinforcing dominant discourses that serve to oppress this vulnerable population further rather than supporting single, immigrant mothers with their acculturation needs and empowering them to feel confident within their cultural identities.

Embracing the need for systems-level intervention broadens possibilities for the roles of counsellors and other service providers (Collins, 2018a; Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Allyship and the provision of pragmatic supports are essential to single, immigrant mothers. Participants in this study required assistance with

child care, meaningful employment, and community engagement. They expressed isolation, a lack of support, and confusion about how to access resources. Supporting this population by being active in addressing these basic needs (Collins, 2018d; Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012) can help reduce stress and other mental health challenges.

It is evident from this study that single, immigrant mothers also need allies to challenge harmful discourses and to promote inclusiveness in Canadian society. This is particularly important in their communities, where they are searching for belonging, employment, and supports to succeed as immigrants and as single mothers. Counsellors have an important role to play in educating other service providers and in fostering professional practice change by reflecting critically on and challenging the dominant discourses that shape both theory and practice (Collins, 2018e; Gazzola et al., 2018; Wong, 2018). These changes must be addressed in a way that "validates the unique experiences of mothers and demands feminist analysis and deconstruction of motherhood" (Wong, 2018, p. 135). Further, creating safer and more culturally responsive communities involves actively fostering the transformation of negative public perceptions grounded in cultural, middle-class, and gender biases (Lewis et al., 2003; Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). The findings demonstrated the need to address the power differentials between single, immigrant mothers and the institutions from which they seek support and services, given that such differentials often stem from the imposition of professional knowledge. Instead, it is important to create space in which to invite and prioritize client-centred knowing (Combs & Freedman, 2018). As allies, counsellors can both empower single, immigrant mothers and work within social services to redirect power back to this population. In conducting this study and disseminating these results, we hope to function as allies and to advocate for multi-level change in service provision.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Intersectionality theory was the focal point to bring the unique experiences and challenges of single, immigrant mothers to light. A critical and transformative lens enhanced understanding of power and oppression within multiple group identities, with the goal of supporting service providers and counsellors in working more effectively with single, immigrant mothers. The combination of intersectionality and critical reflection will help address the oppressive systems and injustices that impact individuals (Mattsson, 2014). In order to understand oppressive systems, it is important to acknowledge oppression as a result of people's day-to-day thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Mattson, 2014), including those of researchers. From a social constructivist perspective, researchers' beliefs, knowledge, and experiences contributed to and are inseparable from the analysis and interpretation of the data, but the measures taken to ensure research rigour and the use of direct quotations foregrounded the participants' voices.

The small sample size, although appropriate for this research design, provided a limited glimpse into the intersectional identities and lived experiences of single, immigrant mothers in one city in western Canada and revealed some directions for future research. Other possible intersections of the multiple identities and social locations of single, immigrant mothers remain to be explored. These extra layers of cultural complexity—as well as larger samples with a broad diversity of ethnicities, countries of origin, pre-migration social classes, and origins of single motherhood status—will add to the breadth and depth of understanding of the lived experiences of single, immigrant mothers. We applaud the strengths and resiliency of these single, immigrant women and encourage future research into their personal, interpersonal, and cultural courage and tenacity. We hope the findings of this study will prompt future research into the strengths, challenges, and counselling needs of this under-represented population.

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