

Telling it Like it is? Constructing accounts of settlement with immigrant and refugee women in Canada

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ABSTRACT *This article reflects on the methodology of a study of immigrant and refugee women's settlement experiences in Vancouver, Canada. It specifically takes up the ways in which the women's accounts were co-constructed through social and political processes and relations operating at different geographical scales, but were experienced at the local scales of body, home and neighbourhood. The study consisted of in-depth interviews with 16 immigrant and one refugee woman and their teenaged daughters. Here we focus on the mother's accounts showing how their story-telling of life since coming to Canada was framed by multiple discourses and local material conditions. We use two case examples from the study to raise substantive issues in the research, focusing particularly on the women's talk of work and health and how these framed their understanding of 'womanhood' in Canada, routes to a desired 'integration' and their daily practices. Their quotidian life embodied their multiple identities as women, mothers, wives, workers and immigrants and the interviews were used by them to express the frustrations and hardships which were in direct contradiction to their expectations as 'desirable' immigrants or refugees under protection. We argue that methodological reflection is not simply an important dimension of rigour in feminist qualitative research, but is also critical to the opening up of taken-for-granted categories brought to the politically charged study/construction of 'the other'. In this research the identities of study participants and researchers, in the specific space of the interview, were intricately involved in 'telling it like it is' for these immigrant and refugee women settling in an outer suburb of one of the three major destination cities for immigrants to Canada.*

Introduction

This article discusses a study that sets out to explore the gendering of settlement experiences through a specific focus on the accounts of women and their daughters. Research on women immigrants in various countries suggests that social and economic changes associated with immigration have profound effects on women's work and health and may unsettle gender relations within a household. The majority of this work, including that conducted in Canada,

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focuses on the 'immigrant woman's' relationship to the labour force, tracing barriers to participation and the widespread experience of downward mobility mostly through a focus on women from particular source countries (see, for example, Preston & Man, 1999; Wong, 2000; Zhou, 2000; Chiang, 2001; Dossa, 2002; Salaff *et al.*, 2002; Waters, 2002; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Morris & Sinnott, 2003; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003; Preston & Lo, 2003; see also International Metropolis Conference workshop, 2003, 4:1.1 and 2.6/1 papers on this theme). Canadian work also notes the effects of immigration legislation on women's experiences, particularly the creation of dependency for sponsored women (family class category), refugees and women entering Canada through the Live-in Caregiver programme (Creese *et al.*, 1999; Pratt, 1998; Thobani, 2000; Côté *et al.*, 2001; Salaff *et al.*, 2002; SPARC, 2003)¹. Previous research also suggests there will be generational and gender differences in settlement experiences (Creese, 2001). In our study we were concerned to follow up such generational differences through investigating mothering work and relationships between mothers and daughters; we wished to focus particularly on the reworking of notions of femininity, motherhood and family as women navigated new social, cultural, economic and material environments in constructing a life in Canada². In this work we interviewed seventeen women and their daughters who had come to Canada from various source countries, and were living in an outer suburban area of Vancouver. Sixteen of the women were immigrants, the other a refugee. The discussion in this article is confined to the accounts of the mothers³. The study was funded as part of an overall programme of research put forward by RIIM (Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis), Vancouver, one of four Centres in Canada focusing on various dimensions of immigration and integration through the institutional framework of The Metropolis Project⁴.

The purpose of this article is to problematise the construction of the women's accounts, with the interview understood as an intense social and political site in which subjectivities come under scrutiny. In considering these accounts of settlement experiences we narrow what is necessarily a topic of broad scope to two main issues: first, the story-telling of the interview as part of the constitutive process of 'immigrant identity' and, secondly, the purposiveness of the women in the construction of their subjectivity in the context of the interviews. In our reflection, we consider how the notion of 'immigrant woman' was destabilised and renegotiated in the ambiguous space of the interview. This was a space of vulnerability but one in which the women took the opportunity to actively construct themselves as a particular type of immigrant or refugee—one that had come to Canada with expectations of working hard and contributing to Canadian society—although they found themselves unable to put this into practice.

The topic is informed by feminist theoretical and methodological debate that understands accounts of 'everyday life', constructed through the methods of qualitative research, to be located within broader relations and distributions of power that play out unevenly within the particularities of time and place. Such accounts, based on story-telling, therefore represent situated knowledge produced under particular conditions. Here we argue that how and what stories are told and listened to are embodied performances of negotiated subjectivities, cultural scripts, and differential location within distributions of power—both on the part of researchers and those interviewed. In the story-telling of this study, homogenising social categories, such as 'immigrant', are shown to be malleable, gendered and constructed in particular ways through representational and

material practices. The analysis moves from the scale of the nation state, in the form of immigration policy underpinned by human capital discourse, to the scale of the body in our attempt to trace how practices of power disrupted the boundaries of the 'interview,' mediating the stories told in complex ways.

What 'happened' in the interviews discussed here has probably been represented by the study participants to other audiences in other ways. We note this at the beginning to emphasise that for any version of 'meaning-making' there will be others, constructed in different ways, between different people and for different purposes. This first fracture signals the uncertainty of the conclusions we draw, but also suggests that the interview is an interstitial space within which 'white feminist power' is at work. However, we also argue that these co-constructed stories cannot usefully be seen as unstable, and fictive, existing only momentarily for the purposes of the interview. We claim that attention to the embeddedness of the interview in interlocking practices and discourses reveals the conditions under which women are able to construct accounts of their concerns and experiences as 'facts' that need to be heard—both in terms of being important to listen to for policy-makers and as adding to the volume of research about the difficulties immigrant and refugee women experience around the world.

The structure of the article is as follows. We begin with a brief overview of pertinent methodological discussion in feminist scholarship so signalling the politics of knowledge construction and the notion of reflexivity, both of which are well rehearsed within feminist methodological debate. We then apply these ideas to our research experience in three sections. The first outlines the feminist theoretical discourse and institutional context within which the research was located. This includes discussion of issues of concern in a broadly defined feminist materialism, and their implications for how we picked up on tensions we found in the interviews. The second section describes the study methods and introduces the main substantive issues women talked about in the interviews. In the third section we discuss two case examples as a means to elaborate further the discursive constructions, concrete practices and power relations that we see at play in both how the interviews progressed and how we interpreted them. These illustrative examples help us construct an argument for understanding the stories as specifically 'immigrant' stories and gendered stories. We conclude with comments on the connection between our reflections and how we can understand processes of meaning-making, in what and whose story is told.

'Meaning-making': situated knowledge and politics of method

Some form of storytelling is the outcome of all research, whether this is a representation of a reality through the empirical observation and statistical data of science, or is in the narrative form of qualitative research. Further, the value-ladenness of all research at some level, whether conducted in the laboratory or 'the field', is widely acknowledged—although critiques of 'objectivity' and the uncertainties of knowledge have been most insistently pursued within feminist and other critical scholarship. The notion of the 'view from nowhere' extolled in natural science and positivist enquiry within the social sciences has been replaced by an acknowledgement of the partiality of all research endeavour—the view is always from somewhere (see Haraway, 1988, for a foundational statement on this notion).

The interpretive act, which occurs in all science but is recognised as the core of qualitative research, becomes an even more critical point of debate if the challenge to objectivity—and therefore of universal knowledge and ‘facts’—is accepted. Interpretation, in essence, is the ‘truth-making’ in this approach to understanding the production of knowledge. Yet, we also know that the process of research is also constitutive of this eventual ‘view from somewhere’ that we read as text. Reflexivity in research has become the hallmark of rigour, exposing to view the part played by the researcher in constructing the stories we read as representations of reality. The positionality of the researcher is commonly recognised as crucial to how and what stories get told. Furthermore, the inseparability of theory, politics, method and interpretation is a truism recognised in discussions of qualitative methodology, particularly in feminist formulations of current epistemological issues in research. Indeed, in feminism the link between theory and action is integral to the outcome of the feminist scholarly project. There is less discussion, however, of how broader discourses and practices of power disrupt the boundaries of the interview as an intense site of intersubjective exchange. Here we suggest, following the conceptualisation of research interviewing as identity performance where inscriptions constituting bodies are open to negotiation (McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997), that attention to the embodiment of this performance provides a view of the links between ‘subjective’ experience and such relations of power.

In the next sections of this article we explore different dimensions of the relations of our research, putting into view some of the particularities of power at work. In this reflection we consider Rose’s (1997, p. 317) proposition that the research process is dangerous ‘since the risks of research are impossible to know’. We do not know how the products of research will be used in the politics of knowledge construction around immigration issues, nor do we know how our intrusion into the lives of those we interview will affect individuals and families. But we agree with Rose that the uncertainties of translating local knowledges into academic knowledges need to be written into research. Putting such reflexivity, as a technology of situating knowledge (cf. Haraway), into practice is difficult, however, nor can the ‘messiness [of doing research] be fully understood’ (Rose, 1997, p. 314). There is considerable complexity to the material and embodied human spaces (bodyspace) that figure in field research, as well as the relations between them⁵.

We also are aware that attention needs to be paid to the specific location of western feminist discussion on the philosophy and material practices of methods. As Mohanty points out (1988, p. 52), feminist discourse and practice is ‘neither singular nor homogenous in its goals, interests and analyses’; indeed, these will be grounded in the specificities of geography, history and culture. Diversity runs through all aspects of feminist work, reflecting the differential insertion of women around the world in relations of power and, thereby, their ability to represent themselves. Working across ‘difference’, particularly when conceptualised in terms of alterity against a centre (often unproblematised in research) has been a prominent theme in feminist methodological discussion. It brings to a critical point the politics of representing ‘others’, and the complex issues when crossing identity boundaries and contributing to the writing or re-writing of boundaries, whether at the scale of the body, local communities or that of the global. It brings us personally into the centre of research, although there are necessarily limitations to individual critical consciousness. Nevertheless, as Ramazanoğlu and Holland

(2002, p. 119) comment, despite the limits of the individual: ' [A]t least as an intention, reflexivity opens up possibilities for negotiation over what knowledge claims are made, for whom, why and within what frame of reference.'

In the following account we attempt to identify the discursive and material spaces within which 'local' and academic knowledges were managed and negotiated in our study. Our intent is to open up the issues and tensions of our research for what they can tell us about the substantive issues raised by the women in the research, rather than bringing closure of argument—our claims necessarily remain tentative.

Methodology in 'Place': institutional and theoretical framing

Our study can be interpreted as a political project on various dimensions: in its location within The Metropolis Project, a national joint government-university research initiative addressing integration and social cohesion issues in the context of Canada's rapid demographic, social and cultural change; the theoretical interests to be pursued in the context of feminist scholarship; and the particularities of the politics of place nested within provincial and national concerns. In sum, the study was located within politicised social and informational flows. While extrication of all these flows is beyond the scope of this article, we trace those relations and processes that became evident to us through the research process.

The positioning of our work within the Metropolis Project's drive for policy relevant research is complicated and at the edge of its main research agenda, because of our concern with gender, interlocking identities, and our critique of ideological processes and material practices sustaining taken-for-granted social categories, such as 'immigrant woman'. Canadian state multiculturalism has engaged a rhetoric of celebrating 'cultural diversity' in its state management of difference, with the latter, as Gunew (2001, p. 85) notes, 'intertwined with questions of racialised differences'. Indeed, a cultural 'imperative' frequently conflated with minority groups of colour remains 'common-sense' in much popular and state discourse, with the integration of 'culturally different' immigrants as a cornerstone of a vision of a socially cohesive society. In mounting a critique of the processes, practices and language (including classificatory categories) that legitimate various types of nation building, Gunew (*ibid.*) points to the importance of admitting minority perspectives in research. Canadian feminist writers of colour have taken up the challenge, examining processes of racialisation in creating social categories, such as 'immigrant woman', and ideological and material practices reinforcing a white, male norm. Such social categories are shown to be dynamic, constructed and playing out within the historically specific gender, 'race' and class relations organised in relation to productive and reproductive activities in the processes of Canada's nation building (Strong-Boag *et al.*, 1998; Ng, 1998; Bannerji, 1993).

Racialised groups, and particularly women, have been disadvantaged within Canada's social formation, with their marginalisation increasing during the 1990s (Ng, 1988; Arat-Koc, 1999; Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000; Thobani, 2000). In the current neo-liberal political climate, with immigration policy increasingly underpinned with human capital discourse (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002), distinctions between positively valued self-sufficient independent immigrants and negatively valued 'family class' immigrants and refugees are underscored

(Abu-Laban, 1998; Arat-Koc, 1999; Thobani, 2000). Not only does this emphasis hide the differentiated stories of immigrant and refugee women, the implicit devaluing of women's reproductive work in the home and community sets an ambiguous discursive framework within which their multiply inscribed identities as women, mothers, wives, workers and immigrants/refugees must be negotiated, as discussed later in this article (see also McLaren & Dyck, 2004).

Social categories and subjectivities are constituted, negotiated and embodied not in the abstract, however, but through material practices in particular sites. Feminist work that emphasises the materiality of everyday life (McDowell, 1993; Massey, 1994) and the 'relations of ruling' (c.f. Smith, 1999) that structure and give texture to women's daily routines cautions against theorising a subject abstracted from political economy and its material effects. There are also specific geographies to such materiality. Spaces and places at various geographical scales are not simply neutral backdrops to action, but are socially constructed arenas of contested power relations, constituted within global flows of people, capital and information, and constantly in process (Massey, 1994; Silvey & Lawson, 1999).

Massey's (1993) work on a progressive sense of place focuses on such ongoing reconstitution of people and places through local and global processes that play out on the ground and 'make' the particularities of place—in terms of demographic composition, available services and built environment. Local cultures, as well as places, are constantly in flux. Groups and individuals are inserted differentially in such places, as fields of knowledge and power, which have consequences for access to material and political resources. Such an understanding of place emphasises that different social groups' mobility and relationship to place are forged within gendered power relations and political economies. Silvey and Lawson (1999), for example, consider attention to state policy and the political-economic construction of place as key to understanding links between identity and mobility, and thereby immigration experiences. They cite research on the effect of age, gender, ethnicity (Fincher, 1997) and sexuality (Binnie, 1997) on who migrates, settlement destinations and postmigration experience in constructing views of state policy as 'a mechanism constructing place and for identifying who has access to certain places and under what conditions' (Silvey & Lawson, 1999, p. 128).

Work on the embodiment of social and political relations, signals another scale that is relevant to understanding meaning-making, that of the body. McDowell (1992) notes that feminist work demonstrates the implication of public discourse, operating through practices at a variety of scales, in constructions of the body. Consistent with this understanding, Price (1999) argues for the conceptualisation of sexed bodies, the psychological and emotions as the 'very local' scale of analysis. In her work with women living in poverty in Mexico, for example, she sees the inclusion of bodies, faith and the 'inner landscapes' of hopes, dreams and fears (of women) as central in constructing knowledge about social, economic and political transformation. This very local scale of analysis reveals linkages between personal experience and its structuring through non-local originating discursive and material processes. Political scientists, Bacchi and Beasley (2002) interested in how policy inscribes the body, conceptualise such embodied subjectivity as 'social flesh'.

Our research is informed by this body of work. While we adopt non-essentialist understandings of the construction of human subjects and knowledges, we do not consider experiences as mere, relativistic constructions, with no relation to

'reality' and material conditions. As Ebert (1996) claims, experience is an already mediated understanding of an act, and as such cannot be separated from the circumstances within which a series of acts takes place. In our research the women's and girls' embodiment (as lived experience and sets of bodily practices) of the social relations of immigrant settlement and inscription as 'immigrant' becomes a focus through which we can tell a story that locates personal experience in relations of power and their geographies. Thinking through the scale of the body also allows us to struggle with our own voices as researchers, embodying the social relations of research, and with our own subjectivities and spatialities deeply implicated in how knowledge is constructed. In the next sections we focus on the interview as a highly mediated, social and political site, which engages with the 'very local' in an immediate and embodied way. As Nast (1994) comments, the site of interviewing is more than a physical setting, but one which potentially opens up an 'inbetweenness' within which the social locations of researcher and researched are at once intensified and provide a space for translating, with its uncertainties, each others' knowledges. We begin by signalling the 'politics of place' of the study area, briefly describe the initial phases of the research, and then go on to discuss in some detail interviews from the study.

Research Practices: the study

The cultural distinctiveness of Vancouver and of the study area has been shaped by Canadian immigration flows and settlement patterns that play out in Vancouver and its region in particular ways, and are reflected in its demographic composition as well as local responses to these. For example, shifting moral panics related to immigration 'waves' in Vancouver are represented in high-profile media coverage of, for example, illegal immigrants, crime and youth gangs and neighbourhood conflicts over landscape change in affluent neighbourhoods, which have included opposition to 'monster houses' associated with Hong Kong Chinese immigration (see Mitchell, 1993). The outer suburban area of our study, which has a prevailing image of being family-orientated and largely middle-income, remains predominantly white in demographic composition and has escaped such controversy. Unlike other suburbs with much higher densities of racialised immigrants and local histories of violence against such 'other' 'invaders', it is relatively new to non-European immigration settlement. A clustering of immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea has been increasingly evident; however, since 1986 following a change in immigrant source countries from primarily European to Asian. This clustering is signalled by the transformation, for example, of a local mall to mainly Asian stores, a proliferation of Chinese services and restaurants and increasingly 'multi-cultural' school populations, particularly in the more affluent pockets of the study area.

The first phase of the study consisted of a focus group with local educators and community workers working with immigrants, who talked of the issues they encountered in their work. This group discussion informed the topics we pursued in the interviews that took place over 1999–2000 and confirmed to us our anticipation of heterogeneous experience among immigrant families. Focus group participants also facilitated recruitment of the 17 women and their daughters to the study. All had been in Canada for less than five years and had come from China, Finland, Hong Kong, Iran, Korea and Taiwan⁶. The interviews were conducted in English by either one of the two research assistants who assisted

with the project, both white and Canadian-born, or by the authors working together, both white and one an immigrant of many years. All but one interview were carried out in the women's homes, with most lasting from one-and-a-half to two hours. The exception was the interview with the one refugee in the study, which was held in a settlement services' premises—this interview is the subject of discussion later in the paper. Each of the interviews carried out jointly by the authors was discussed immediately afterwards. Field notes were made to record what we saw as the 'core' of what had been transmitted in the interview, and noting demographic information and contextual features of the interview. The research assistant also kept field notes of her interviews that were discussed in team meetings. In addition, the research assistant produced a summary of each interview after reading through the transcripts in full (some transcribed by a typist employed for the purpose, some by the research assistant)⁷.

The women were already aware of our association with universities and the Metropolis Project through the recruitment procedures, which included provision of a letter of information. We embodied this association in our arrival at the women's homes with tape recorder, consent forms, interview guide and demographic data forms. The women appeared to have dressed up for the interview and practiced visiting courtesies, offering us refreshments such as home-baked cookies and coffee or cultural specialities. While our intended topic of how femininity and the family might be renegotiated through immigration and resettlement processes was addressed, other stories were more prominent—those of economic troubles, absent fathers, isolated mothers but the promise of Canada for the next generation. We were given to understand that, despite considerable effort, adult family members were frustrated and dismayed by their seeming lack of prospects in Canada and difficulty in making Canadian friends. Some of the stories we heard from women were bleak—'every day is worse than the last one'. Most had been educated and skilled workers in their own countries, but they had difficulty translating their abilities to the British Columbia labour force—whether as men or women.

We do not know what spaces, figuratively and concretely, have featured in the telling of other experiences of the research process by the women and girls we interviewed. Nevertheless, the discussion that follows is based on common features of the interviews as we saw them; that is, their indication of the difficulties associated with immigrants' dislocation—from countries, relatives, friends and work—and women's agency, and constraints on this agency, in attempting their resolution. The commentary also recognises the interviews as highly mediated events. How and what was talked about, we argue, was shaped by the location of the study within the Metropolis initiative and our positionality within it, as well as the discursive fields described in the previous section.

As the primary audience of women's settlement stories, we were also their 'makers', intervening in the ongoing constitution of binary categories of 'immigrant'/Canadian, self/other. The flow of power, nevertheless, was not unidirectional and the women were active in participating in the negotiation of the stories that were told. Their emphasis on economic pressures, isolation and health problems challenged our focus on practicing femininity, motherhood and the family as a problem of identity performance, to one that—while not leaving this behind—reframed the problematic as one closely related to the marginalisation of immigrant women in the economic and social processes of Canada's nation building. Racialised and gendered identities were intertwined with a 'de-classing'

of most of the women through immigration, accompanied by a fragile insertion in 'place' as uncertain citizens.

Listening To and Telling Stories: two women

We present 'what went on' in our research interviews as a negotiation of knowledge through which control of meaning was unsettled and contested in a context of wider discursive constructions of 'immigrants' and immigration experience. These latter constructions, while framed by national concerns of integration, have currency and are reconstructed at the local scales of body, home and neighbourhood. In this section we work through two interview situations, exploring how the different scales of our research come together in making meaning. We use a combination of excerpts from the interview transcripts, our field notes, and summaries of the interviews that one research assistant constructed as a further 'entry' into the data. In quotes from the interviews we have not corrected grammatical errors. We focus only on the mother in each of these interviews, although the daughter was in attendance in both cases. Clearly, the presence of the daughter would have affected what was told and how, but analysis of this further layering of the 'talk' is beyond the scope of this article⁸. Here our primary interest is in the women as skilled, knowledgeable agents who actively shaped the terms under which the intended topic was to be discussed.

The two interviews that we look at in detail are chosen for a number of reasons, theoretically and methodologically. First, the two women, like others in the study, brought employment issues and experiences of stress to the fore in the interviews, yet are distinct in terms of class of entry into Canada; the first being the main applicant in the household, entering Canada as an entrepreneur and bringing money with which to start a business, and the second arriving in Canada as a United Nations Convention refugee. This puts them on opposite ends of a continuum in terms of relationship to the state, and within the group of women we interviewed—most of who came as spouses of a main applicant. This allows us to show that the substantive issues the women raised cut across immigrant classes, with work a central motif in how women interpret 'immigrant experience' and a gendered subjectivity in Canada. Secondly, they provide a contrast in household composition and help illuminate a relationship between the family and spatiality that is directly connected to experience of the immigration process; the first woman lives alone with her daughter, while her husband and son live in Korea, while the second lives in a nuclear family household. Thirdly, the two cases point up the complex relationship between agency and structure, through the empirical issue of 'choice'; the first family chose to come to Canada as an economic strategy for themselves and their children, but became 'split' through economic circumstances that resulted in return of the husband and son to the country of origin. On the other hand, the second family was persecuted in the country of origin and sought asylum outside its borders. They have severely constricted 'choice' in where they live. Fourthly, and associated with the third point, is that these two family households have very different resources on which to draw; the first has assets and a business remaining in the country of origin and there are no barriers to their return; the second has no material or financial resources on which to draw in Canada and a view of the future that precludes return to their country of origin. Fifth, the second interview gives us opportunity to present a situation where the community worker, who was well trusted by the woman interviewed,

spoke in large part *for* the woman, rather than literally translating her words, so emphasising points around the collectivity of experience and means by which women may exert agency in a world where they have very little power and are marginalised socially, as well as in the labour market. Lastly, these two interviews were conducted by the authors working together and so can be critically reflected upon as an embodied experience, and not simply through transcripts, fieldnotes and discussion with research assistants. Indeed, this article could not be written without this first-hand experience.

Interview One

In the first interview we trace a woman's account of settlement difficulties through extracts that indicate the initial focusing of the interview by the woman on her lack of achievement of an expected better quality of life; her claims to best efforts to establish herself in business; and her ultimate disappointment and concerns about her future, and that of her family, in Canada. In our field notes we situated this woman and validated her claims. We hint at the tension between a scripting of the home and bodies that suggested middle-class comfort and a contradictory reality. We noted the home's location and appearance, the family members' self-presentation, the family's economic struggle and their adoption of a transnational household strategy:

The mother is very welcoming and provides coffee and home-made cookies for the interviewers... The interview takes place in their new-looking, well-furnished apartment. It is located in a quiet area; mostly new apartment buildings and close to a mall. The mother is well dressed, has a fashionable hairstyle and is wearing make-up. Her daughter wears jeans and tee shirt typical of Canadian teen wear. The woman and her daughter live here without the husband and older child (university age) who are back in Korea... It seems likely that the family will be separated for some time because the mother feels that a business here would not support them all so the father must continue to work in Korea. She has found things stressful, including her declining social status... It is another story of immigrants' struggle and the tremendous efforts they make to reach out and make a go of it.

From the beginning, the interview was framed in terms of making a successful life in Canada, rather than according to our intended primary focus on femininity. When we began the interview with asking the woman how it was she had come to Canada she plunged us immediately into an account of what immigration meant to her, to people from her country, the difficulties that she faced, and the strategic significance of jobs:

Yeah, most Koreans who wanted to immigrate here, they thought their reason is to improve the quality of life. In Korea, I thought that the same, I feel the same. Here sometimes I think I improved my quality of life, sometimes, but sometimes to survive here it's not so easy. Me, I graduated from university in Korea but here I can't get a job. It's very difficult. So, in the case, it's not a improved life. This I'm thinking about, some things more difficult here. So sometimes I feel confused but I don't regret.

The woman had come to Canada in the entrepreneurial class with her husband, the daughter who was at the interview and an older sibling. She was somewhat unusual in being the main applicant, but she explained this in terms of her English language skills being better than those of her husband. Her husband had been unable to find work in Canada, and caught in an acute economic downturn in Asia that reduced the value of the couple's assets—like other entrepreneurial class immigrants of the same period—the choice of a transnational household form appeared to be forged out of necessity rather than choice. Her husband and the older child had returned to Korea where the family still had business interests, while she and her daughter had stayed. She explained that it would be very difficult for them to return to Korea, as her daughter would now be too far behind in school classes, whereas the older sibling could attend university in Korea. This situation put her and her husband in the position of considerable rethinking of their respective economic and parenting practices within the family.

The woman expressed anxiety about meeting the requirements of an entrepreneurial immigrant who must set up a business within two years. In response to our broad question about whether or not she had found immigration services in her community helpful, she underscored the significance of her responsibilities as an immigrant in this class, showing the efforts she had made in difficult circumstances and her growing knowledge of the locality.

Yeah, sometimes I find some number, telephone numbers in newspaper, when I have some questions, then I call them, then I can get information... And compared with other Korean ladies, I think I am very active. Since I live here without my husband, I have to know everything, and I am responsible for (fulfilling) my conditions, entrepreneur immigration I will have conditions. So within two years, you have responsible conditions. And now I am very good at the location here.

She also talked of her sense of declining class position in the context of being a well-educated immigrant. Her experiences had honed her expectations. She thought that any business that she would be able to establish in Canada would probably be 'very small', so leaving the family in a continuing predicament. A small business, she felt, would be unable to sustain the family, requiring her husband's continuous business activity in Asia.

Yeah, I would like to say one more thing. Yeah, mostly immigrants, most immigrants, some immigrant, they are not educated but mostly are like me, they are educated but here they are having just, they are running just the small business... we are educated but we are being very, very, eh, small business, very small business... so because of that, Canadians eh, eh, down on immigrants.

In the interview she also spoke of concerns regarding her daughter's opportunities for work, worrying about the lack of jobs in Canada. Economic success was not the family's sole goal, however, and the woman talked of her daughter's entry into 'Canadian' society. She commented that while her daughter had made friends at school, they were mostly among other girls from Korea and she still wondered 'what the Canadians do with their friends'. She also reflected on her own position as a woman in Canada, stating she'd heard that, 'Canada is a good place, like being in heaven for women... but now I don't think so. Here in Canada, women have to work like men do. And then women can be respected by men...'

Her anxieties about being an immigrant in Canada, however, were not confined to the joblessness, disrupted family, social experiences, and her declassed position. They also included her marking as 'other'. She mentioned complaints about noise from a woman living above them, such as that made by shutting cupboard doors when preparing meals. She explained this in cultural terms, speaking of the volume of activity involved in daily cooking for her and her daughter because of their Asian style meals. She also recounted how her car was scratched when it was in the apartment parking lot. This had an effect on how she felt as an immigrant trying to make a new life in Canada:

I tried to feel Canada is my country, but so different from racist scratch my car because of, I am from Asia, it was very bad. At first, actually, I wasn't so afraid of living here because I felt I was very excited, a little excited about living immigration life here, but as the days go by... and as I knew more, I feel afraid more.

From these illustrative quotes and our interpretation of the transcripts, we suggest that the woman's narration of her experience of trying to establish a business and 'family life' in Canada was filtered through her notion of being a 'good' immigrant. She presented herself as a potentially 'ideal' immigrant, eager to participate in the economy in accordance with her entry in the entrepreneurial class of immigrant, but thwarted in her best efforts. She also places herself as a woman and mother in the context of an imagined Canada; commenting on her perception of women having to 'work like men' to be respected, and her and her daughter's lack of inside experience of 'Canadian family life'. She presents herself and her daughter as doing cultural work, baking Canadian cookies—offered to us when we arrived—and trying hard to make Canadian friends. Eschewing the motif of Canada's multiculturalism as 'celebrating diversity', she has tried to 'integrate' only to find that her cultural difference can become the object of racist action.

This presentation of her experiences of Canada and our construction of these in our field notes and interpretations needs also to be thought of in the context of the interview as a set of embodied social, cultural and political practices. The telling and listening of the woman's story was an embodied, emotional event. The woman's western clothes, the well-furnished apartment and mention of two cars reflect and 'perform' the family's financial standing and position in their country of origin and 'modern-ness' in a global economy, with no indication of current fears of economic marginality in Canada. This surface embodiment of stable financial position and success brought the woman's story of insecurity, declining hope and disrupted family household into sharp relief.

Furthermore, her account indicated that her embodiment of middle-class experience was not able to over-ride her visibility as an 'ethnic minority' and her marking as 'other.' The apartment and environs were not the safe space of much literature on the home⁹. We carried out the interview in little more than a whisper, sitting close together around a coffee table, in response to the anxiety the woman felt about the neighbour's complaints of noise. She stated she was wary of having her daughter's friends or other visitors to visit due to the complaints. Yet she was willing to have us come to do the interview in her home. This perhaps reflects the importance to her of being able to voice her experiences to someone she thought might be in a position to put her account forward through our study. The woman's expression of fears about her and her family's future through the hushed

tones and tears of the interview, is a further type of evidence of the stresses associated with how the family - and thereby femininity - were being lived in Canada.

Interview Two

This interview was conducted with a refugee who had entered Canada via a previous 'safe' country, through the auspices of the United Nations. The embodiment of this account of dislocation, resettlement and classification through immigration and refugee policy was witnessed in the form of the emotions the woman expressed in the interview and the ill health she recounted. She associated the latter with the difficulties she was having in settling in Canada. As in the other interview, an account of the economic difficulties the family were experiencing was intertwined with the problematic construction of identity for this woman. She contested an imposed 'suspect' identity as burden on the state with claims of her potential as a productive citizen, if given the chance. The woman asked to have the interview at the local office of a settlement services organisation, where the worker who had recruited her to the study acted as interpreter. They appeared to know each other quite well and the woman, although able to speak some English, referred most questions through her settlement services worker.

We opened the interview with questions for the daughter, addressing our interest in the reworking of cultural scripts of femininity and family, but the mother's story of lack of work, emotional distress and illness interjected and became the most prominent. She had tears running down her cheek for part of the interview. The research assistant's summary of the transcript included the following:

They are a refugee family. Both the mother and father are unemployed and are both ill as a result of stress. The mother feels that 'each day is worse than the one before'. They are on social assistance and feel they are being harassed by the government, describing unannounced visits by immigration officials. The mother married at the age of fifteen at a time when the government of Iran was changing. She lost her job and her daughter was harassed at school because of their Ba'hai faith. They went to another middle-eastern country to escape this harassment. The mother and father are very discouraged and are desperate for any job...

Another story of waste of parents, hope for children. Both mother and father are ill from stress. The mother is on anti-depressants.

The notion of Canada as a safe refuge for this family is overlaid by an account informed by similar economic and 'moral' pressures to those of the entrepreneurial class woman of the previous interview. The lack of personal security at the level of the local, however, is experienced and expressed in a different way; the account of the harassment of immigrant officials paralleling that of the Korean woman's account of racist scratches on her car and the neighbour's complaints. A main difference between the two women, however, is their class of entry into Canada. The refugee's expression of her marginal and vulnerable status in Canada is a story told with the aid of the settlement services worker, so providing legitimacy to her account. The summary continued:

The question of why Canada takes people when it cannot give them work is brought up as it has been in other interviews. The interpreter's story is linked to the story of this family. She is a settlement worker and has, it seems, experienced the same problems... as she indicates that she is also Ba'hai. This is sometimes helpful, because she can clarify some things, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between their story and hers. It becomes, 'Iranian people', 'their people', 'us'.

The research assistant's last comment echoed our experience of the interview at the time; as she translated the multicultural worker also took an advocacy position. Both the woman and multicultural worker appealed directly to us, to make known what they saw as needed to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees. Connections were made among work, health, government obligations and social life:

Settlement worker: [talking about stresses of unemployment] So she would rather to find a job, so she can go. And that makes sense. If she can find a job, and she is working, is less burden on the government, because when she's sick she goes to doctor, and that has a lot of expenses for the government, right? So if the government can provide some jobs, create some jobs for this new immigrants, which have, you know, don't have the language skills, so ... much easier for them. They can build their self-esteem, the adjustment will be easier.

Later in the interview the subject of friends or other forms of social support was brought up:

Woman: Yes I have, we have a community of Ba'hai... [Farsi]

Settlement worker: [Farsi]

Woman: [Farsi]

Settlement worker: ... you know, you're talking about friends, right? She has lots of, but in order to have to—even to have some interaction—it's money. They want to come to her house; she has to provide—at least to have tea, you know, to have sugar. This is the cultural things too. Because when we have guests, we have to provide some, to offer something to them. So when there's nothing, then you isolate yourself. You don't go, because you can't have them back.

As in the first interview, the emotions of the woman, expressed in her tears, were part of the story she told. Her make-up and dress suggested she had made careful preparations for this meeting with us and her settlement worker that gave her a chance to convey the extreme difficulties she and her husband were having as refugees in this suburban community. Work seemed unattainable and government representatives appeared to be monitoring their activities—suggesting the family's 'lack' rather than their potential as contributing citizens. While sharing some of the discouragement and stress of the woman of interview one, her refugee status suggested a different sort of vulnerability – twice discriminated against, first through the family's religion in their country of origin and now occupying a category of entry into Canada that is less 'desirable' than the independent or entrepreneurial class immigrant whose activities are anticipated to meet the needs of Canada's economy and society.

Nevertheless, she had been able to draw on local resources in the telling of her story, in the form of the settlement worker of the same country and religion. The two women's premigration stories of religious persecution seemed to be an important anchoring point in the expression of their common experiences and anticipation of better fortunes to be found within Canada. The settlement worker was supportive of the mother and her experience of working in a settlement service organisation for immigrants gave her a language of representation for her client—a refugee with a strong work ethic and a willingness to contribute—in a story that she wanted us to hear as researchers with the Metropolis Project. With no home country to return to, the strategies of settlement for this refugee woman were being crafted out of very different resource opportunities than that of the woman of the previous interview.

The interview accounts of the two women also show the intertwining of class of entry into Canada and social class, as reflected in the different material conditions under which the two women were living. In contrast to the Korean woman whose car, modern furnishings and apartment in a newly developed area marketed to the middle class, we gained the impression that the Iranian woman and her family lived in an older apartment in a less desirable area. The financial stresses for the two were also different for the women, the Korean woman's concerns centring on the difficulties of meeting the requirement of setting up a business within a set period of time, whereas the Iranian woman spoke of living in poverty. Despite these different resource bases, neither found they could actively participate in and contribute to what they saw as Canadian life—socially or economically.

Settlement Accounts as Embodied, Negotiated Knowledge

In this reflection on our work with immigrant women, we have aimed to show how the knowledge produced from the women's settlement stories is mediated and constructed through a layering of discourses and material practices constructed at various scales. Feminist researchers emphasise that knowledge through which we understand the world is embodied, derived from bodily social interactions taking place in the spaces of everyday life. In this study we suggest that the story-telling of the interviews was one of such embodied events, but intensified through its purposefulness—on the parts of both us and the women being interviewed. In this discursive and physical setting meaning of the women's identities, as multiply inscribed immigrants, mothers, wives and workers, was negotiated. However, exploring embodiment does not confine the analysis to the interpersonal dynamics of the interview, but provides an entry into the fields of knowledge and power within which the 'facts' of the women's lives are constructed. In the article we began by locating the interviews as political events, framed by an institutionalised research initiative and a theoretical approach that draws on post-structural feminism but retains a commitment to the 'grounding' of the subject in the materiality of everyday life spaces [10]. Going on to describe the research process and taking detail from two interviews, we addressed the complex relationship between story-telling and its discursive and material context. We noted the points of tension for women located in different categories of entry to Canada as they 'write' themselves and their struggles into an imagined Canada.

Our discussion of the process of performance and negotiation of identity in the interviews seeks to make space for 'minority perspectives', albeit mediated by us,

in critique of the taken-for-granted categories that create a discursive context for the living out of an immigrant and gendered identity. In drawing on the notion of scale in our analysis, we have attempted to follow threads through the body, homespace and neighbourhood to processes of nation-building—all further connected to global conditions of change and geopolitics. In our account we note the emotional tenor of the interviews and the expressions of tears, hushed tones, and body language that unlocked the stories of the women's inner landscapes (c.f. Price, 1999). The hopes, dreams and fears of the 'very local', as expressed through this corporeality, not only signalled the conditions they embodied but the connections between us (as study participants and interviewers) as well as our contradictory locations within the nation state and multi-culturalism.

Our own intersecting identities and experience provided points of identification as well as difference with the women interviewed (e.g. as women, mothers, and one of us an immigrant). But, as researchers, our class positioning and our Canadian citizenship were important dimensions of relations of power in the research, and were embodied in our ability to act in the 'proper ways' that constitute our cultural capital and 'whiteness' within scripts of nation and national identity. Such positionality in relationship to the nation state is important in gaining access to social and economic resources (see Bonnett, 1997; Jackson, 1998; Kincheloe, 1999, Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; and Macdonald, 1999 on whiteness as a power relation). In the case of the women, their status as immigrant or refugee intersected with gendered, racialised and classed identities in shaping access to material and social resources. Coming together in the interview, these differential positionings were drawn on in various ways. The women sought to place us: how did we come to do this work? Were we from Vancouver? Did we have contacts that could help them find work? The women were not powerless and indeed used our position in relation to the overall research programme of the Metropolis Project in a purposeful way. We were a potential source of information as well as a route to expressing concerns, disappointments and discouragement with the Canadian government.

The women wanted us to hear of their desire to work and their bitterness at not finding jobs after they had appeared to be desirable immigrants at the time of the application process. They stressed how they had worked hard to learn English, to learn about Canada, to find employment, and to make friends. Their discourses, produced by their full engagement with daily life, differ from official discourses (e.g. homogenisation of immigrants, pathologisation of the non-'ideal' immigrant), and indeed, act as counter-discourses. The women sought to have us recognise their claims about themselves as 'good' citizens, denied the work opportunities that would help them become 'Canadians'. Their expression of emotions and accounts of stress and depression were important aspects of their settlement narratives, embodying accounts of self and family life, located in a flow of time, conditioned by the particularity of place, and deeply embedded in state politics and discourses of power.

Stories are the embodiment of 'context', set within a shifting web of relations as social and cultural transformations unfold. They also reflect, as Silvey and Lawson (1999) suggest, the effects of state policy on the differential positioning of immigrant groups and individuals and their post-migration experiences. Similarly, such stories indicate differing conditions prior to immigration or flight as a refugee that shape their presented content and interpretation of settlement experience. As researchers we engage in the process of interpreting and

translating local knowledge and experience for other audiences, which, in the anticipation of our study participants include immigration policy makers. How well can we tell their 'truth? Will the study be another disappointment in its inability to produce immediate, tangible change for women like those in the study? Or can it, through a view of social justice that emphasises the unevenness of oppression related to different groups' situation within the meta-narrative of whiteness and its spatiality within Canadian society (Bourne & Rose, 2001, Kobayashi & Ray, 2000; Peake & Ray, 2000), indicate the relevance of local knowledge as articulated by research subjects? Such knowledge, set within an ongoing narrative of dislocation—whether a chosen one with the aim of improving quality of life and securing a better future for children or one of forced migration of political refugees—may disrupt taken-for-granted notions of the 'ideal immigrant' and suggests ways of taking more seriously the activities of women immigrants set outside a human capital discourse.

The inclusion of women's voices in narrating settlement experiences helps to reveal the gendering of immigration processes and, we claim, is critical in denaturalising the common-sense categories that underpin policy making. Furthermore, taking account of the context of the particularities of Vancouver as a settlement destination and the finer scale dynamics of each interview helps us to understand the multi-layered and multi-scaled political space within which women's accounts are contextualised. These accounts also point to tensions within feminism that arise when voices representing the differential insertion of women in places and processes intermingle in constructing understandings of the world. Initially we felt our Western feminist concerns with identity, difference and practicing femininity had been displaced by the women's insistence on the centrality of the family unit and its economic fortunes in their lives. Perhaps we had been misguided in our 'white' agenda? On reflection, however, we see the women's active participation in the agenda of the interviews, and, thereby, our research as exactly about the formation and practice of multi-stranded feminine and gendered identities. These identities are highly conditioned and negotiated through social and political relations and processes—including representations—that racialise women's bodies and construct an immigrant identity with profound consequences for how 'womanhood' is interpreted and lived in the 'migrant spaces' emerging from processes of globalisation. Materiality must not be lost sight of, but the representational issues of central concern in post-structural feminism remain critical to understanding the enactment of 'social flesh' (cf. Bacchi & Beasley, *ibid.*)—with its materiality mediated through available, culturally hegemonic discourses, including those of 'immigrant' and normative 'womanhood'.

In concluding, we reiterate the point that research 'stories' are critical to opening up the categories that underpin policy-making and have consequences for how immigrants are positioned in relation to social and material resources. 'Race', class and gender are categories closely associated with the category of 'immigrant'. Their conflation is interwoven with a negative evaluation of 'minority groups', which conflicts with the egalitarian notions of multiculturalism and produces what Henry and Tator (1994) describe as democratic racism. Reflecting on the practices of research helps us identify practices of power at different scales that have the potential of fixing or contesting powerful social categories, including that of the troublesome taken-for-grantedness of 'cultural difference' used in problematising issues of integration and inclusion.

Furthermore, the discursive space opened up through the women's story-telling introduces their embodied knowledge as another source of evidence to be taken account of in unravelling knowledge about the materiality of immigrants' lives.

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Notes

1. In 1999, 189 816 immigrants landed in Canada. The top 10 source countries were: People's Republic of China (15.33%); India (9.17%); Pakistan (4.89%); Philippines (4.83%); Republic of Korea (3.80%); Iran (3.11%); USA (2.90%); Taiwan (2.88%); Sri Lanka (2.49%); and the United Kingdom (2.36%). The major immigrant classes were: economic (56%); family—entering as sponsored family members (29%); and refugees (13%) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada: <http://www.cic.ci.gc.ca>). Categories of immigration class are based on the distinction between anticipated economic contribution to Canadian society and a humanitarian stance. Independent class immigrants include skilled workers, business investors, entrepreneurs and the self-employed. A points system initiated in the late 1960s to target skilled workers was entrenched in the Immigration Act 1976–1977 and developed further in a new raft of legislation in 2002 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). This latter emphasises Canada's desire for highly educated, 'flexible' immigrants who will contribute to the country's economic development, and has increased the number of points awarded for educational level and official language knowledge. The increased emphasis on the human capital of immigrants entering through the points system, however, serves to diminish the visibility of the economic contribution made by those—predominantly female—entering under the family reunification scheme and refugees. Further, the contributions of reproductive work in the home and the community are overshadowed; instead there is concern that family class immigrants and refugees main drain public resources (Immigration and Legislative Review Advisory Group, 1997; Abu-Laban, 1998). Feminist scholars have been quick to point out that despite the purported neutrality of policies, women continue to be disadvantaged, and while women do enter Canada in the independent class and educated women are among those sponsored, there is considerable evidence of their downward occupational mobility (SPARC, 2003).
2. The predominant focus of research on women immigrants concerns paid employment participation issues. Exceptions include Cohen's (2000) examination of the negative effects on family life of immigration policies that separate Filipina–Canadian domestic workers from their spouses and children, and Waters' (2002) work on the 'astronaut' family strategy of Hong Kong and Taiwanese business and professional households in Vancouver. Our study takes up the general neglect of examination of the reconstitution of family life and relationships between parents and children. Our specific interest in mothers and daughters arises from the foci of our previous work on mothering work and schooling.
3. Preliminary work with a specific focus on girls appears in Dyck and McLaren (2002). McLaren and Dyck (2004) explore mother's connection to the girls' schooling.
4. The Metropolis Project is a joint government and scholarly initiative previously unprecedented in Canada in its level of funding and its complexity in the form of multi-site, multidisciplinary study on a wide range of topics intended to create knowledge useful for policy makers. Further information about the Project and its international linkages can be found at:

- (www.canada.metropolis.net) (National Metropolis Project); and (www.riim.metropolis.net) (Vancouver Centre of Excellence: Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis).
5. See *Professional Geographer*, 1994; Jones III, Nast and Roberts, 1997; and Moss, 2002 for examples of how this complexity has been addressed in feminist geography.
 6. The focus group was organised by the first research assistant to the project and attended by her and the first author. Those who participated were representatives from three of the high schools (an English Second Language (ESL) teacher and the head of the Counselling Department of one school; the Head of Multiculturalism of another, and the ESL Program Facilitator of the third); the coordinator of an Adult Education ESL programme and a teacher from this programme; a worker from the settlement services organisation; the coordinator of the Leisure Services of one of the three component municipalities; a representative from the same municipality's Volunteer Centre, and the area's Civilian-Police Liaison Coordinator. We recruited 12 of the 17 mother and daughter dyads through schools (two), the community-run Volunteer Centre (one), the settlement services organisation (two) and the English Second Language programmes of the adult education centre (seven) that had been represented at the focus group. The others were recruited through snowballing from other study participants (three) and through posters put up at community centres (two). Five mothers and daughters were from Taiwan, four from Korea, four from Iran (two were from refugee families), two from Hong Kong, one from China and one from Finland. Recruitment was difficult, but we did reach mothers and daughters from five of the top 10 source countries to the area, which from 1991 to 1996 were: Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, Poland, Iran, Romania, India and the United Kingdom.
 7. Using research assistants necessarily complicates the 'interpretive act' as well as data collection. Distancing from the data requires that researchers and research assistants work closely together in reflecting on all aspects of the data collection. In addition to discussing the interviews and the emerging analysis, research assistants also summarised transcripts and our field notes as an additional entry point to the 'data' to help problematise our various social locations *vis-a-vis* the research. As the interviews were with women from various source countries and a variety of first languages were represented among them, the often-used strategy of employing research assistants from the same broadly defined language or national group was not attempted. Furthermore, our experience of the issue of 'matching' 'ethnicities' or social location of research assistants and researched is far from clear cut. Multiply-stranded identities and differential insertion in local communities make any assumption of connection based on common identities as women of colour, immigrants or regional identification uncertain and an empirical question (see Dyck *et al.*, 1995). A similar point is made by Lee and Jiwani (2003) as women of colour researching racialised girls. They point out that the fluidity of identities and contextually specific social locations means that shared identities can be a starting point only in research and not a fixed place of knowing.
 8. We intended to interview the mothers and daughters separately about their lives since coming to Canada. This model of interviewing was influenced by the notion that talking with individuals was preferable, without the potential silencing of, for example, a daughter's perspective by her mother's presence, or vice versa. The majority of the interviews took place in the women's homes, as we also intended, but we found we needed to be highly flexible in how interviews were conducted. Most women and their daughters wanted to be interviewed together, with the daughter sometimes acting as a translator for the mother or helping clarify questions or the articulation of responses. In one case the husband/father in the family wanted to be included. In another situation two women friends and their daughters were interviewed together. One woman (interview two in this paper) chose to be interviewed with her settlement services worker and daughter.
 9. Of course, many women do not experience the home as the 'safe space' of the ideal home as well rehearsed in feminist literature. Work specifically concerned with immigrant women in British Columbia shows the particular vulnerability of sponsored women to domestic violence (SPARC, 2003) and the insecurity of 'home' for live-in nannies (Pratt, 1998). In the case of the Korean woman we interviewed, we speculate that being a woman without the 'protection' of a man is a type of vulnerability that might have been at play in the racist actions.
 10. While Butler's (1993) work on performativity and gender has been particularly influential in post-structural feminism, it has also been critiqued for giving primacy to representational issues in abstracting the subject from the specificities of space and place, as well as neglecting experiential issues (see Kontos, 2004). Geographical work has been particularly sensitive to the problem of the abstract subject and its implications for theorising women's agency.

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