

**EXPLORING THE SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN INTIMATE  
PARTNERSHIPS AMONG WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN LETHBRIDGE,  
SOUTHERN ALBERTA, CANADA.**

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EXPLORING THE SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN INTIMATE PARTNERSHIPS  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study's findings contribute to a body of research that explores power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among African immigrants in Lethbridge. The purpose of this research was to 1) explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada, and 2) to address the existing literature gap related to power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada.

An exploratory descriptive qualitative research study design, incorporating semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary data collection technique was used to collect data from a purpose/snowball sample of individuals who have knowledge and experience of shifting power dynamics in intimate partnership following immigration to Canada.

The findings of this research study indicated that gender intersected with other social, economic, and cultural factors to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge.

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## **ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the thesis, including: the purpose statement, research questions, rationale for this study, and an overview of migration, the presence of African immigrants in Canada, migrant's social networks, gender and migration, migration implications and challenges.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the study, which focuses on how structural factors (e.g., gender and patriarchal norms, immigration policies and laws, and religious beliefs) and the socioeconomic factors (e.g., racism, income, education, employment, acculturation, and economic-based gender role reversal, reproductive health and decision making, and age, health, and energy) intersect to influence power dynamics within intimate partnerships.

Chapter 3 summarizes the key theoretical perspectives that were applied in the current study of relational power dynamics including: the theory of gender and power, gender and social constructionism, intersectionality theory, transnationalism, and acculturation theory. This chapter also discusses the epistemology of social constructionism, and the theoretical lens of intersectionality theory to understand how structural and socioeconomic factors intersect or interact to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

Chapter 4 discussed my philosophical orientation to this study, followed by details related to the research design, research settings, participant eligibility criteria, data collection methods, reflexivity, thematic data analysis, data management, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, and potential risks assessment of this study.

Chapter 5 starts with a summary of the demographics of the research participants. These study findings captured the perceptions and experiences of the West African immigrant participants surrounding power dynamics within their intimate relationships. This chapter also



discusses how structural barriers (e.g., gender and patriarchal values and beliefs, immigration policies and laws, and religious beliefs) and contributors to power dynamics (e.g., gender, income, education, racism and employment, social status, age and health, children, and extended family pressure) intersect to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. Braun and Clarke's (2016) thematic analysis, and the theoretical lens of intersectionality were applied to rigorously analyze, code, categorize these data, and generate themes. The chapter concludes with suggestions from the participants on how to improve gender relations and their understanding of what contributes to equity and fairness within an intimate relationship.

Chapter 6 discusses the study findings in the context of the existing literature, research questions, and theoretical framework. This chapter ends with the limitations of the study, recommendations/suggestions for future research, the significance of the study and implications for practice, knowledge translation, evaluation of the theoretical framework, reflection, and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Africa is ranked second as a source of immigration to Canada, constituting about 13.4 percent of all recent immigrants (Statistics Canada 2017). According to Loxely, Sackey, & Khan (2015), Canada is an attractive country of destination for international migrants including Africans because of its cultural diversity, affordable education, and economic opportunities. The transition to life in Canada can present significant challenges to migrants as they encounter unfamiliar laws, new customs, and complex social dynamics in the destination country. While it is recognized adjustment is not a homogeneous phenomenon and that women and men each face distinct challenges (Torres & Wallace, 2004), little is known about the gendered experiences associated with migration.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to 1) explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada, and 2) to address the existing literature gap related to power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada. The results of my research may inform policy makers, service workers, and health care agencies to adapt culturally sensitive policies that may promote the well-being of West African immigrants and their integration into Canadian society.

The objectives of this study were fivefold: 1) to explore how West African immigrants to Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, perceive and define power within intimate partner relationships; 2) to explore how religious beliefs influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships; 3) to explore how immigration policies and laws influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships; 4) to explore how gender/patriarchal structures influence power dynamics

within intimate partner relationships; and 5) to explore how socioeconomic factors such as age and health, acculturation, transnationalism, racism, education, income, employment, and reproduction and decision-making influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

To achieve this purpose and objectives, this research study was guided by the following three primary research questions.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants since immigration to Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada?
- 2) How do these power dynamics operate within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada?
- 3) How do intersecting factors such as gender, patriarchal norms, socioeconomic status, Religion, age and health, and policies and structural barriers influence power dynamics within intimate partnership among West African immigrants to Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada?

The research problematic of gendered experiences of African migrants is shaped by reasons for migration, social networks, migration challenges and implications, and social location. I conceived this research idea or topic through my interactions with a few African immigrant families living in western countries such as Italy, the United States, and Canada. In these encounters, I heard about shifting gender, economic and interpersonal dynamics. Firstly, I often felt helpless when reading and listening to some of the narratives about power imbalances within intimate partner relationships among African immigrants in western countries. Some African women felt they were unequally treated by their partners, even though they may equally

contribute to the functioning of the relationship. Conversely, some African men also believe that some African women living in western countries had grown horns, that they were disrespectful, unreasonable, uncontrollable, and that they acted in ways that did not align with the prescribed traditional gender roles. Many African women gain their economic independence or financial stability following migration; therefore, they may bargain or renegotiate for flexible traditional gender roles within intimate partner relationships, which sometimes lead to marital conflicts and abuse (Inclan, 2003). Secondly, I learned from research articles that, little research has been conducted in this area, and that many of the previous research studies conducted, focused on African immigrants as a very homogenous group. Lastly, even though the narratives shared by these individuals were based on their unique personal experiences within the western context, I felt they were not adequate to make generalizations surrounding the realities of the shifting power dynamics within intimate partnerships among African immigrants in western countries, given their different migration backgrounds, goals, immigration status, social class, gender, and religious beliefs.

Surprisingly, despite the increasing number of African immigrants to Canada, Mensah (2010) indicates that Africans are the least researched of all immigrant groups in Canada. Consequently, little is known about their integration experiences and how these experiences may be similar or different from other immigrant groups. Therefore, this study sought to explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among recent West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, and also address the existing literature gap.

### **What is Migration and Why Do People Migrate?**

Although migration is not a new phenomenon (Koser, 2007), there has been an unprecedented rise in the number of international migrants over the past decades due to the

globalization of trade, finance, production, as well as the political and economic integration (Merali, 2008; Muthuki, 2014; and United Nations 2016). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2017) defines immigration as a process by which people move to a new country for settlement purposes. Rapid globalization, political turmoil associated with wars, economic mismanagements by governments, ethnic conflict, political and religious persecution, and family reunification have forced many Africans to seek greener pastures in industrialized countries such as Canada, the United States, Germany, U.K, and Australia (Loxely et al., 2015; Mensah, 2014).

Some scholars of international migration assert that most migrants make a one-way permanent move to settle in affluent countries (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1995). However, other scholars like Mensah (2014) argue that this is not always the case because many Africans migrate to the developed countries such as Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada with the initial plan to stay temporarily, and then return to their “homeland” after they have acquired adequate financial resources to help them live comfortably. Many Africans consider “home” to be either their birthplace, hometown, ancestral and spiritual world, or final place of refuge and rest (Sarpong, 1974).

Accordingly, many African immigrants continue to relate and commit personally to their countries of origin. For example, many African immigrants maintain strong ties with their “home” country by visiting the “homeland” or “motherland” often, building houses, sending remittances, making regular phone calls, making investments, forming ethnic associations, and maintaining their original culture (Loxely et al., 2015).

However, Abbasi-Shavazi, Sadeghi, and Mohammadi (2017) indicate that the immigrant’s decision and ability to return “home” depends on the economic development,

political stability, and the rule of law in the home countries. Therefore, many African immigrants may gradually change their initial plan and adopt the host country as their permanent “home” and this involves a complex process of emotional, cultural, and social deconstruction and reconstruction of “home” (Korevla, 1999). In addition, Shaw (2010) indicates that this deconstruction and reconstruction process may involve changes in migrants’ perceptions about gender roles, culture, social, religious, economic, and political structures of the host country. Herman, Kaplan, and Szwarc (2010) emphasize that while some immigrants may find ways to manage or adapt to post-migration changes and challenges, others may experience a family breakdown.

Unfortunately, the decision to move away from one’s country of origin and loved ones to settle in a new country is usually a difficult and painful one. In many African countries, such important decisions are often taken with family members (both nuclear and extended), friends, and even neighbors (Korevla, 1999). Sometimes, one or more family members or friends may pool their financial resources together to support the migrant to relocate to a developed country for better opportunities (Korevla, 1999). However, this kind of support is often offered with the intention that the migrant will acquire adequate resources in the new country, and in return offer financial support to the family back home or help one of the family members to join him/her in the new country (Baffoe, 2009). These expectations, according to Baffoe (2009), place a huge responsibility on the migrant to work harder in the new country to meet the expectations of the family back “home.” Consequently, many African immigrants may experience frustration, stress, and depression, which negatively affect their health because of their inability to meet the expectations of family members back home (Baffoe, 2009).

## **The Presence of African Immigrants in Canada**

The United Nations (2016) indicates that Africans form a significant portion of international migrants. African immigrants, according to Winks (1997) and Walker (1996), have been living in Canada for centuries and were among the first non-Aboriginal settlers in Canada. However, the African immigrant population began to increase with the introduction of the Federal Skilled Worker Program, which allows other migrants from non-traditional European sources to migrate to Canada.

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2013), recent migrants to Canada are from countries such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In addition, many of the recent sub-Saharan African migrants to Canada are from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Rwanda (Statistics Canada, 2017). Based on recent migration population growth data, Statistics Canada (2017) anticipates that immigrant population growth could reach more than 80% of the Canadian population growth by 2031.

Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, and Karimi (2019) indicate that African immigrants are usually admitted to Canada under three main categories: economic, family reunification, and asylum seeker. Loxley et al., (2015) indicate that there has been a significant increase in the number of African immigrants in Canada, and the number has more than doubled from an annual average of 5 percent of immigrants in the 1980s to currently over 10 percent. Between 69% and 80% of the total number of immigrants in Canada have origins in developing countries including Africa. According to the 2016 Canadian population census, the number of African immigrants in Canada totaled 1,198,540, constituting 3.5% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017). This demonstrates a significant increase in the African immigrant population compared to almost 300,000 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Many of the African migrants to Canada settle in four

major provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2017).

It is worth noting that, African immigrants in Canada form a minority group and are often considered a homogeneous group and categorized as “blacks” of African origin on Canadian Census documents, which makes it difficult to know the exact number of immigrants from specific African countries living in Canada (Soudien & Ladhari, 2011). Soudien and Ladhari (2011); and Mensah (2014) argue that it is misleading to consider African immigrants as a homogeneous group because they are a very heterogeneous group in terms of their cultural backgrounds, values, and norms of behavior. Mensah (2005) adds that while most of the immigrants from Western African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria are likely to be considered Black Africans, the same cannot be said about immigrants from Northern, Southern, and Eastern African countries. This is because immigrants from North African countries such as Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt are best described as Arabs and Maghrebi; immigrants from South Africa are likely to be described as either Whites, Indians, or Colored (African); and immigrants from East Africa are likely to be described as either Europeans, Arabs, or Asians (Mensah 2005). Despite the diversity that exist particularly across ethnic, national, and regional groups of African immigrants, concerning history, culture, and social structure, they share some commonalities which allow for salient features among the various African immigrant groups concerning power dynamics within intimate partner relationships (Okeke-Ihejirika, & Salami, 2018; Mensah, 2005). For instance, many African countries are either former colonies of Britain or France, and African immigrants may either speak French or English language in addition to their native language or dialect (Okeke-Ihejirika, & Salami, 2018).



Importantly, Canada is ranked fifth in the top global migration destinations (World Bank, 2011), and is considered to be the first developed country in the world which embraced multiculturalism by enacting the Multicultural Act in 1988, a policy that recognizes and respects diverse ethnic groups within the framework of equality (Tettey and Puplampu, 2006). Other policies such as the Immigration Act in 1967 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms Act in 1982, were enacted to build an all-inclusive Canadian society (Tettey and Puplampu, 2006). All these Acts create the opportunity for immigrants from developing countries including Africa to immigrate to Canada (Tetty & Puplampu, 2006). However, immigrants encounter many challenges in the host or destination countries despite all the policies that are designed to create equal opportunities (Mensah & Williams, 2015), and the important role immigrants play in the economic growth of the host countries (Koser, 2007).

### **Migrants' Social Networks**

Haug (2008) emphasizes that a migrant's decision to move to a destination country may be influenced by the migrant's social networks, who may provide financial support during the pre and post-migration processes, accommodation, job information, and emotional support. In addition, Koser (2007) indicates that most migrants usually move to countries where they have already established a network of friends, and relatives.

An immigrant's pre-migration social networks may include but are not limited to extended family members, friends, and associates. Unfortunately, while these pre-migration social networks, or informal support services, enable immigrant women to take up employment outside the home, the family, friends, and neighbors which took care of their children with little or no payment, are often not available in the host countries (Ryan, 2011). Furthermore, with the high cost of daycare and lack of federal subsidies for new immigrants, some may team up and

take turns to assist each other with childcare (Ryan, 2011; White, 2010). However, other scholars have indicated that the lack of social networks or informal support services may be considered positive because it may enable immigrant families and communities to build a stronger relational bond as they rely on each other for social support (Ryan, 2011).

Importantly, an immigrant's social networks may be a key element in facilitating community formation and permanent settlement because studies on social networks indicate that people generally connect with those who have similar backgrounds (Portes 1998). These social networks are not static but rather dynamic depending on the individual's social status (Gill & Bialski, 2011; Putnam, 2000). For instance, an immigrant might gradually move away from his/her prior social networks because he/she may perceive that to be too limited, and will thereby begin to build new social networks with people he/she has more in common with or with others holding similar social positions or status (Gill & Bialski, 2011; Putnam, 2000). Thus, an immigrant might surround himself/herself with people who can provide him/her with the social resources he/she may need to integrate into the host society. In this regard, Reimer, Lyons, Ferguson, and Polanco (2008) emphasize that access to social networks of privilege cannot be taken for granted because they may be constructed in ways that do not include outsiders. The social network formation process may be different for both immigrant men and women. For instance. Some migrant women may form their local social networks by establishing acquaintances with other parents in the community to help each other with childcare, thereby cutting the cost of daycare (Ryan, 2007; White, 2010).

Leigh (2015) states that lack of socioeconomic resources or social networks such as extended family support often limits the immigrant's ability to maintain an organized family unit as they adapt and negotiate changes in the new environment. Consequently, the conditions in the

new environment may demand changes in traditional gender roles, which may lead to strain and stress on the relationships. Leigh (2015) highlights that some immigrants may be hesitant to adapt to the host country's culture, which limits their ability to explore countless opportunities in the host country.

## **Gender and Migration**

Contrary to the general perception that men are the principal actors or initiators when it comes to migration, some scholars argue that some immigrant women may either migrate as principal applicants with their families or alone to destination countries due to their desire to escape discrimination, oppression, or seeking freedom from male domination patriarchal norms, and organized crimes against females in the home countries (Ghosh, 2009). However, Ghosh (2009) indicates that social and cultural norms in some home countries may determine a woman's ability to migrate alone or not. For instance, whereas women in certain countries are permitted to migrate alone, this is not exactly the case in certain countries where there are severe restrictions on the social and physical movement of women (Ghosh, 2009). Interestingly, Ghosh (2009) indicates that the social and cultural norms in some countries may limit a woman's ability to either migrate alone or not to destination countries. Currently, gender immigration trends show that there has been a significant increase in the number of female migrants, constituting about half of the world's migrant population (Crush & Dodson, 2010; UN, 2016; Jolly & Reeves, 2005). This according to the UN (2016) may be due to the high demand for feminine dominated professions such as customer service, nursing, nursing aide, and sex work (whether by choice or as a result of sex trafficking).

It is worth noting that, some scholars argue that both immigrant men and women may experience pre-migration and post-migration stressful conditions differently (Torres & Wallace,

2004). Post-migration gender role changes can have a major impact on intimate partner relationships because an immigrant's perception and beliefs about intimate partner relationships may be deeply rooted in cultural ideologies that support and promote men's dominance over women, which is different from the stated values of institutions in the host culture (Guruge, 2007). Consequently, post-migration gender role changes may lead to stress, conflicts, and the risk of abuse as some men may resort to aggressive behaviors to compensate for their perceived loss of status (Boyd, & Grieco, 2003).

Inclan (2003) highlights that multiple factors influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships following migration. For example, an immigrant's ability to negotiate for a balance of power within intimate partner relationships may depend on the immigrant's social class or status (Inclan, 2003). Furthermore, many immigrants to Canada come from traditional patriarchal societies, and internalization of these patriarchal beliefs may limit the degree to which an immigrant woman may question or challenge the husband's authority (Statistics Canada, 2017; Lim, 1997). Importantly, post-migration experiences may offer immigrant partners the opportunity to renegotiate and rebuild their relationships (Hyman, Guruge, & Mason, 2008). For example, some husbands may learn to adopt flexible gender ideologies, and consequently, take on more household labor such as childcare than they were in their countries of origin (Sullivan, 2006; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Hook, 2006; and Coltrane, 2004). However, conflicts and abuse may occur if one partner (often the man) adopts a traditional gender role and resists equal sharing of household labor (Guruge, 2007).

Unfortunately, many African women are frequently disadvantaged in the process of migration to Canada because many of them lack the necessary skills or experiences, which are required to be admitted in Canada under the points-based system (Dorowolsky 2010; Gabriel

2006, & CIC, 2013). Consequently, many immigrant women gain admission to Canada as dependents of their husbands, and this may make them more vulnerable to spousal partner violence if their immigration status is dependent on a spouse or the spouse uses their economic and social dependency on the partner as a threat (Dorowolsky, 2010; Gabriel 2006, & CIC, 2013). Women and gender inequality have become the core issues in the national and international immigration discussions due to the role gender plays in family-related issues and human development (Ghosh, 2009; and Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, & Karimi, 2019). Unfortunately, some countries may have gender-biased immigration policies that favor men more than women.

### **Migration Implications and Challenges**

Ghosh (2009) points out that migration is a multidimensional phenomenon because it has both positive impacts (e.g., economic growth for both the host and source countries) and negative impacts (e.g., abuse of migrant workers by employers and natives).

**Immigration implications.** International migration may have economic, social, and cultural implications for both origin and destination countries. Loxley et al., (2015) note that international migration has two major implications (negative brain drain and positive remittances) for Africa. First, the loss of human resources or capital through the brain drain of highly skilled professionals. Approximately one in three (about 34 percent) of African immigrants in Canada has a bachelor's degree or higher, and this is a setback for growth and development in Africa (Loxley et al., 2015). Second, the potential gains through remittances. For example, in 2018, the Ghanaian government earned \$3.8 billion (constituting 7.3% share of the country's GDP); Kenya: \$2.7 billion (constituting 3% share of the country's GDP); Uganda: \$1.2 billion (constituting 4.5% share of the country's GDP); Egypt: \$28.9 billion (constituting 11.6%

share of the country's GDP); Nigeria: \$24.3 billion (constituting 6.1% share of the country's GDP); and Senegal: \$ 2.2 billion (constituting 6.1% share of the country's GDP) (World Bank's Migration and Development report, April 2019).

**Immigration challenges.** Presently, there are two divergent views on migrants. In one view, nativists in receiving countries may subscribe to the political rhetoric that migrants are a threat to national security, citing 9/11 as an example, whereas in another, some people consider migrants as an opportunity for the host country's economic development (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017). For instance, the anti-immigrant sentiment of Islamophobia is on the rise because nativists believe that immigrants adhere to their ethnic identity at the expense of their allegiance to the host national identity (Mensah & Williams, 2015).

Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, and Karimi (2019) emphasize that the discrepancies between pre-migration expectations of a better life or greener pastures in destination countries explaining how postmigration experiences of realities in the host countries may create challenges and stress for families. Immigrants encounter numerous intersectional challenges including gender role changes, exploitation, human rights abuse, discrimination, prejudices, economic pressures, and devaluation of foreign credentials or qualifications, language barriers, low income, loss of extended family ties, loss of kingship, loss of resources (e.g., time and money spent on education), unemployment and underemployment that directly or indirectly may affect their health (e.g., depression, frustration, and stress) and intimate partner relationships, and may as well hinder their successful integration into host society (Ahmed & Rasmussen, 2020; Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, & Sidani, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1999; Lim, 1997; Min, 2001). The loss of extended family ties according to Ahmed and Rasmussen (2020), may also be considered as positive because the relational bond

that exists between partners may be strengthened as they may rely on each other for moral, emotional, and psychological support. While, gender role changes, for instance, may be met with resistance by men from traditional patriarchal societies and for fear of being ridiculed by other men for not being men enough, other men may go against masculinity norms and embrace renegotiation of traditional gender roles. Alternatively, while migration may open many opportunities for recent migrants, many immigrants may resist the opportunity for change due to cultural conflicts and the tendency to maintain strong relational ties with their countries of origin. However, many immigrants embrace changes that may be due to increased demand on their limited financial resources and pre-migration family needs such as children's education.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented some of the reasons for migration, migrant's social network, the presence of Africans in Canada, gender relations in migration, migration implications and challenges, the rationale of this research topic, the purpose and significance of this study, and research questions. In the next chapter, I review the existing literature on the factors that contribute to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This section explores the structural factors (e.g., gender and patriarchal norms, immigration policies, and laws, and religion) and socioeconomic factors (e.g., income, education, employment, acculturation, and economic-based gender role reversal, reproductive health, and decision making, and age, health, and energy) that intersect to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants to Canada.

Power dynamics within intimate partner relationships may occur in different dimensions. For instance, the power dynamics that exist in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship may be different from that which exists between marital couples. The traditional patriarchal authority which considers men as head of the family may be practiced differently in different traditions and cultures, consequently, influencing power dynamics within intimate partners differently depending on individual social locations or context.

### **Approach to the Research Literature**

The search strategy was organized around broad areas that included international migration, African immigrants in Canada, and gender and power dynamics. The literature search comprised three phases: a search of online databases, a bread crumb strategy of scanning reference of lists of retrieved articles, and a review of articles citing the selected studies as additional sources. Electronic databases accessed included SocIndex, JSTOR, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar. The search terms/keywords were grouped in relevant areas such as marital satisfaction, international migration, immigrants in Canada, African immigrants in Canada, post-migration gender role changes, and gender and power dynamics, immigration, migration, transnationalism, and gender or masculinity.



Based on the literature search, I noticed that little research has been conducted on this topic despite the growing numbers of the African immigrant population in Canada. Therefore, this research study broadens our knowledge and understanding of the poorly understood power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta.

### **Power Relations in Intimate Partner Relationships**

The concept of power is central to the study of all social relationships in society (Straus & Yodanis, 1995). Power, according to Straus & Yodanis (1995) is the ability to change the behavior of another member of a social system. Furthermore, Wood, Avellar, and Goesling (2009) indicated that power dynamics within intimate partner relationships significantly determine the duration and quality of the relationship, as well as the well-being of the couple and other family members. Some scholars have emphasized that the unequal distribution of power within intimate partner relationships can have detrimental effects such as poorer psychological and physical functioning among women (Wood et al., 2009). Furthermore, Halstead, De Santis, and Williams (2016); Robles and Kiecolt-Glaser (2003) indicate that power imbalance within intimate relationships may lead to several negative outcomes including, but are not limited to intimate partner violence, increased risks of sexually transmitted diseases, depression, anxiety, and invalidation of identity.

According to the United Nations (2016), women are globally treated unequally in comparison with men, and gender inequality emerges in cultures that support and promote the domination of men and the subordination of women. Therefore, gender inequality has been a global issue over the past decades (Ozaki & Otis, 2017), and many influential international

institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) have promoted research and health interventions concerning gender-based power imbalances (WHO, 2009).

Undoubtedly, the existing economic, social, and political gendered power structures create a power imbalance in relationships and serve as obstacles to gender equality (Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998; Bravo, 2007). For instance, full-time working Alberta women, are on average paid \$31,000 less than their male colleagues annually (Lahey, 2016). Rabin (1996) and Lips (1991) add that partners who fail to recognize that the existing social, economic, political structures treat men and women differently, often pay a high price in their relationships. Recent studies have shown that there has been a significant change in the ways gender is affecting some relationships (Sullivan, 2006). Even though men and women may not be equal in their relationship, many partners strive for gender equality in their relationships (Sullivan & Coltrane, 2008).

Although the movement toward gender equality has not been as quick as expected by advocates, current studies indicate that many partners acknowledge that gender equality is a prerequisite for a successful contemporary relationship (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Some scholars argue that partners need to discard or transform, the old gender disparity structures that create obstacles to gender equality (Risman, 1998; Sanchez & Kane, 1996; and Sullivan, 2006). In addition, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) indicate that partners who accept without question systemic gender inequity may find themselves struggling to cope with the demands of this new generation, because intimate partner relationships are now forged in an environment of competing values about what constitutes appropriate behavior for both men and women. Furthermore, Greenberg and Goldman (2008) emphasize that the acceptance of unequal power in intimate relations, supported by gender inequity in the social sphere, contributes to

relationship failures. Moreover, as a result of inequity in intimate relations, many women are unwilling to stay in those relationships; likewise, many men no longer want a weaker and subservient partner.

### **The Link between Equality and Health**

Sternberg (2001) highlights that a good or equal relationship is related to better health status for both men and women. However, it is sometimes difficult to understand what partners mean by an “equal relationship” (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Harris (2006) highlights that there is little consensus on the varied meanings of “equal relationship”, which may include fair exchange, maintaining a balance of power, sharing household labor, status equality, and shared decision making (Deutsch 1999; Dienhart, 1998; Risman, 1998; and Schwartz, 1994).

### **Factors that may Impact Power Relations in Intimate Partner Relationships**

Family sociologists have widely adopted resource theory to explain power dynamics within intimate partner relationships (Straus & Yodanis, 1995). Resource theory assumes that the partner, who holds more valuable resources (e.g., income or education) or comes from a higher status background, makes most of the decisions and holds greater power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). In addition, Xu (2011) states that the partner, whose relatives provide more capital support or resources for the functioning of the relationship may have more power to influence the relationship. On the other hand, feminist theorists attribute power differentials within intimate partner relationships to social structures such as sex and gender stratification in patriarchal societies (Fox & Murry, 2004).

**African Context.** Previous studies on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships in Africa and Asia have revealed that power is usually measured in terms of who has the final say in decision making surrounding specific household matters, who control

income, the degree to which women's freedom of movement is restricted and other proxy measures, such as the age and educational differences between partners (Hogan, Berhanu, & Hailemariam, 1999; Mason & Smith, 2000; Kishor, 2000; Wolff, Blanc, & Gage, 2001). Connell (1987, 2005) emphasizes that partners could then enter into a relationship with an a priori set of power resources and a preconceived notion of gender roles when the culture is rooted in social norms and structural forces that privilege men and masculinity over women.

Although the comparative resources of each partner are essential to explain power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship, the cultural or subcultural expectations of each partner further influence power dynamics within the relationship (Rodman, 1972). Nevertheless, critics of resource theory argue that the theory may not explain power relations in traditional patriarchal societies where the husband is dominant in the family regardless of his resource contribution (Straus & Yodanis, 1995).

Feminist family therapists have indicated that societal gender inequities create power imbalances within intimate partner relationships (Goodrich, 1991). Power, according to Knudson-Martin (2013), is relational and manifests itself in how the needs, interests, and goals of one partner influence the other. However, Knudson-Martin and Huenergardt (2010) emphasize that both men and women may have relational ideas and expectations, which may conflict with other aspects of their societally embedded identities. In addition, Parker (2009) notes that people in powerful positions may be unaware of the needs and interests of their subordinates, because their privileged positions may blind them to the needs and interests of their subordinates. It is in this regard that, Overall, Hammond, McNulty, and Finkel (2016) have emphasized that the lives and goals of individuals in an intimate partner relationship depend on the cooperation of each partner.

## **Gender Norms, Sexual Violence, and Intimate Partner Relationships**

Rwafa (2016) indicates that gender roles are usually portrayed as static, fixed, and unquestionable. However, according to Jolly and Revees (2005), traditional gender roles may either be challenged and changed or maintained and enforced following migration. However, Creese (2012) states that migration to Canada may disrupt the notions of traditional gender roles within the family and a challenge to male authority, that many men may find it hard to negotiate. However, some men may resist traditional gender role renegotiation for fear of being ridiculed by other men. In addition, Boyd and Pikkov (2005); and Jolly and Reeves (2005) indicate that post-migration gender role changes may affect immigrant men and women differently concerning their integration into the host country. For instance, post-migration gender roles changes may lead to negative health outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression among immigrant men, consequently leading to partner physical/sexual abuse (Boyd & Pikkov, 2005; and Jolly & Reeves, 2005).

Certainly, gender norms are constructed and reconstructed through language, intimacy, and processes that maintain an individual's identity, interpersonal interaction, and societal systems and institutions (e.g. law, education, and economics); therefore, it often not noticed and not questioned in our daily lives (Risman, 2004; and Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2008). Previous studies indicate that gender norms may have implications for power imbalances within intimate partner relationships, reduce women's ability to refuse sexual advances, and negotiate safer sexual practices including condom use, which may lead to negative health outcomes including sexually transmitted diseases. (Ncube, 2010; Fladseth, Gafos, Newell, & McGrath, 2015; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Oliffe, Chabot, Knight, Davies, Bungay, & Shovellar, 2013). For instance, the WHO, UNAIDS, and other International Organizations have identified gender norms as one of

the core factors that contribute to the high rates of STIs and gender-based violence (WHO, 2007; Rivers & Aggleton, 1999). Consequently, any attempt by women to refuse sex or insist on safer sex may result in verbal, economic, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse (Pettifor, Macphail, Anderson, & Maman, 2012). In this regard, young women may adhere to social norms of sexual encounters as initiated by men, against female resistance because of the need to preserve their reputation (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994b). Therefore, societal gender role expectations may put pressure on women and impact their ability to fight against the social, cultural, economic, and political forces that conspire against their progress (Rawfa, 2016).

Significantly, the male partner's attitudes and beliefs may determine the use of condoms even if the female partner desires the use of condoms (Teitelman, Tennille, Bohinski, Jemmott, & Jemmott, 2011). For this reason, some researchers use partner behaviors such as condom use negotiations in sexual encounters as a measure of relational power (Teitelman, Ratcliffe, Morales-Aleman, & Sullivan, 2008). However, power dynamics surrounding sexuality may vary considerably across different African cultures. In many African contexts, such as among the Ashanti women of Ghana, the Muslim Jola women of Senegal, the Baganda women of Uganda, and the Centocow women of Southern KwaZulu-Natal province, women may demonstrate extensive sexual negotiation skills and are usually sexually expressive (Fiaveh, Izugbara, Okyerefo, Reysoo, & Korkor Fayorsey, 2015; Tenkorang 2012).

It is worth noting that, gender norms may have different implications for both women and men (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). For instance, women may view gender norms as a way of creating and reinforcing their unequal position in relationships, families, societies, and public domains, while for men, gender norms may fuel the concepts of masculinity that promote sexual

prowess, masculinity, and male control over women, and view condom use and fidelity as not masculine.

However, Bonaficio (2012) emphasize that migration may offer opportunities for female migrants to embrace gender equality, fight against internal and external forms of discrimination, and positively contribute to society. Furthermore, Bonaficio (2012) notes that immigrant's worldview may change as they embrace the host country's culture, consequently, shaping their personal beliefs and aspirations. Therefore, many immigrant women may challenge, transform, or negotiate the traditional prescription of womanhood (Bonaficio, 2009). Some scholars note that many immigrant women may experience a conflict of ideas and culture as they socialize and interact with the host culture or society (Singh, 2010a). Accordingly, many immigrant women may self-reflect on the intersectionality of the social systems, identify new symbols of womanhood, and break away from the old cultural values that seek to oppress women, and consequently may lead to personal strain and tensions within intimate partner relationships (Singh, 2010a).

**African Notions of Masculinity and Femininity.** In many traditional African societies, boys were taught to demonstrate masculinity through bravery and potency during the passage rite or initiation rite ceremonies, while girls were also taught to focus on their roles as mothers and how to conduct themselves toward males and future male partners (Addai, 2000). Failure to act within these expected gender roles may provoke derogatory name callings or punishments (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011). For instance, among the Akans of Ghana, a boy or man whose behavior aligns with the prescribed female role may be called derogatory names such as *benyin-besia*, meaning “male-woman” (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011). Similarly, a female whose behavior aligns with the prescribed male role may be referred to with the

derogatory name of *besia-benyin*, meaning “female-man” (Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2011). Some scholars indicate that women also play a role in establishing gender hierarchies, for instance, when they shame men who do not live up to masculine ideals (Goldstein, 2001). In many traditional African societies, this mode of socialization or gender construction often has religious values attached to it, and therefore may also influence people’s sexual activities and practices (Addai, 2000).

**African Masculinities.** Little research has been conducted on African masculinities (Pierre, Mahalik, & Woodland, 2002). Pierre et al. (2002) point out that African men are expected to conform to the dominant colonial culture’s gender role expectations (e.g. success, control, competition, and aggression), and this may culturally conflict with traditional African masculine values (e.g. cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group). Green (1994) indicated that racism institutionalizes the devaluation of African men while it concurrently idealizes their white counterparts. Consequently, many African men may adopt the notion of masculinity that is idealized by the dominant colonial culture, and may experience psychological distress from becoming detached from their African worldview, as they continue to operate within a culture that silences abuses, and devalues their existence (Pierre et al., 2002). This according to Johnson and Greene (1991) may make African men feel invisible and may compel them to internalize their anger and frustrations surrounding this notion of invisibility for fear of losing their jobs and means of supporting their families. Johnson and Greene (1991) further argued that such internalization of anger and frustration by African men may lead to negative health outcomes such as hypertension, sleep deprivation, obesity, and substance abuse.

**Notions of Masculinity and Femininity held by African Women.** According to Fiaveh et al. (2015), many African women define masculinity in terms of one of these three main



features: physical characteristics, reproduction, and responsibility. In other words, a man should be strong, able to sustain and maintain an erection, satisfy a woman sexually, impregnate a woman and parent children, and provide for his family (Fiaveh et al., 2015). However, some African women believe that a man's failure to fulfill any of these responsibilities does not emasculate him because such failures can be compensated for in other areas, such as being: caring and respectful to women; nice/kind; faithful and offering spiritual, emotional, and psychological support; and having high social status (Fiaveh et al., 2015). Women, on the other hand, are expected to display good personal hygiene practices, good housekeeping (including cooking, and training of children), modesty and humility, motherhood, and marital fidelity (Fiaveh et al., 2015).

Certainly, masculinity may be valued and practiced to varying degrees in different cultures, and the pursuit of some hegemonic masculine ideals may adversely impact one's health by adopting riskier health behaviors (Courtenay, 2000). For example, some men may feel emasculated, and their social positions weakened if they are unable to fulfill their responsibilities related to providing for their family, sexual performance, procreation of children, etc. and this may contribute to the use of drugs, alcohol, abuse, and suicide because they believe weakness attracts social stigma (Andoh-Arthur, Knizek, Osafo & Hjelmeland, 2018).

### **Patriarchal Norms, Kinship Structure, and Power Relations**

Stanistreet, Bambra, and Scott-Samuel (2005) describe patriarchy as a system of male domination and female subordination. According to Statistics Canada (2017), many immigrants come from countries that are traditionally patriarchal societies where men assume the breadwinning role, while women's roles are restricted to household labor such as childcare, and cooking; and this attempt to reinforce male hegemony and power imbalance between men and

women because women may become economically disadvantaged (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018). Therefore, a traditional African man's authority over his household is perceived as something of great benefit to the family because it helps to maintain order in family settings and groom men for leadership positions or roles (Harrison, O'Sullivan, Hoffman, Dolezal, and Morrell, 2006),

Accordingly, immigrants from traditional patriarchal societies may bring their own social and cultural norms to Canada, and many of these norms are supported by the state, religion, and ethnic ideologies that privilege men's power over women (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018). The husband is usually regarded as the head of the family, which reinforces his assumed position of power in the family (Kalunta-Crampton, 2013). The bride price or dowry a man pays to marry a woman in some cultures also further reinforces the husband's power and authority over the wife (Kalunta-Crampton, 2013). For example, it is unacceptable for wives to go out without their husband's permission, or argue with their husbands because the men perceive that to be a sign of disrespect, and does not align with submissiveness to their patriarchal authority (Uthman, Lawako, & Moradi, 2009).

**Patriarchy and Internalized Oppression.** Many immigrant women experience significant challenges in intimate partner relationships because of the gendered cultural expectations imposed on them (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015). Thus, many African women are culturally expected to be submissive and passive to male dominance, which reinforces power inequities in gender relations (Kalunta-Crampton, 2015). Many African women may further internalize these cultural norms of male dominance and female submissiveness as appropriate gender role expectations (Kalunta-Crampton, 2013; Ting & Panchandeswaran, 2009). Although patriarchy is culturally embedded and collectively accepted in many countries, it may be

exercised in varying ways and degrees by individual ethnic groups according to how each interprets the “right” to male dominance (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2013).

**Kinship Structure.** The family structure plays an important role in the traditional African society; therefore, a disruption of the family structure has serious socioeconomic implications for the traditional African society (Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). According to Nukunya (1992), social structures such as kinship structures (matrilineal and patrilineal) may influence power dynamics within an intimate partnership. Individuals in a matrilineal society, trace their lineage and descent through women, consequently, children in a matrilineal society, inherit from female members of the group because they are considered to be part of their mother’s kinship group (Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Nukunya, 1992; Clark, 1994; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Contrarily, individuals in a patrilineal society, trace their lineage and descent through men, consequently, children inherit from male members of the group (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Nukunya, 1992).

Some scholars have indicated that the traditional African kinship structures have conflicting allegiances because a wife in a matrilineal society, has her allegiances to her brother, who has the financial responsibility to support his sister’s children (Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Nukunya, 1992). While, a husband in a matrilineal society has his allegiances to his sister’s children to support them financially because they are considered to be his heirs (Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Clark, 1994; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Nukunya, 1992). In this regard, Nkansa-Kyeremanteng (1996) further explains that this “uncle-nephew” inheritance tradition was based on the assumption that, whereas the maternity of a child cannot be questioned in the Ghanaian Akan kinship traditions, the same cannot be said of the paternity of a child. Conversely, in the patrilineal society, children and wives are considered to be part of the

husband's kinship group, and inheritance is passed on to the man's children (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005).

Interestingly, some scholars have argued that the matrilineal kinship structures undermine a husband's authority over his wife because a woman in the matrilineal system maintains greater authority over her children and their upbringing because they belong to her lineage (Clark, 1994; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Nukunya, 1992). Therefore, matrilineal systems may increase the wife's bargaining power during negotiations within the family and decrease her cooperation without fear of retaliation, leading to a weaker relational bond between husband and wife (Clark, 1994; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Nukunya, 1992). For instance, the matrilineal Akan women of Ghana are taught through the socialization process to be strong, motivated, economically independent, and strive for success (Ojong, 2005).

### **Religious Beliefs**

McGuire (2007) defines religion as a combination of beliefs, values, and behaviors which provide an overall worldview. Rwafa (2016) adds that religion is about how people's belief and spirituality shape their relationships with God and one another. Lampe (1981) identified religion as one of the agents of socialization, and it is through this process of socialization that some women may sustain attributes such as self-sacrifice, compassion, humility, and obedience as both feminine and appropriate religious behaviors.

Religion, according to Mohammad-Arif (2005), is an instrument of community formation and identity re-composition and forms an integral part of the lives of many immigrants. Although many African immigrants in Canada are either Christians or Muslims due to their colonial heritage, African immigrants may feel discriminated against by the mainstream religions (Mensah, 2010). Consequently, many Africans with similar ethnocultural backgrounds may

prefer to live in established immigrant communities where there are already existing immigrant churches and mosques for easy access to places of worship and also create an atmosphere of belongingness (Mensah, 2014).

**Patriarchy and Religion.** Brinkerhoff, Grandin, and Lupri (1992) indicate that strong patriarchal beliefs are founded on the religious idea that Eve was created from Adam's ribs to serve him. Therefore, based on the scriptures, Brinkerhoff, et al., (1992) define patriarchy as a set of personal, marital, and religious beliefs that enable men to exercise power and authority over women and their services. Previous studies have also shown that some men use certain religious texts to justify their power and control over women (Nordien, Alpaslan, & Pretorius, 2003; Nason-Clark, & Nancy, 2009; Rwafa, 2016 and; Wendt, 2008). For instance, one of the religious texts frequently quoted is Ephesians 5:22-23 which states "wives submit to your husbands, as to the Lord, for the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992).

Rawfa (2016) highlights that culture and religion are often used as instruments to create gender inequalities. For instance, some scholars have argued that wearing of headscarves by Muslim women in public is a symbol of the inferior position occupied by women in Islam religion (Winter, 2006). Consequently, certain countries have placed a ban on wearing the headscarf in public places to prevent sex discrimination and thus promote sex equality (Winter, 2006). However, some scholars also argue that wearing of headscarves may have other meanings such as a symbol of opposition to assimilationist politics, support for Islam, a manifestation of piety and Islamic identity, or demonstration of women's subservient position to men (Dwyer, 1999; Killian, 2003).

Additionally, Takyi (2001) points out that some African traditional religions support the economic dependence of women on men, which makes it difficult for women to live independently of male domination. Consequently, some African women have internalized such religious beliefs and accept that it is right for the husband to exercise his power and authority over his family, as he assumes the role of the head of the family (Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016).

Interestingly, Binkerhoff and Mackie (1988) argue that religious imagery such as God is father, judge, shepherd, King, Jesus, and twelve male disciples all in diverse ways seem to support male supremacy. Accordingly, the Theologian Daly (1975) suggests that if God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and order of the universe that society be male-dominated. Binkerhoff and Mackie (1988) highlight that Christian teachings have two divergent views on womanhood or femininity. First, the condemnation of Eve as the first ‘sinner” responsible for humankind’s sufferings and expulsion from paradise. Second, the glorification of the Virgin Mary for bringing salvation to humankind by giving birth to Jesus Christ. Although with few exceptions, Binkerhoff and Mackie (1988) argue that the hierarchical structure of the church is consistent with religious teachings that reinforce male supremacy.

Similarly, Mensah, Williams, and Aryee (2013) argue that the church is a hierarchical institution founded on core tenets with little regard for gender equality because these tenets were formed before the age of enlightenment. For example, with few exceptions, most of the prophets, leaders, deacons, priests, clergymen, bishops, cardinals, and popes were males (Binkerhoff & Mackie, 1988). Barnes (2006) further argues that the church is one of the few institutions where a man could hold higher positions of power regardless of his social status. Mensah et al (2013)

state that some men, who may occupy lower positions in the labor market, may resort to a power grab in the church to elevate their social status to assert their power and authority over women. However, with the rise of new evangelical and Pentecostal churches, many women are now occupying higher positions in the church (Stacey, 1990). Ecklund (2006) points out that certain churches have adopted the progressive culture by placing women in leadership positions as part of their larger ideological commitment to justice and equality for all people.

Conversely, Stacey (1990) points out that certain religious teachings and activities may have a positive impact on marital or intimate partner relationships and overall health. For example, couples experiencing some difficulties in their relationship may resort to religious activities as such prayer, meditation, and Bible reading to resolve their issues and increase the sense of self-worth (Stacey, 1990). Stacey (1990) further adds that the quality of marital relations may improve for partners, who indulge more in religious activities because partners may internalize and accept these gender roles as either divinely ordained or part of obedience to a divine covenant or order. However, critics also argue that not all partners dealing with relationship crises will seek answers through religious activities because some would rather withdraw from such activities to avoid their partners and the embarrassment of being reminded by church members that divorce is immoral and unacceptable (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995).

However, Marshall (2010) suggests that one's level of education and religious perspective may influence expected gender roles, as these roles may either be perceived as divinely sanctioned or biologically based. For example, partners with more liberal religious views and higher educational levels may adopt more of an egalitarian type of relationship (Ogletree, 2015). In addition, Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1988) point out that one's religious

beliefs, values, and behaviors may change over time, and religious doctrines may be practiced in varying degrees within various religious sects.

### **Canadian Immigration Laws and Policies, and Power Imbalance**

Immigrants in Canada fall under three main categories: economic (e.g., entrepreneurs, investors, and skilled workers), refugees, and family reunification (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017). According to Abbasi-Shavazi et al (2017), immigration policies in many developed countries (e.g. Australia, Canada, the United States, and Germany) usually reflect their labor market needs and demographic objectives. For example, Canada adopted the new universal “Open Door” Immigration policy in 1967, a point system policy that allows immigrants to be admitted in Canada from non-traditional European and American sources (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). This involves a ‘human-capital accumulation formula’, a process where the government list attributes or characteristics that are in short supply and are of economic value to the host country’s economy (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). The criteria used for awarding points to these attributes include, but are not limited to the level of education, specific vocational skills, professional experience, occupation, arranged employment, age, and language proficiency (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). These criteria are also adjusted regularly depending on local economic and labor market needs (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). This policy according to Citizenship & Immigration Canada (2013), creates desirable conditions, and appealing opportunities for highly skilled migrants and their integration into Canadian society.

However, immigrant women are frequently disadvantaged when it comes to Canadian immigration policies because they are less likely to have the educational and/or formal work experiences which are required to be admitted in Canada under the points-based system (Dobrowolsky 2010; Gabriel 2006, & CIC, 2013). According to Cooray and Potrafke (2014), the



disparities in the levels of education among African immigrant women and men may be due to the way boys in many traditional African societies are groomed to pursue education or careers of their interest to become intellectually prepared for leadership positions in the family and society. For instance, in Zimbabwe, daughters are advised to respect their brothers because they will be future fathers or leaders (Rwafa, 2016). Consequently, many women receive an entry to Canada as dependents of skilled immigrant husbands, which increases their vulnerability to abuse, and economic dependency on the husband, because they are not permitted by Canadian immigration policies to receive state benefits such as Social security until 3 years, have passed (Merali, 2008; Alaggia, Regehr, & Rishchybski, 2009; Folson, 2004; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018).

**Power Imbalance.** Power according to Emerson (2003), is an inverse function of dependence: the more dependent one partner is on the other, the less power that partner has in the relationship. Therefore, some scholars argue that many skilled husbands take advantage of their dependent wives because of the gender-insensitive nature of the family immigration policies, lack of awareness of human rights among immigrants, dependent immigration status, and cultural beliefs about the traditional gender role in marital relationships held by many immigrants (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Shirwadkar, 2004).

A study conducted by the Canadian government in 2002, determined that the immigration policies place women at risk of mistreatment by the frequently male sponsor, due to the power imbalance between the sponsor and the sponsored (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002b). Although mistreatment is unacceptable in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002a), the mistreated person, who is usually the sponsored wife, may not exercise her rights to report

the abuse or mistreatment to local authorities because of the fear of economic hardships, social isolation, or physical retaliation (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014).

Unfortunately, the sponsored wife may also experience what Cote, Kerisit, and Cote (2001) termed as “Sponsorship Debt”. In this situation, the sponsored, who is often the wife is constantly reminded by the sponsor (the husband) and his extended family of her “debt” (cost of sponsorship) owed to the family (Cote, Kerisit, & Cote 2001). According to Cote, Kerisit, and Cote (2001), the modes of “debt payment” include, but are not limited to, doing extra house chores, giving her hard-earned income to the husband as a show of appreciation for assisting her to gain admission to Canada, and sometimes involves buying gifts for her in-laws, or being expected to tolerate emotional, physical and sexual abuse by the husband. However, Wong (2000) indicates that a study conducted on Ghanaian immigrants in Canada in 1998 revealed that the social support services (e.g. housing and childcare) offered by the Canadian government to divorced women and single mothers may serve to undermine the authority and power of husbands.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

Many African immigrants in Canada encounter racial discrimination when it comes to employment, education, and housing, which sometimes hinder their full integration into Canadian society (Laryea & Hayfron, 2005). To cope with some of these challenges, immigrants may prefer to stay in established immigrant townships or communities, where they can live closer to other immigrants of similar ethnocultural backgrounds to minimize feelings of alienation, develop a sense of belongingness, and sustain certain cultural practices such as the extended family system, and patriarchal norms (Mensah, 2010). The following discusses the socioeconomic factors that contribute to the power imbalance in intimate partner relationships.

**Education.** Due to the inefficient social support systems in Africa, many African parents may invest in their son's education due to the general perception that a higher level of education translates into future success and the belief that their sons will take care of them in their old age (Rwafa, 2016). Consequently, tensions and conflicts may develop between the mother-in-law (who expects to reap some benefits for investing in her son's education) and her daughter-in-law who also consider it as her legal right to enjoy her husband's material possessions (Rwafa, 2016). Marital conflicts may also occur when one of the partners can remit his/her parents, while the other cannot remit his/her parents due to financial constraints (Rwafa, 2016).

**Employment.** Societal gender construction of work roles may influence gender bias in the demand for labor (Ghosh, 2009). For instance, immigrant women are more likely to gain employment in the feminine dominated industries such as Healthcare (e.g., nursing, nursing aides), and domestic services (Ghosh, 2009; Yang & Lu, 2010). While male migrants are more likely to gain employment in the male-dominated industries such as construction and manufacturing (Ghosh, 2009), thereby, making migration a highly gender-biased phenomenon or pattern. Immigrant women are more likely to get hired quickly and earn more income due to the high demand in female-dominated professions such as nursing, nursing aides, and customer service (Langford, Waiyaki, & Fantino, 2000). Other scholars have attributed the increasing demand for feminine professions such as nursing and nursing aides to a rise in the aging population (Langford, Waiyaki, & Fantino, 2000). Consequently, financially independent immigrant women may demand changes or renegotiation of traditional gender roles as women's social mobility rises while that of men diminishes (Fisher, 2013; Hofmann, 2014). Therefore, some men may feel threatened by their wife's financial independence or autonomy, consequently, may lead to stress, frustration, depression, tensions, and marital conflicts, and

divorce in certain situations (Boyle, Kulu, Cooke, Gayle, & Mulder, 2008; Jolly and Reeves, 2005). However, some immigrant women for various reasons may not challenge the traditional gender roles but may rather maintain and enforce traditional gender roles within their relationships.

Creese and Wiebe (2012) emphasize that immigrants are frequently disadvantaged when it comes to employment opportunities and may have to navigate through unfavorable labor conditions compared to their native-born counterparts, who may take their social or cultural networks available for granted. Therefore, many immigrants may create their social networks with other immigrants through which they may obtain invaluable advice and important contacts for finding entry-level jobs (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). In this regard, the lack of social or cultural networks or misinformation may limit immigrant's access to better jobs, and consequently, immigrants may be compelled to rely on employment agencies for low-wage jobs which are often due to misunderstood and devalued foreign credentials by employers (Creese & Wiebe, 2012).

Interestingly, some immigrant women may sacrifice their employment opportunities due to financial constraints to take care of their younger children at home, support husbands to advance their careers, and ensure smooth family integration into the host society (Purkayastha, 2005; Salaf and Greve, 2011). Many immigrant women usually encounter challenges such as systemic discrimination in the labor market due to their race, nationality, gender, language barriers, and social isolation (Wong, 2014). However, Ghosh (2009) highlights that the challenges immigrant women encounter in host countries may be considered insignificant compared to their home country experiences.

Previous studies indicate the psychological impacts of unemployment may vary among immigrants depending on environmental factors and cultural backgrounds (Shen & Kogan, 2020). For instance, the psychological impacts of unemployment may be greater for an immigrant couple where at least one of the partners is unemployed compared to an immigrant couple with both partners employed (Clark, 2003). Therefore, an immigrant's unemployment status may hinder his/her ability to fulfill multiple needs (Shen & Kogan, 2020). In contrast, an unemployed native-born may not experience many of the obstacles that an unemployed immigrant experience due to his/her relatively privileged status in the socioeconomic hierarchy (Shen & Kogan, 2020). On average, immigrant men are socio-economically disadvantaged when it comes to unemployment issues (Kogan, 2004, 2011; Brynin and Güveli, 2012). This may be due to: first, many immigrants value work due to their pre-migration expectations and intentions to form new self-identity following migration (Shen & Kogan, 2020). Previous studies indicate that many immigrants may emphasize work as the only channel to achieve economic prosperity in the host society (Bartram, 2011). Thus, unemployment may not just be viewed as a loss of income, but also a failure to achieve economic prosperity, which may lead to a feeling of disconnectedness with the host society, frustration, stress, and depression (Shen & Kogan, 2020). Second, immigrants may value work more than native-born, especially when their immigration status is tied to their employment status. Many immigrants consider workplace or employment as not only fulfilling their strongest motive for migration but also a place for them to interact with mainstream society (Shen & Kogan, 2020).

**Racism and discrimination.** Berman and Paradies (2010) define racism as organized systems within societies that create evitable and unfair inequalities in resources, capacities, power, and opportunities across racial or ethnic groups. Racism, according to Berman and

Paradies (2010), operates at different levels such as internalized, interpersonal, and systemic, and can be manifested either through stereotypes, prejudices, beliefs, or discrimination. Recent data on racism indicate that there has been an increase of racial sentiments in many national and global contexts (Semyonov, Rajjman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006; United Nations, 2009; The Guardian, 2014; Gallup Poll, 2014).

Many African immigrants in Canada either speak English or French as a second language due to their colonial heritage (Mensah 2010). However, many first-generation African immigrants are discriminated in the Canadian labor market due to their accent as some employers complain of their inability to understand Africans when it is not in their interest of doing business with African immigrants (Mensah, 2010). On average, an immigrant is socioeconomically disadvantaged compared to a native because they may both have different starting points in the labor market due to racism and devaluation of foreign qualifications (Kogan, 2004, 2011; Brynin & Guveli, 2012).

Although the Canada immigration policies attract immigrants, other scholars have argued that structural inequities such as racism, discrimination, and the devaluation of foreign credentials of skilled immigrants by employers may hinder an immigrants' ability to establish a decent economic status, consequently leading to the downward economic status of immigrants and income disparities between immigrants and natives (Fisher 2013; Creese, 2012). Consequently, immigrants from lower-income economies may be compelled to undertake formal education courses in the host countries to re-train for certifications that are nationally recognized (Tharmaseelan, Inkson, & Carr, 2010). However, other scholars believe that immigrant's recertification in the host country may still not be enough to get a job that matches his/her qualifications due to prejudices, selection biases, and racial discrimination by employers (Coates

and Carr, 2005). Furthermore, post-migration experiences and challenges such as limited employment opportunities, prejudice, and discrimination can lead to stress, changes in relational power dynamics, and intergenerational relationships (Ayika, Dune, Firdaus, & Mapededzahama, 2018).

Although one's level of education may determine his/her socioeconomic resources such as income, and the degree to which education may impact these outcomes can vary from country to country (Kalmijn, 2013). Pierre et al., (2002) noted that structural racism may limit African men's and women's ability to attain full control of their own lives. However, Mensah et al (2013) argued that some immigrant partners have witnessed changes in relational power because some immigrant men through their experiences of racism and injustices in their new society have become more sensitive to the needs of women and gender inequities.

**Acculturation.** Kasturirangan, Krishnan, and Riger (2004) define acculturation as an adjustment process that takes place as the individual adapts to a new culture. Research studies indicate that immigrant women from traditional patriarchal societies are more likely than the men to adjust or acculturate into a country that holds divergent or different patriarchal beliefs and norms such as Canada (Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy, 2008).

Undoubtedly, an immigrant's successful integration into host or destination country is a lengthy and difficult process and may depend on multiple factors such as age, gender, level of education, language skills, pre-migration and post-migration experiences, availability of support from immediate and extended family, neighbors, community, immigration policies and employment opportunities (Myers, Gao, & Emeka, 2009). However, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Rivera, Guarnaccia, and Mulvaney-Day (2008) indicate that uneven levels of acculturation within families may lead to family cultural conflicts, which may have adverse mental health

impacts. For instance, shifts in post-migration gender relations or roles can have a major impact on intimate partner relationships because an immigrant male's perceptions and beliefs about gender roles may be deeply rooted in cultural ideologies that support the domination of men over women, different from that of the host culture and institutions (Beckett, & Macey, 2001; Guruge, 2007). Consequently, post-migration gender role changes may lead to stress, conflicts, and the risk of abuse because some men may resort to aggressive behaviors to compensate for the loss of power (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Jewkes, 2002; Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002).

**Economic-Based Gender Role Reversal.** Previous research studies have indicated that Immigrant women are more likely than their men to take further education or skill training programs to facilitate their integration into Canadian society (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Kaba, 2007). Consequently, many African women are more likely to earn more than their husbands following migration, and this often poses a threat to their patriarchal authority and subordinates their male provider or breadwinner role, leading to marital conflicts and stress (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Kaba, 2007). As reported in previous studies, there has been an increase in the number of women employed in the labor market over the past few decades particularly in industrialized countries such as Canada due to family financial constraints (Van de Vijver, 2007, Statistics Canada, 2018). This according to Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, and Sidani (2010) lead to an increase in financial independence and autonomy of women, influence their beliefs about gender roles surrounding being a breadwinner, engage men in house chores and child care activities, and provide opportunities for financially independent women to leave abusive husbands. Although these outcomes may be considered as positive for women in abusive relationships, they may be considered as negative for men because it may lead to stress, anger, frustration, and depression in men (Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, & Sidani,



2010). However, some scholars argue that although there has been an increase in the number of women employed outside the home, there has not been a significant change in the balance of power in many intimate partner relationships (Tichenor, 2005).

Adomako-Ampofo and Boateng (2008); and Adinkrah (2012) add that many African men may feel the need to adhere to masculine ideals by providing for all the daily needs of their families; therefore, they may feel emasculated and stigmatized if they are unable to fulfill their economic male provider or breadwinner roles. Furthermore, working wives expect their husbands to help with the household labor such as childcare, and many African men perceive these duties or roles to be something that is reserved for women (Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). An African woman who expects the husband to help with the household labor is sometimes accused of imitating the white woman or the white culture and breach of patriarchal norms (Ting & Panchaneswaran, 2016). However, some scholars indicate that some men are doing more of the house chores than before to support their full-time working wives (Coltrane, 2004). Other scholars have also argued that doing house chores cannot be used as a measure of relational power as some women may prefer to do more house chores not because of power imbalance within the relationship but rather because they perceive men to be incapable of doing certain house chores well (Tichenor, 2005).

Interestingly, Gergen (1999) indicate that individuals may discard certain behaviors that do not support their well-being once they become aware that gender is socially constructed. For example, an immigrant father may forego the traditionally male role of his original culture and be more involved in household labor including childcare (Gergen, 1999).

**Reproductive Health and Decision-Making.** Partners may engage each other in the decision-making process to achieve desired results or outcomes (Hardill, 2002). However, this

may involve negotiations and compromises whenever there are disagreements, which may sometimes require partners to do some trade-offs to achieve the desired goals (Hardill, 2002). However, many studies in developing countries show men's dominance in reproductive decision-making and this may reinforce power imbalance within the relationship (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; DeRose, Escarce & Lurie, 2007). Dodoo and Tempenis (2002) point out that the marriage transactions and the bride price a man pays to get married in many traditional African societies bestow the reproductive decision-making authority on the man. Komter (1989) considers the husband's influence on their wife's reproductive decision as a form of "hidden" or "invisible" power. Komter (1989) defines "hidden" or "invisible" power as implicit values, beliefs, or preconceptions that precede behavior. For example, a husband may be exercising invisible or hidden power when his wife adheres to his desires to have more children than she would have desired or when she adheres to dominant norms to avoid conflict or instable relationships (Komter, 1989). Consequently, many women in a monogamous relationship in traditional African societies may be willing to bear more children than she would have desired to satisfy her husband's reproductive goals and for fear of losing the husband to another woman (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 1997).

The essence of marriage in traditional African societies is to conceive and bear one's biological children because children are considered a source of power, pride, assurance of family's name continuity or continuity of lineage, heritage, proof of fertility, and social security (insurance for parents in their old age) (Gyekye, 1996; and Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, & Van der Spy, 2004). Abasili (2011) further emphasizes that childbearing is considered to be both a social and religious obligation in marriage in many traditional African societies. Some religious texts such as "be fruitful and multiply" have been used by certain religious groups to support this

notion of childbearing (Abasili, 2011). Usually, a prayer such as “you shall give birth to male and female in nine months and we shall gather here again to celebrate the birth of your baby” is said for the newly married couples during both the traditional and Christian marriage ceremonies (Abasili, 2011).

Therefore, many women in traditional African societies may not even consider using contraceptives, because they may be opposed by the husband, extended families, patrilineal kinship traditions, and religious doctrines (Addai & Trovato, 1999; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). However, in the Ghanaian Akan matrilineal kinship traditions, the reproductive decision-making authority is bestowed on the woman because children are considered the “property” of the mother and not the father’s as seen in the patrilineal kinship traditions (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005).

The idea of voluntary childlessness or voluntary motherhood is foreign in many traditional African cultures because of the high social status, power, and prestige attached to childbearing (Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, & Van der Spy, 2004); therefore, the decision not to bear children is viewed as a protest against normative notions of masculinity and femininity (Horne, 2010). A childless marriage is disliked in many traditional African societies and a childless woman may have lower bargaining power during negotiations within the family compared with a “fruitful” woman and may even be considered as a witch or evildoer (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Similarly, women bearing only female children may experience mistreatments from the husband and in-laws in traditional African societies, where male children are expected to maintain the traditional patriarchal structures (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005).

Furthermore, a childless woman according to Remennick, (2000) and Orji, Kuti, and Fasubaa, (2002) may be excluded from important social activities and ceremonies and may not be allowed to touch or cuddle a new baby. Therefore, a childless woman would do everything

within her capability to look elsewhere for solutions such as visiting the prayer camps for divine intervention if she is a Christian or visiting the native doctors/fetish priests to perform certain rituals if she is a traditionalist. However, some scholars have argued that a woman's socioeconomic resources such as level of education, income, and economic prosperity may compensate for the loss of social status and power due to childlessness (Dolpyne, 1991; de Vaus, 2002).

According to Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, and Van der Spy (2004), women are often blamed by the extended families for the couple's childlessness after a year or two into the marriage because of the notion that men are naturally strong and healthy. Contrarily, some researchers have argued that multiple factors or medical conditions such as poor ejaculation, low sperm count, and poor ovulation may account for the couple's childlessness situation, but unfortunately many traditional African societies do not take into consideration the aforementioned medical conditions (Abasili, 2011).

**Multiple Partners/Polygamy.** Summers (1999) notes that in certain traditional African societies, masculinity may be exhibited in having multiple partners and many children. Previous studies have shown that men who embrace the traditional notions of masculinity have multiple partners and adopt health risk behaviors such as unsafe sexual practices and substance abuse (WHO, 2003). Substance abuse, for instance, influences one's cognitive processes such as reasoning ability, judgment, and health risk behaviors (Kalichman, Simbayi, Kaufman, Cain, Cherry, & Jooste, 2005).

Amoakohene (2004) emphasizes that the ability to have multiple wives or girlfriends to produce many children and the right to discipline and control wives reinforces male power and prestige in traditional African societies. Polygamy is culturally permitted and encouraged in

many traditional African patriarchal societies which reinforce power imbalances within intimate partner relationships (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). However, scholars like Maticka-Tyndale (2007) have indicated that having multiple sexual partners puts one at risk of contracting STIs. Men are sometimes encouraged by some extended family members, and friends to try other alternatives such as marry another wife or have multiple partners if the wife cannot bear him children, and this reinforces men's authority over women (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). Previous studies conducted in African societies indicate that family and cultural values play major roles in the lives of many Africans and can also make life miserable or unbearable for a childless wife (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). However, some scholars have argued that due to economic hardships, many African men have redefined masculinity with regards to childbearing and that only fewer wealthy men are now having more children and multiple wives (Wolff, Blanc, & Gage, 2001).

**Age and Health.** Adinkrah (2012) points out that age plays an important role in marital relationships in many African traditional patriarchal societies where the elderly are accorded great respect. The bigger the age gap (which usually favors men), the greater the likelihood of power imbalance within intimate partner relationships. Therefore, males in traditional African patriarchal societies are advised to marry younger women to maintain the patriarchal tradition of male dominance and female submission (Adinkrah, 2012).

Nicholas (2000) emphasizes that men are socially constructed to believe that they are invulnerable to illness and that help-seeking is a sign of weakness. Men, according to Addis and Mahalik (2003) are less likely than women to seek help for a variety of mental and physical health problems, less likely to seek needed medical care on time, and also less likely to follow medical advice. Furthermore, Courtenay (2000) and Williams, (2003) indicate that the tendency for men to minimize pain and suppress the expression of need may be responsible for men's

lower rates of engagement in preventive health care visits. This according to Nicholas (2000), may partially explain the increased mortality rates associated with cancer and heart disease among men. Therefore, Courtenay (1998a, 2000c, 2003) have indicated that the attitudes and beliefs that one adopts can have an impact on both one's health and one's health behavior. For instance, on average, men in Canada die 4 years earlier than women (Statistics Canada, 2017), because men and boys are more likely than women and girls to engage in behaviors and beliefs that undermine their health and well-being (Courtenay, 1998a, 2000c, 2003). Biggs, Brough, and Drummond (2017) also add that as couples age there is a natural decline in health and energy hence the healthier spouse may have more power advantage in the relationship.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explored how structural factors (e.g., gender and patriarchal norms, immigration policies and laws, and religious beliefs) and socioeconomic factors (e.g., racism and discrimination, education and income, and acculturation and economic-based gender role reversal, reproductive health and decision-making, and age, health, and energy) influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among immigrants in Canada. In the next chapter, theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks are discussed in relation to the research study.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) and Dew (2007) emphasized that it is very important for qualitative researchers to adopt a theoretical framework so that data can be interpreted sensibly with insight, and not with preconceptions and prejudice. There are many theoretical frameworks a qualitative researcher can adopt; however, the chosen framework should relate to the findings and allow for greater generalization of the study (Punch, 2005; Rosman & Rallis, 2012).

Researchers must discuss in detail the chosen theoretical framework so that the audience and other researchers can make meaning of the study (Punch, 2005). This chapter presents key theoretical perspectives that are relevant to the current study's exploration of relational power dynamics and includes: theory of gender and power, gender and social constructionism, intersectionality theory, transnationalism, and acculturation theory.

### Theory of Gender and Power

Connell's theory of gender and power involves three basic social structures (a sexual division of labor, sexual division of power, and the structure of cathexis) that underlie the power relations between men and women (Connell, 1995; Wingood & DiClemente, 2003). *The sexual division of labor* refers to both societal and institutional mechanisms that restrict a woman's economic potential and financial independence. Consequently, this creates an economic power imbalance and may lead to poor health outcomes. *The sexual division of power* refers to power differentials within relationships that are socially sanctioned and reinforced at the institutional level through mass media. *The structure of cathexis* refers to the effectiveness of cultural norms and gender role expectations concerning women's sexuality and their sexual experiences or relations with men. Therefore, these structures define the gendered relationship that exists

between men and women at societal, institutional, and individual levels, and consequently, shape health behaviors and outcomes for both men and women (Connell, 1995). This theory according to Pulerwitz, Barker, Segundo, and Nascimento (2006), explains the influence of gender-based inequities within a social system, where males may have the social support to control decisions including sexual ones.

Connell (1995) and Creese (2012) indicated that masculinity and femininity may be practiced to varying degrees in different contexts. Hegemonic masculinities are perceived to be the most legitimate and respected forms of masculinity because they prescribe a particular set of behaviors and traits that are accepted by many men as socially desirable and a standard measure of masculinity (Connell, 1987). Therefore, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as manly qualities that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Consequently, femininities and other masculinities are less valued and less respected in relation to hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, several studies indicate that there are other forms of masculinities, and individual men may contest these hegemonic forms, despite the ridicule and physical threats they may experience (Adomako Ampofo, 2001).

Even though the specific features of hegemonic masculinities may vary across groups and contexts, several aspects such as competitiveness, assertiveness, physical strength, aggression, risk-taking, self-reliance, courage, heterosexuality, sexual activity, adopting the role of protector and provider of the family, honor, and lack of feminine traits are believed to be common across cultures (Hooper 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009). For instance, in the American context, dominance and control are the core concepts of hegemonic



masculinity (Johnson, 2005). However, behaviors that do not fit within the prescribed gender roles or norms may lead to exclusion, ostracization, violence, threats of violence, loss, and other forms of punishment (David, 2014). While behaviors that do fit within the prescribed gender norms or roles receive approval, acceptance, admiration, inclusion, freedom from violence, and other forms of reward (David, 2014). Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, and Wojnowicz (2013) assert that men may over-perform masculinity in ways that they would not normally have when faced with threats. Over-performance of masculinity may be driven by men's desire to regain masculine status both in their perceptions and that of others. Therefore, some men may over enact masculinity based on the responses or feedback they receive from others especially when the feedback is self-defeating (Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, & Wojnowicz, 2013).

Although hegemonic masculinity is the idealized form of masculinity, many men fail to attain it despite continuous striving (Connell, 1987, 1995). Kimmel (1994) further adds that men often strive to attain these masculine ideals due to the strong social pressure to maintain an esteemed masculine gender identity. Consequently, boys at an early age learn to distance themselves from things that are considered to be feminine, thereby reinforcing the gender hierarchies between men and women (Goldstein, 2001). However, many immigrant men from traditional patriarchal societies may experience loss of male privilege and authority enjoyed before migration. Consequently, an immigrant man may experience a new definition of masculinity or what it means to be a real man in Canada, which may conflict with his cultural expectations of what it means to be a man. In this regard, an immigrant man may be compelled to negotiate the new terrain to gain status as a 'good man.'

Many research studies have indicated that most of the valued masculine attributes may have negative connotations because men who endorse these traditional or dominant norms of

masculinity frequently engage in poorer health-related behaviors, and experience greater health risks than men who hold less traditional beliefs (Courtenay, 1998b). However, certain aspects of masculine attributes may promote good health in men (Courtenay, 1998b). For example, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), emphasize that possessing the “provider” attribute may be perceived as positive. Wade (2008) further adds that possessing codified masculine attributes such as self-reliance and aggression may be perceived as positive because they may create health awareness, promote personal wellness, and may motivate men to avoid poor health habits. Indeed, these potentially positive elements create ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of hegemonic masculinities; therefore, they also serve a role to promote their durability in social interaction.

In contrast, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic femininities as the characteristics accepted as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Although femininities are not constructed similarly, several codified aspects such as gentleness, empathy, sensitivity, care, sweetness, compassion, tolerance, nurturance, and deference are believed to be common across groups or cultures (Hooper 1999; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009). Interestingly, some scholars argue that women often do not adopt hegemonic femininities because they feel less threatened and less motivated to reclaim femininity (Willer et al., 2013). Furthermore, women are frequently advised to stay away from practices that are not considered feminine such as the sexual desire for other women, promiscuity, aggressiveness, and frigidity because of stigma and sanctions they attract (Willer et al., 2013).

## **Gender and Social Constructionism**

Although there exist biological differences between men and women, which to some extent may explain the differences in their behaviors, the social constructionists, and scholars like Judith Butler agree that gender is socially constructed or performed, and is performative, rather than merely based on biological sex assigned to a person at birth that defines men and women as two distinct classes of people (Butler, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Crawford, 1995; Tichenor, 2005; Goldstein 2001). Gender norms, which are the behaviors or characteristics that are considered appropriate for both men and women, are deeply embedded in culture or social structure, thereby shaping, and defining behavior, and limiting what is considered possible in relationships. Therefore, women and men think and act in the ways they do because of feminine and masculine norms they adopt from their culture, which are usually passed down from parents to children, older siblings to younger siblings, and peers to peers. (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Courtenay, 1999).

The social constructionists believe that people are not simply conditioned by their cultures to act, but rather they significantly contribute to the construction and reconstruction of the dominant norms of femininity and masculinity as they interact with their environment (Butler, 1990; Crawford, 1995; Courtenay, 1999). Andersen (2010) adds that gender is a social construct, and that it does not exist in isolation but rather intersects with other identities such as race and class. Therefore, gender norms are not static, but rather continually changing because it is socially constructed and reproduced through people's actions and interactions with their immediate environment (Courtenay, 1998a). In this regard, Rwafa (2016) indicates that the extent of oppression immigrant women experience may vary depending on their exposures and experiences. For instance, a woman living in an urban setting may be conscious of her social

location, and consequently, may be able to confront the forces or factors that hinder her growth when compared to a rural woman.

Importantly, Rawfa (2016) argues that normalizing cultural stereotypes about women's social conditions may allow men to perpetuate gender inequalities between men and women. Rawfa (2016) further adds that African societies should recognize women's value and contributions to economic growth and not view them as weaker sexes.

Thus, gender and power, and social constructionist theories help us to better understand how women and men construct gender, what resources are available to them to construct gender, and how they learn to use these socially constructed identities to demonstrate gender (Courtenay, 1999).

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Campbell (2016) indicated that intersectionality as a theory has evolved beyond its original tenets and is widely and diversely used by social science researchers. Cole (2009) defines intersectionality as an analytical and theoretical approach that considers the meaning and consequences of socially defined constructs and provides ways to understand the complex nature of social phenomena. In addition, Brah and Phoenix (2004) define intersectionality as a complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects produced by the interaction of social, economic, political, cultural, and symbolic factors intersecting in each context.

Hankivsky (2014), and Carbin and Edenheim (2013) highlight that intersectionality may be used as a theory, methodology, concept, perspective, paradigm, lens, and framework. Bilge (2013) notes that the intersectionality concept emerged as a tool to counter multiple oppressions. In addition, Hankivsky (2014) indicates that the intersectionality concept may be used to challenge the existing inequalities in society, promote social justice, and may help policymakers

to develop policies or adopt better approaches to deal with complex social issues. Scholars like Eriksson-Zetterquist and Styhre (2008) have argued that the intersectionality concept can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Black American Freedom Movement. However, it wasn't until 1989 that Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality'.

Crenshaw (1989) indicated that various social identities or categories interact to influence the lives of individuals who represent those categories. Crenshaw (1989) further argued that the multiple marginalization experienced by African American women can be understood within the context of traditional boundaries of gender, or race/ethnicity, religion, age, and discrimination. Crenshaw (1989, 2003) highlighted that social identities are mutually constituted and experienced simultaneously. Many scholars have used this concept to explore how gender, race, and class interact to determine outcomes in personal relations Collins (2005). Therefore, the different power relations between these categories interact to strengthen or weaken, compete, or support each other to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

The theory of intersectionality indicates that different forms of oppression operate simultaneously to determine outcomes. For instance, immigrant women may experience different forms of oppression from immigrant men, while at the same time experiencing different forms of racialized sexist stereotypes from white women. Though these racialized sexist stereotypes against immigrant women may vary across national borders because black women are often perceived to be slaves, aggressive, physically strong, oversexed, and underserved of protection. Contrarily, white women are perceived to be passive, physically weak, undersexed, and needful and deserving of protection.

Furthermore, Hankivsky (2014) and Crenshaw (1989, 2003) indicated that social categories interact and co-constitute with one another to create unique social locations that vary

according to time and place. Hankivsky (2014) and Crenshaw (1989, 2003) emphasized that inequities are never the result of a single factor, but rather the collective outcome of the intersections of independent social factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion, power relations, and experiences. Therefore, there is the need to examine the different dimensions of social life or the collective impact of multiple independent factors that intersect to determine outcomes rather than to focus on a single factor to determine or explain outcomes (Hancock, 2007).

In addition, McCall (2005) noted that social identities or categories are not static but are fluid and continuously interact to create inequalities in society. Hankivsky (2014); Davis (2008) and Warner and Brown (2011) note that intersectionality theory articulates how human behavior or socially constructed identity is influenced by the interaction of different social factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, and social status mutually interacts and mutually supplement each other to produce power relations and experiences. According to Crenshaw (1989, 2003) and Hankivsky (2014), these interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power such as laws, policies, state governments, political and economic unions, religious institutions, and media.

**Approaches to Intersectionality.** To explore and analyze the intersectional complexities of social life, McCall (2005) identified three different approaches to intersectionality: anticategorical, intracategorical, and intercategorical complexities. *Anticategorical complexity:* This approach, according to McCall (2005), considers social categories or identities as irreducibly complex, and flexible rather than fixed. *Intracategory:* This approach according to McCall (2005), recognizes that there is a link between social categories and inequalities, and the only way to eliminate inequalities in society is to eliminate social categories that place people

into different categories based on race, class, sexuality or gender. *Intercategorical*: This approach according to McCall (2005) is based on the assumption that inequalities already exist among the social groups in society. Therefore, this approach analyzes the already existing social inequalities or categories in society across multiple dimensions and the changes in social inequalities or categories that occur over time.

**Key assumptions of the Intersectionality Framework.** According to Hankivsky (2014), the intersectionality framework is based on the following core tenets: a) the human social life can be explained by the interactions of multiple social categories such as gender, race, and socio-economic status that shape an individual's realities. According to Hankivsky (2014), these social categories are multi-dimensional, complex, dynamic, and operate together; b) During the analysis of social problems, the importance of any of these social categories or structures cannot be predetermined. In this regard, Hankivsky (2014) indicates that these social categories, and their importance, must be discovered through investigation; c) power relations and social locations are linked. However, Hankivsky (2014) indicated that power relations can change with time, depending on one's geophysical or social location; d) privilege and oppression can be experienced simultaneously depending on one's social context or location; e) power relations are shaped by multiple layers of individual's experiences with the broader social structures and systems; f) in conducting research, researchers have to take reflexivity into consideration when setting priorities and directions of the research study. Accordingly, Hankivsky (2014) emphasizes that scholars, researchers, policymakers, and activists should consider their social position, role, and power when taking an intersectional approach; and g) the intersectionality concept aims for transformation, coalition-building among different groups, and promotion of social justice.

Certainly, the intersectionality framework, according to Dill and Zambrana (2009) and Weber (2010), assumes that there are multiple systems of social stratification in society that interact to create a structure of domination and oppression. In addition, Stewart and McDermott (2004) point out that social groups are not homogeneous; and individuals in social groups are ranked in the social hierarchy of domination/privilege and oppression based on an individual's social and economic status (Berg, 2010). Therefore, each individual's worldview or experience may be shaped by his/her position in the social hierarchy of domination/privilege and oppression (Ritzer & Stepniski, 2013). Furthermore, Browne and Misra (2003); and Collins (2005) emphasize that an individual may hold a simultaneous position of oppression and privilege in different systems of social hierarchy. For instance, an individual may be an oppressor, (e.g., may be a member of a group that oppresses others), or and an oppressed (e.g., may be a member of an oppressed group) (Browne & Misra, 2003; Collins, 2005). In other words, a white woman, for example, may be oppressed within her race due to her gender but may be privileged by her race/ethnicity when compared with other races/ethnicities or other ethnic minorities (Browne & Misra, 2003; Collins, 2005).

### **Transnationalism**

Muthuki (2016) defines transnational space as a social space consisting of a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, and solidarity and cooperation. While, Basch, Glick, and Szanton (1994) define transnationalism as the process by which immigrants establish and maintain multiple social networks which link their countries of origin and host countries together. On the other hand, Mahler and Pessar (2001) used the term transnationalism to refer to immigrant's political, economic, social, and cultural processes (e.g., remittances, investments in



home countries, celebrations of home country's national holidays, and formation of ethnic Associations in host countries) that go beyond the borders of a specific country.

Transnationalism, according to Morawska (2014) and Glick et al, (1999) may impact the lives of many migrants in various ways, thereby influencing their integration into the society, and causing problems of disunity, social instability, and exclusion. Though transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, Glick et al. (1995) indicated that the use of new technologies (e.g., airplanes, telephones, satellite technology, faxes, and computers) have made movements and communications across borders easier and faster.

Importantly, at the core of transnationalism is the gender factor that intersects with other multiple factors such as cultural values, norms and beliefs, religion, age, race, and ethnicity, to create, change, and strengthen the transnational spaces (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Thus, gendered ideologies and processes are negotiated within intimate relationships, which shape the gender relationships (Mahler & Pessar, 2003).

Within the transnational space, Levitt and Glick Shiller (2004) stated that immigrants often experience alienation, loss of family ties, loss of social status, and lack of power to take full control of their lives as they see themselves in several transnational contexts or spaces and do not belong anywhere. Accordingly, Levitt and Glick Shiller (2004) indicated that immigrants experience alienation at multiple levels due to subordination and the feeling of starting a new life in a new country with few social and economic resources.

The gendered intersection of gains and losses in hegemonic masculine status in the diaspora may contribute to the negotiation of other acceptable forms of masculinities (Pasura & Christou, 2018). However, previous studies indicate that men may respond to the loss of hegemonic masculine status in different ways such as resort to domestic violence, drug, and

alcohol abuse (Kabeer, 2007). Pasura and Christou (2018) suggested four possible strategic responses of men who experience loss of hegemonic masculinity: (a) *Withdrawal*: This is where an African migrant man withdraws from the traditional marriage and/or return to their homelands to regain their privileged position again; (b) *Accommodation*: This refers to a situation where an African migrant man consciously negotiate and embrace his new masculine identity; (c) *Resistance*: In this case, an African migrant man resist the new gender roles or changes in gender roles and values to preserve 'ideal' African cultural practices; and (d) *Endorsement and Subversion*: This refers to a situation where an African migrant man consciously embrace and enact respectable forms of masculine behavior such as sharing household duties, while simultaneously and strategically using religious and social spaces to resist changes to gender relations and roles.

According to Pasura and Christou (2018), the diaspora is increasingly becoming a transnational space to reorder social categories and social status and negotiate other acceptable forms of masculinities.

### **Acculturation Theory**

Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2006) define acculturation as a process of cultural change and learning that individual experiences as a result of prolonged intercultural contact. Abbasi-Shavazi et al., (2017) indicate that one of the core issues of migrants is the extent to which they adapt to the host country. Abbasi-Shavazi et al., (2017) further states that migrants may experience different degrees of adaptations depending on their migration history, socio-demographic, economic backgrounds, age, marital status, investments made in the country of origin, duration of residence in a host country, degree of attachment to the country of origin and

host country, income, level of education, employment, personal working and living conditions in the host country, and the nostalgia of country of origin.

According to Berry (1997), cultural changes such as language, customs, norms, and values occur during the acculturation process between the migrating ethnic group and the host culture. Acculturation may have more impact on the immigrant ethnic culture than on the host culture (Berry, 1997). Berry, Kim, and Power (1989) identified four modes of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. *Assimilation* occurs when an immigrant rejects his/her cultural identity and accepts the host society's identity and culture (Berry, 1997; Abbasi-Shavazi, Sadeghi, & Mohammadi, 2017). *Integration* occurs when an immigrant maintains a positive attachment to the new society, as well as their original culture and community (Berry, 1997; Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017). *Separation* occurs when an immigrant retains his/her cultural heritage and identity while rejecting the new culture (Berry, 1997; Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017). *Marginalization* occurs when an immigrant neither retains his/her original culture nor forms relationships with the host culture (Berry, 1997; Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017).

Interestingly, Sussner, Lindsay, Greaney, and Peterson (2008) assert that African immigrants are more likely to fit into the "integrated" or "separated" modes of acculturation, rather than the "assimilated" or "marginalized" modes because of the strong ties they maintain with the mother country, and their desire to maintain their cultural norms or values. However, acculturation experiences may influence certain aspects of one's cultural beliefs and values including traditional gender roles, despite the strong ties one maintains with the mother country (Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006). Therefore, acculturation theory provides a useful lens

through which to assess the shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Western Canada.

### **Summary**

In this chapter theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework were discussed. On the whole, intersectionality as a theory thus deepens our understanding of how structural and socioeconomic factors interact with gender to determine outcomes or influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. In the next, the methodology of this study is discussed in detail.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

This section begins by discussing my philosophical orientation to this study, followed by details related to the research design, research settings, participant eligibility criteria, data collection methods, thematic data analysis, data management, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and potential risks assessment of this study.

### **Research Philosophy**

A researcher's world view is influenced by his/her ontological and epistemological stance, which has implications for their research study and findings. Importantly, a researcher's philosophical stance clarifies his/her choice of the study design, the research methods, and the theoretical framework that may influence the quality of study findings (Jackson, 2013).

Therefore, my prior knowledge of the phenomenon of study may influence my choice of study design and interpretation of findings. To the maintain quality of the study findings, I made conscious efforts to self-reflect on any biases, values, and beliefs that could have influenced the interpretation of the study findings.

This research was informed by the epistemology of social constructionism, and uses the theoretical lens of intersectionality to analyze the data. Although some other theories or approaches could have been used to inform the interpretation of findings from this research study, I chose this theoretical framework because it best served the objectives of this study to explore the shifting power relations between partners, while considering the numerous intersecting contributors to their social location and perceived status and power. Social constructionist theorists believe that the world or reality is constructed by individuals as they interact and engage with their environment, and make meanings (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the

application of social constructionism and the theoretical lens of intersectionality to this research study were appropriate. Social constructionism captured the multiple meanings participants attached to the phenomenon of study, and it also helped to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). While the theoretical lens of intersectionality captured the multiple factors that intersected with gender to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants, helped to answer the research question, and also revealed in the study findings that privilege and subordination can be experienced concurrently (Hankivsky, 2014).

### **Research Design**

An exploratory descriptive qualitative research study design, incorporating semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary data collection technique was applied to meet the research objectives. This design was appropriate because I possessed little was knowledge about this topic area and was thus a good fit for this research on the changing power dynamics within intimate partner relationships following migration. Sandelowski (2000) notes that an exploratory qualitative research design is most appropriate when a researcher is interested in expanding their knowledge and understanding of a topic. For this research, such a design supported acquiring an in-depth understanding of the factors that influenced power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. Also, this research design adopted a holistic approach to the research by identifying and describing the phenomenon in detail, while also acquiring an understanding of the meanings attributed to it (Creswell, 2013).

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted in West African immigrant communities in Lethbridge. Lethbridge is the fourth-largest city in the province of Alberta by population

after Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer, and the third-largest city by area after Calgary and Edmonton. It is a religiously, culturally, and socially diverse city. According to Statistics Canada (2017), the province of Alberta, has the fastest-growing immigrant population, with many of the immigrants living in Calgary and Edmonton. According to the 2016 census, the African immigrant population was 1,935, constituted of 1,055 men, and 880 women (Statistic Canada, 2017). The African immigrant population in Lethbridge includes, but is not limited to Ghanaians, Liberians, Kenyans, Nigerians, Ethiopians, Congolese, South Africans, and Cameroonians (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Individual participants were interviewed separately in a natural setting at a convenient place and time (including their homes), which provided them the comfort, the safety, security, and confidentiality needed to engage in the research interview, and share their experiences. Herzog (2012) emphasizes that the location of the interview is extremely important in research to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Therefore, I ensured that the interview setting was private so that others did not observe or overheard the conversation.

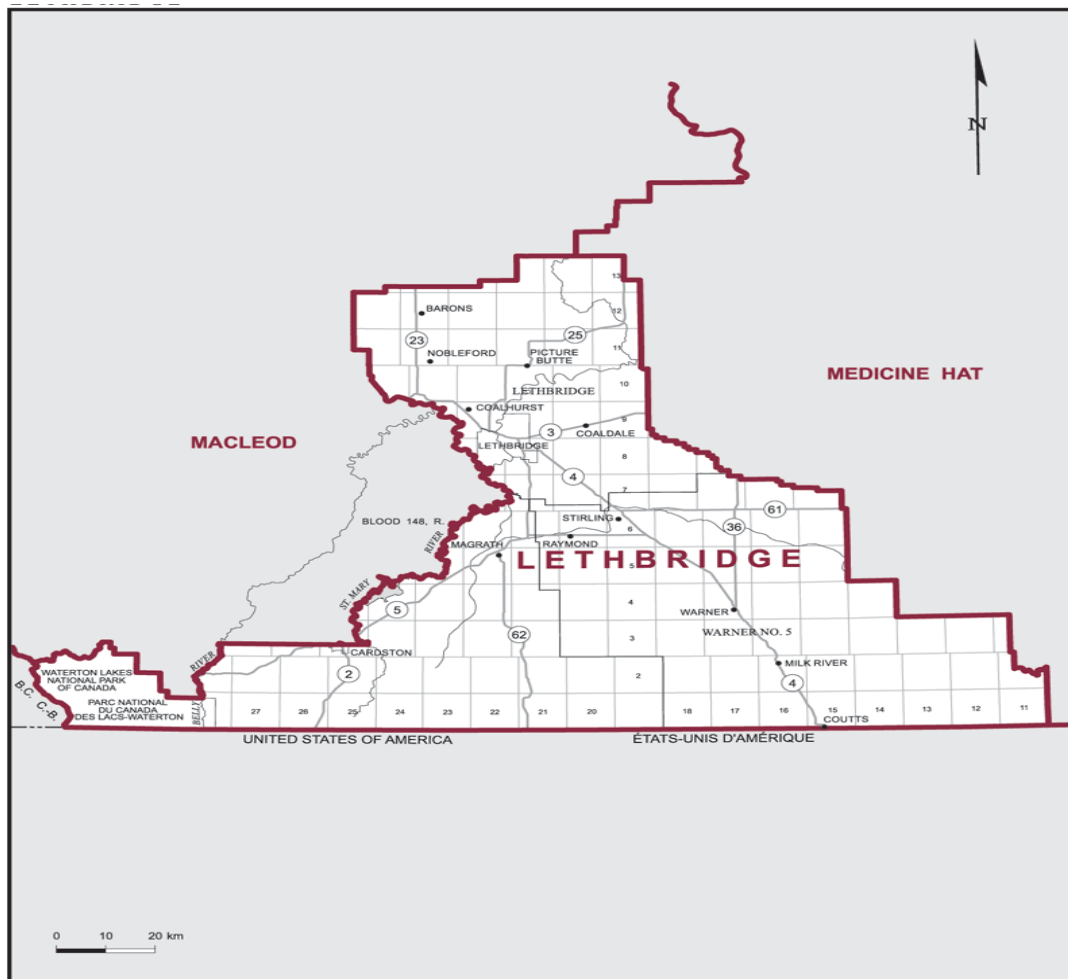


Figure 1. Map of Lethbridge.

### **Participant Recruitment**

To maximize diversity in the study, the nonprobability sampling method of purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods were used to identify participants who fit the criteria. Following my migration to Lethbridge, I have been actively involved in the African immigrant community, especially the Ghanaian Immigrant Association in Lethbridge. Due to COVID-19 and the directive to restrict in person interactions by the Ethics Review Committee, a few West African immigrants were purposefully contacted on the phone for their voluntary participation in the study. Also, with the help of my few acquaintances in the African immigrant community, other West African immigrants, who fit the criteria, were contacted to voluntarily participate in



the study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicate that a non-probability sample is appropriate for qualitative research because it provides a deeper understanding of complex human issues rather than the generalizability of findings. The purposive sampling technique assisted me to select specific West African immigrants, whose qualities or experiences provided valuable information for a deeper understanding of the phenomena in question (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). While the snowballing sampling method helped to identify additional eligible participants that were difficult to reach due to COVID-19 (Creswell, 2013).

The study sample was comprised of 10 eligible participants (5 males and 5 females) from Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia were recruited to capture the perspectives of both men and women. The informed consent form (Appendix A) was emailed to the recruited participants after ethics approval was received from the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee. I ensured that eligible participants read and understood the purpose and the nature of the study, the procedures, the time commitment involved, the responsibilities of both the researcher and the participants, the potential risks and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, and the right to continue or withdraw from the study without any penalty, before asking them to complete and sign the informed consent form (Appendix A). All the eligible participants were contacted on the phone, which served to establish a relationship of trust and confidence between the interviewer and the participants. During the recruitment process, I assured the participants that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected at all times as these data were stored in a safe and secure filing cabinet, and saved and encrypted as electronic files on a password-protected computer.

**Eligibility Criteria.** The eligibility criteria for participants included being: (a) a first-generation immigrant from Africa; (b) at least 18 years of age; (c) a person who has knowledge

and experience of being in a relationship (e.g. currently married or cohabiting, divorced or widowed for at most 5 years, people in long term relationships); (d) met and coupled before or after they were in Canada (d); able to communicate in English, and; (e) Someone who has lived in Canada for at least two years. The participant recruitment poster (Appendix B) outlined the eligibility criteria to potential participants.

### **Data Collection**

Data, according to Yin (2016), serve as the foundation for a research study. In qualitative research, data can be obtained through interviews, observations, collection and examination of materials, and feelings or senses (e.g., Sensations of coldness or warmth of a place) (Yin, 2016). Due to COVID-19, participants were interviewed using Zoom video conference software. Participants were interviewed in a natural setting that preserved their confidentiality, including their home (if they lived alone) or any chosen place of convenience outside their homes, which provided them the safety, security, and confidentiality needed to engage in the research interview. The interview was scheduled at a mutually agreed upon a convenient time for each participant. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews using Zoom video conference software with eligible participants who had knowledge and experience of shifting power dynamics in intimate partnership following immigration to Canada from West Africa. This interview method allowed for the natural flow of conversation, while pursuing interesting themes until theoretical saturation occurred (Lloyd, Gatherer, & Kalsy, 2006). I also had the opportunity to engage some of the participants in an informal conversation after the interviews to clarify issues raised during our formal interview session.

The interview was digitally recorded with the consent of the participants. One of the advantages that digital recording of participants' responses had over note-taking was that it

ensured that the participants' responses were captured in their own words without losing any phrase or language (Bryman, 2012). To further ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality, the interview recording was stored locally, using a secured place in my home (where I live alone), and a password was required to join the meeting. However, although all security precautions were taken when using Zoom, confidentiality could not be fully guaranteed since the Internet was being used as the medium of communication. The Zoom recorder was tested before the interview to make sure it was in good working condition. I also ensured that there was no background noise to capture the conversation clearly. I established a trusting relationship with the participants before the interview began by engaging the participants in general topics (e.g., life experiences, and daily routines), and this made them felt comfortable and willing to engage in honest conversation. I also took brief notes of the responses of each participant, and noted body language, gestures, postures, and communication patterns displayed by participants during the interview which might indicate that they might be censoring their response related to a perceived power imbalance. The interview session lasted roughly an hour with each participant. However, I maintained an 'open door' in case there was the need to go back for further clarification on any of the participant's responses and also for the purposes of member checking (Appendix C). The participants spoke uninterrupted and I probed further when there was the need to acquire additional clarification. In addition, a conscious effort was made to allow the participants to freely express themselves without any response influence that could have affected the validity of the research findings.

This study was funded through my monthly graduate student stipend. As a show of appreciation, each participant received a \$10 gift through e-transfer to thank them for their participation. Demographic information (Appendix D) was also gathered from the participants

before collecting data and helped to understand how these demographics may influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships. The interview guide that was used to guide the semi-structured interviews in this study is available in Appendix E.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity in qualitative research interviews can be bi-directional: the researcher's influence on the participant; and the participant's influence on the researcher (Yin, 2010). The use of a reflexive journal helped me to clarify my pre-conceived ideas about power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants, and I also attempted to maintain a clear separation between my ideas, and the foci and interpretation of data collected. The following are the characteristics I possess which created some challenges in conducting this research as a male African who: (a) was born and raised in Ghana, West Africa, (b) has a recognizable Ghanaian native middle Name, (c) has a Ghanaian/African accent, (d) has knowledge of power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants (f) and has been in contact with people who have knowledge and experience of power dynamics within the intimate partnership among West African immigrants. As an African researcher, all these reflexive elements directly or indirectly may have affected the participant's selection process, data collection, interpretation, and analysis of data, results, and conclusions. Though not easy, I attempted to set aside my biases or preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of study during the interviews to minimize barriers to genuine communication. This assisted the researcher (myself) and the participant to establish a trust relationship before collecting the data, thereby enabling the research participants to share freely their experiences without reservation. I also checked back with some of the participants to make sure the interpretation of the data represented their perspectives and views of the research participants.

## Data Analysis

A general inductive approach was used to analyze these qualitative data. Data were analyzed rigorously by transcribing all interviews verbatim, checking for accuracy against the original recording before engaging in coding. I applied thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clark & Braun, 2017) to inductively explore the themes and experiences of participants. Thematic analysis is considered as the foundational method for qualitative analysis because it identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes within and across data about participants' experiences, perspectives, behaviors, and practices (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Bryman, 2012). Using Microsoft Word, the interview transcripts were imported, coded, categorized and themes generated applying Clarke and Braun's (2017) thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006; 2017) thematic analysis approach uses six steps to manage and analyze data: (a) *Familiarization with the data and identification of items of interest*: All written transcripts were read line by line several times to get an overall understanding and comprehension of the data as generated themes were identified before beginning the coding process; (b) *Generating initial codes*: Initial codes were identified to capture important phrases and statements about the data. Codes were manually generated grouped into categories according to their similarities and differences. The coding process assisted me to organize these data, identify and document the links within and between concepts and experiences in the data. Holloway and Wheeler (2010) indicate that codes are labels or names assigned to sections of the data to help formally organize the key concepts of the data while maintaining the context in which these concepts occur. Important phrases or statements that related directly to participants' experiences were identified from each participant's transcripts; (c) *Generating themes*: I organized codes into potential themes. Similar codes were clustered together. Relevant codes

were gathered, reviewed and potential themes were identified; (d) *Reviewing potential themes*: I identified the nature and character of the potential themes, considering the quality of data to support the theme. I made sure that the potential themes were meaningful and related to the extracted code and the entire dataset; (e) *Defining and naming themes*: I named, described, and defined each theme to capture the overall story of the data analysis; (f) *Producing the final report*: I finalized the order of the potential themes and related them to my research questions and the literature review. The final report depicted a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. The credibility of these findings was further validated by cross-checking the descriptions and themes with the participants. Figure 2 shows Braun & Clarke's phases of thematic analysis.

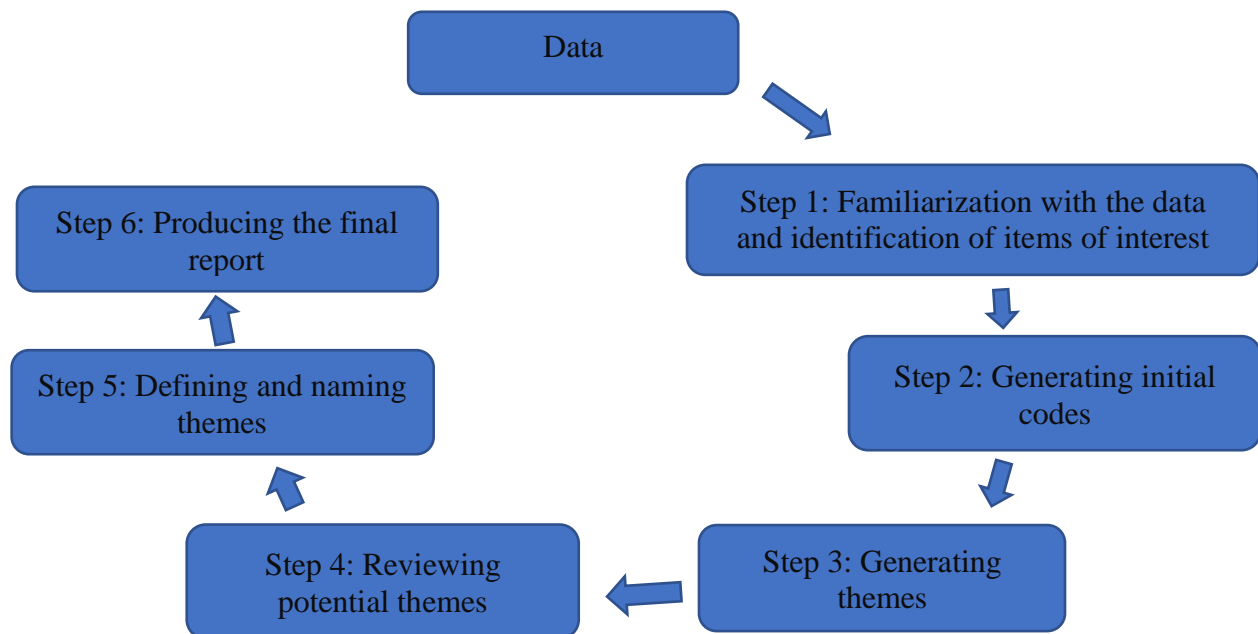


Figure 2. The six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017).

## **Data Management**

I ensured that participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected at all times. However, under Alberta law, everyone has a mandatory obligation to report any revelation of potential crimes such as child abuse, elder/vulnerable adult abuse, to appropriate authorities. In this regard, each participant was made aware of the limits to confidentiality as I am legally required to report revelations of a potential crime such as child abuse during the study, to appropriate authorities (e.g., the police or Children's Services) or disclosure of a situation that places the safety of the participant or others at risk. I did not have additional reporting obligations as I do not belong to a regulated profession that has an additional code of conduct or ethics. These data collected from the field were shared with only my supervisor. I transferred the digital audio file after each interview to an encrypted folder on my password-protected computer. All hard copies of data including handwritten notes, transcribed data, external drive (USB) key, and other all documents bearing the names of participants are kept in a safe and secure filing cabinet, for confidentiality reasons and are used only for this research. These data are also saved on a password-protected computer and encrypted electronic files. I used pseudonyms so that the identities of the participants were not revealed in the public domain, especially during the analysis and write up of findings. Consent forms are stored in a separate locked file from any study data. All raw data both hard copies and digital files on the digital recorder, and on my computer/digital storage will not only be deleted but digitally shredded and disposed of in the Faculty of Health Sciences confidential shredding after 5 years.

## **Trustworthiness or Scientific Rigor**

Qualitative researchers employ several assessment criteria to establish trustworthiness in research studies (Liamputtong, 2013). Establishing rigor or trustworthiness in qualitative

research is very important, and it is through an accurate interpretation of findings that represent participants' realities, integrity, and competence of the research are demonstrated (Liamputtong, 2013; Bryman, 2012). To establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggested four widely known criteria applicable for the assessment of research of any kind: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For these reasons, I applied Guba and Lincoln's (1985) four assessment criteria for a qualitative research study to establish trustworthiness for this study.

**Credibility.** According to Chilisa (2012), credibility depends on the ability of the researcher to represent as accurately and adequately as possible the multiple realities held by the participants. Johnson and Waterfield (2004) add that the representation of the participant's reality is considered accurate and adequate if the participants can recognize the description and interpretation made by the researcher. Credibility was established in this study by purposefully selecting the participants, reading all written transcripts several times, member checking with selected participants (Appendix C), and attempting to put aside all my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of study (Chilisa, 2012). I checked back with some of the participants after all data had been collected and analyzed to make sure they represented their views and meanings. Member checking is a technique that consists of continually checking the researcher's data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All these helped to ensure that I accurately stated the views of the participants in the data.

**Dependability.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) define dependability as a situation in which another researcher can follow the decision trail used by the researcher in the study. Carpenter and Suto (2008) indicate that dependability relies on how accurate and adequate the research findings (description, interpretation, or theory) represent the data from which they were generated. Tobin



and Begley (2004) emphasize that the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that the research process is logical, traceable, and well documented. Dependability was achieved through a thick description of the research methods, theories, rigorous data analysis, constant comparison, member checking, peer review, and coding and re-coding with the help of my supervisor to ensure dependability (Chilisa, 2012).

**Transferability.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the findings should fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity. Liamputtong (2013) indicate that transferability provides the foundation for the generalization and application of qualitative research findings to similar individuals, groups, or situations. I relied on adequate purposeful sample size and thick description of the factors that influenced power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Western Canada to facilitate transferability (Chilisa, 2012). Rich or thick description is very important in qualitative research because it provides the readers and other researchers, a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study through a detailed description of the research setting, the participants, and research methods and processes, so that decisions about transferability are made (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010).

**Confirmability.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) define confirmability as the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations, and perspectives. I ensured confirmability through attending to reflexivity, thick description, creating an audit trail, and with the support of my supervisor and committee (Chilisa, 2012). Liamputtong (2013) indicates that establishing an audit trail helps the researcher to provide a detailed clarification of his/her theoretical, methodological, and analytic choices so that the reader and other researchers can understand how the research was carried out

and how the researcher came up with his/her findings and interpretations. I also ensured confirmability by sharing preliminary findings with some of the participants through member-checking to ensure that the findings represented their experiences and were deemed accurate by participants before any dissemination occurred.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethical conduct is an important part of research because it involves informed consent, avoidance of deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Prior to conducting any ethical research, Creswell (2013) emphasized that it is important that the researcher acquire ethical approval from an institutional review board, and adhere to all ethical research guidelines during the research study. In this regard, ethical approval was acquired from the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee before the study began, and this study adhered to all the guidelines for ethical research outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2014), which include, but are not limited to confidentiality, respect, integrity, honesty, and informed consent.

**Concern for Welfare.** Due to COVID-19 and the directive to restrict in-person interactions by the Ethics Review Committee, the consent form (Appendix A) was emailed to all eligible participants. I ensured that a consent form was completed and signed by the participants once they read and understood the purpose and the nature of the study, procedures, the time commitment involved, the responsibilities of both the researcher and the participants, the potential risks and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, and the right to continue or withdraw from the study at any point in time, for any reason, without any penalty or consequence. A copy of the consent form was given to these participants for their reference, so that they could contact me or my supervisor if they had any further questions or wished to withdraw from the study. I

continue to ensure that participants' privacy and confidentiality are protected at all times, as these data are stored in a safe and secure filing cabinet in a locked office, or saved and encrypted as electronic files on a password-protected computer. I used a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants. All files on the digital recorder or on my computer/digital storage will be deleted and digitally shredded. Hard copies and all raw data will be destroyed by shredding or deleting them after 5 years.

**Justice.** I ensured that all participants were treated with equity and fairness (Bryman, 2012). I did not exploit participants by forcing or inducing them to participate in the study. I ensured that the burdens and benefits of this study did not weigh on any one individual. I made the effort to establish an equal power relationship with the participants and created a free and honest environment where participants shared their experiences (Liamputtong, 2013).

**Respect for Persons.** I ensured that each individual exercised his or her judgment and participated freely without coercion or influence. I did not pursue consent or interviews with those who were impaired or had diminished autonomy. I ensured that participants understood the nature and purpose of the study. This enabled them to make meaningful and informed choices. I also ensured that participants' views were accurately represented. I ensured that issues of psychological, physical, economic, or social discomforts were addressed appropriately. There were no identified conflicts of interest since this study was not funded by any particular organization. I ensured that the dignity and welfare of both the researcher and the participants were maintained by not using any humiliating, dangerous, offensive, and degrading language. The findings were reported to some of the study participants and my supervisor. I also sought advice from my supervisor on issues I had little or no knowledge on.

## **Potential Risks Assessment**

The principle of non-maleficence in research states that the researcher has the responsibility to ensure that the physical, emotional, and social well-being of the research participants are maintained, and that participants are not adversely affected by taking part in the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The risk in this study was minimal (that is, within acceptable minimum daily risk). During the interview, none of the participants experienced any emotional or psychological breakdown that required counseling services (Appendix F). Participants were called a day before the scheduled interview day to confirm participation and all the participants confirmed their participation. Response bias is a huge risk in research. To mitigate this, participants were interviewed in a natural setting that preserved their confidentiality, including their home (if they lived alone) or any chosen place of convenience outside their homes, that provided them the safety, security, and confidentiality needed to engage in the research interview. I also engaged the participants in an open and honest discussion and developed the mutual trust that enabled the participants to freely express themselves with minimal risk.

Although I maintained a cordial relationship with the participants, I did not find it difficult to terminate the relationship with the participants, since my interactions with participants were brief and limited to the time of the initial interviews and a follow-up interaction as part of member-checking results. However, I maintained an open door to participants if they had any additional questions or concerns, or if they decided to withdraw their consent at any point in time during the study.

## CHAPTER 5: STUDY FINDINGS

### Introduction

In this chapter, I present the study findings illustrating the shifting power dynamics within the intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, southern Alberta, Canada based on individual interview data from ten (5 men, 5 women) West African immigrants in Lethbridge. This chapter starts with a summary of the demographics of the research participants, followed by a discussion of the overarching theme and sub-themes. These study findings capture the perceptions and experiences of the West African immigrant participants surrounding power dynamics within their intimate relationships. I also discuss how the intersecting structural barriers (e.g., gender and patriarchal values and beliefs, immigration policies and laws, and religious beliefs) and contributors to power dynamics (e.g., gender, income, education, racism and employment, social status, age and health, children, and extended family pressure) influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. The chapter concludes with suggestions from the participants on how to improve gender relations and their understanding of what contribute to equal and fair relationships.

Figure 3 shows the intersecting factors that influenced power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge.

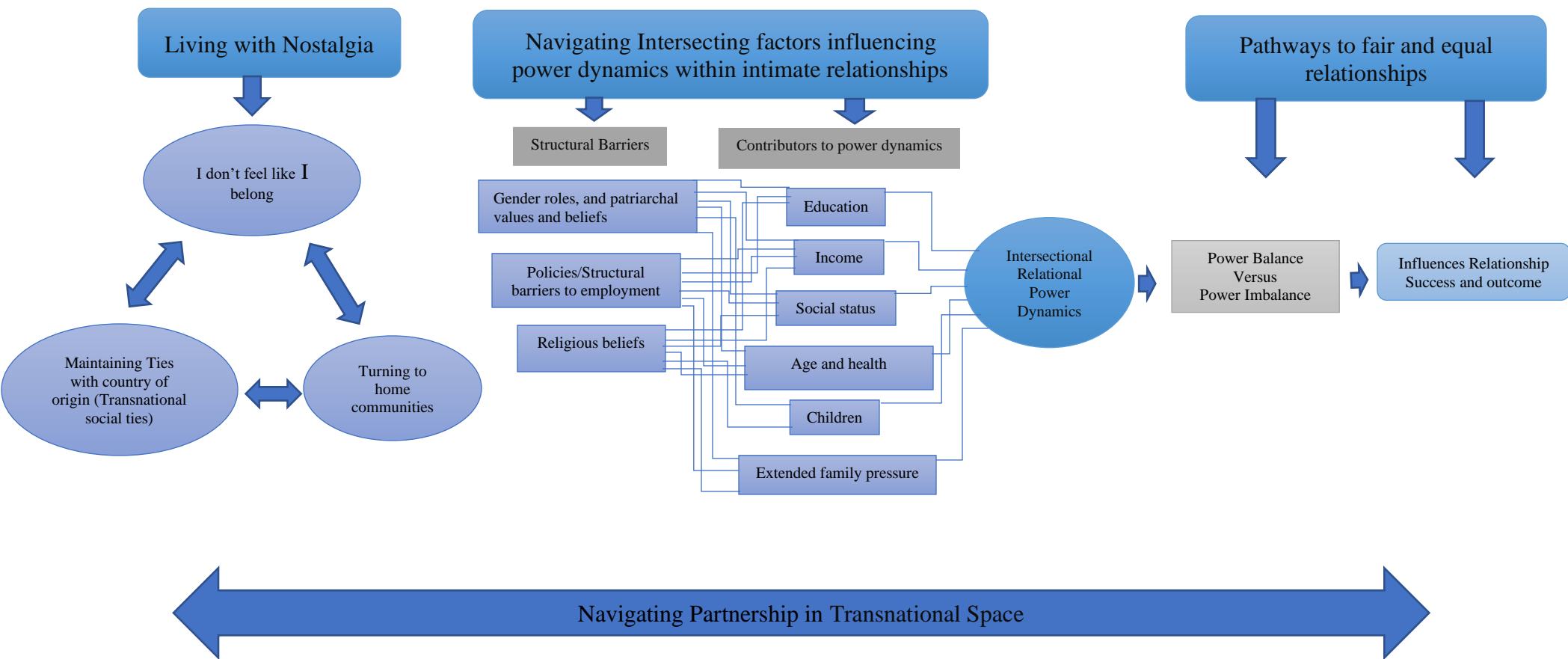


Figure 3. Intersecting factors influencing power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship in Transnational space

## **Demographic Characteristics of Participants.**

To obtain demographics information about the participants, a questionnaire (Appendix D) was emailed to participants due to COVID-19, who then completed it and emailed it back to the researcher. These data assisted in the exploration of how economic, social, and cultural factors influenced power dynamics within these West African immigrant's intimate partner relationships. This study was informed by interviews with ten West African immigrants (five males and five females). All participants were residents in Canada for three years or more. The participants were either single, married, or divorced, with or without children. All the participants had spouses or partners from West Africa, currently or in the past. Two of the participants were in a marital relationship. Seven participants had at least a bachelor's degree and professional work experience before migrating to Canada. Two of the participants obtained their degrees in Canada and one participant, who is already a nurse, is about to pursue a degree program in Public Health. Interestingly, all the participants were either studying healthcare-related courses or were already healthcare professionals. Despite the existence of differences based on migration history and background, there were some cultural similarities. The participants migrated to Canada through a range of migration processes as: students, skilled workers, refugees, and through family reunification. For example, one participant migrated to Canada to escape the civil war in his country, four participants came in as students, four of the participants migrated to Canada under the Federal Skilled Worker Program, and one participant came in through the Family Sponsorship program. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1

*Demographic Data for Research Participants*

Characteristic		Number	Percentage
Country of origin	Nigeria	5	50%
	Ghana	4	40%
	Liberia	1	10%
Gender	Male	5	50%
	Female	5	50%
Relationship Status	Single	1	10%
	Married	6	60%
	Divorced	3	30%
Age range	26-35	3	30%
	36-45	4	40%
	46-55	3	30%
Has Children	Yes	8	80%
	No	2	20%
Occupation	Students (Nursing)	2	20%
	Healthcare Professionals	8	80%
Level of Education	Diploma	1	10%
	Bachelor	5	50%
	Post-Graduate	4	40%
Level of income	less than \$2000	3	30%
	\$2000 - \$3000	4	40%
	More than \$3000	3	30%
Religious Affiliation	Christian	10	100%
Immigration Status	Citizen	6	60%
	Permanent Resident	3	30%
	Temporary Resident Permit	1	10%



## Description of Themes

The study findings reflect these data gathered during semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with ten West African adult immigrants. Due to COVID-19 and the directive to restrict in-person interaction by the Ethics Review Committee, these data were collected using the Zoom video conference software. Participants had the opportunity to express themselves freely, while I took notes and observed the participants as they responded to the questions. During the interviews, participants answered a broad range of questions that helped to highlight the intersecting factors that influenced power dynamics within the intimate partnerships of West African immigrants.

The overarching theme of these data is *Navigating Partnership/Collaboration in Transnational Space*, which highlights the experiences of West African immigrants as they learned behaviors that promoted fair and equal relationships, and unlearned behaviors that did not promote fair or equal relationships. Applying the thematic analysis approach as presented by Clarke and Braun (2017) for data analysis, I identified three key sub-themes contributing to the overarching theme: (a) living with nostalgia (b) navigating intersecting factors influencing power dynamics within intimate relationships, and (c) pathways to fair and equal relationships. Table 2 illustrates the overarching theme, key themes, and sub-themes of interviews.

Table 2

*The overarching theme, Sub-themes, and Sub-themes elements of Interviews*

The overarching theme: “Navigating Partnership/Collaboration in Transnational Space”			
Sub-themes	Living with nostalgia	Navigating intersecting factors influencing power dynamics within intimate partner relationships	Pathways to fair and equal relationships
Sub-theme elements	I don’t feel like I belong	Gender roles, and patriarchal values and beliefs	Effective communication and mutual understanding
	Maintaining ties with country of origin (Transnational social ties)	Policies/Structural barriers to employment	Accepting individual’s differences in views and values
	Turning to home communities	Religious beliefs	Learning and unlearning behaviors
		Education	A good relationship is a partnership/collaboration
		Income	
		Social status	
		Age and health	
		Children	
		Extended family pressure	

### **Sub-theme #1: Living with Nostalgia**

The participants indicated that moving away from one's country of origin to Canada was certainly not an easy task because it involved a lot of sacrifices such as financial costs, and leaving behind family members, spouses, child(ren), and friends. Some of the participants, whose nuclear family joined them later in Canada narrated that it was difficult and frustrating living in an unfamiliar environment without their spouses and child(ren). Many of the participants expressed their nostalgic feeling for their homeland, because they believed that they didn't belong in Canada. Family or social gatherings and food were the two things that many of the participants stated that they missed most from their countries of origin. The majority of the participants reported that social gatherings and social networks played an important role in migrant's lives because they brought immigrants together, migrants got to know each other better and served as the backbone or pillar for immigrants when they needed help. Some of the participants also stated that it was through one of these social gatherings or social networks that they met their partners. The following excerpts from Esau, Mark, and Thomas illustrate this sub-theme:

One of the things that bring a lot of immigrants or African communities together is what we call society meetings or social gatherings such as churches, weddings, etc. I miss what we call the social gatherings of our communities back home, where you know people have time for each other and they set that time, you know if it's on a weekend, you are all together, having family time together. There is more time to meet and share and have a meal and do things together as a family. It was during one of our social gatherings that I met my ex-wife. We met in a church and we were attending the same church and because it was more of an African gathering. It was easy. Very easy actually. So that how I met her, in a church. (Esau).

I miss it a lot even though we can talk on the phone, video conference, is not the same. Home sweet home or home is always home. Even if we spend 100 years here, our home is our home. Definitely one day. But I will be visiting occasionally. Then as time goes on probably go back to Africa settle there. Because Africa is a sweet country if you have money (Mark).

I miss a lot about my country, the food, the culture, the people, everything. No place like home to me. More freedom of movement at home. People are more out-going at home. I miss our delicacy. That is the kind of food we eat in Africa is not here. Most of the time when you go to the stores there what you see are frozen foods. Everything is frozen (Thomas).

All the participants narrated their experiences about the post-migration challenges they experienced such as cultural differences, loss of identity, lack of belonging, and lack of informal social support systems and networks.

**I don't feel like I belong.** All the participants shared their experiences when they first arrived in Canada. They explained that their exposure to the unfamiliar environment led to stressful and strange experiences. Many of the participants indicated it was difficult to adjust to the new lifestyle especially for those who were already established in their countries of origin. Consequently, many of the participants indicated that they experienced a feeling that they didn't belong, a loss of identity, and a devaluation of their foreign credentials. According to many of the participants, this made them feel they had lost everything they had acquired over the years in their home countries. Many of the participants reported that fitting into Canadian culture was one of the main challenges.

This is a western country, is not like the African countries that we are used to. So, I have to like to learn and unlearn certain things that pertain to life and livelihood. And coming to a western country like Canada is just like starting all over again because what I observed is that most of what we did in our country like our degrees and everything is not really recognized. So, coming here and trying to work and going to school and trying to write Canadian professional recertification exams is not really easy. So those ones are really challenging especially if you are pretty much settled at home (Thomas).

In Ghana, for example, we don't see differences in people like we are all blacks. When first came here, the first place I settled in, I was the only black person in the house. It was a student house but I was the only black person and the other people were all white. And so, I could feel the difference and they could look at me in some way. And so they could ask me do you understand what we were saying, do you speak English? And all that. And they made me feel very different. And so you know that culture when I came here I used to cook a lot and maybe my food was different even though I was speaking English, my accent was different and let's say the way I do things. Kind of everything we say you

have to say please, you know even our way of speaking is different from theirs despite you're speaking English. A lot of things with your language, your accent, your relations with people was different. So that was one of the cultural differences I experienced in the first year (Margaret).

Many of the participants stated that the lack of feeling of belongingness exerted a long-lasting stressful and psychological effect on them. Surprisingly, Mark who came to Canada when he was a child, and is now a Ghanaian – Canadian citizen, went further to state that he would love to be buried in the motherland when he dies because he didn't belong here and his traditional beliefs tell him that his spirit will not rest in peace if he's buried in a foreign land. Seven out of the ten research participants expressed a desire to retire in their homeland, two stated that they had no intention of going back home, but would rather visit the extended family members occasionally, and one participant was indecisive because her husband didn't intend to go back home.

Sometimes I feel like I don't belong here no matter what I do or how hard I try to fit into the system it tells me no this not your real home. I feel that's where I belong. I find my identity there. I intend to go back home but I hope I don't get there in my old age if I live to see old age. I would love to go back and live the rest of my life back home. The Akans of Ghana believe that is not good to die and be buried in a foreign land because your spirit will be hovering around and will not rest in peace if you're buried in a foreign land. That is why when someone dies here, they like to take the body home. So definitely, if am going to pass away, I would love it to be where I started. Is all about where did I start? That's where I want to end. So definitely I would like to be there (Mark).

I really want to go back. I want to go back I don't know maybe unless I marry a Canadian, if not I still have the intention of going back. Home is home. You should never forget where you came from. You feel you don't belong here where you hear things like: how did you learn to speak English? Oh, you speak English very well, how long have you been here? do you like it over here? you have an accent, or I like your accent, where do you come from? Here we live as an individual, and then you can be on your own, where we have situations where people die in their rooms for days, people are facing a lot of loneliness, and they feel like they have been isolated (Margaret).

No matter how far you go and no matter how long you stay away from your culture from where you come from, you still belong to that place. That's why they say you can take the African far away from the village, but you cannot take the village from him. Some parts will forever be with me, I cannot change it. I try my best to adapt as much as I can. I

try my best to learn some of the good things that are here. But to say that I have fully integrated, no I cannot (Paul).

Although the majority of the participants admitted that they had the desire to settle back in the homeland or motherland someday, they acknowledged that it wasn't easy to go back home due to family attachment in Canada, indecisiveness on the part of their partner, the inability to achieve economic prosperity, and political and economic instability in the homeland. The following quotes from Esau and Mary illustrate these sentiments:

The intentions are always there because it's a homeland, motherland. I do believe at some point I might retire in Africa, have a retirement home there. But again, am attached here because now I have family roots here. My kids are American born and they are Canadians now. They definitely will be here I would love to be here with them for the longest time possible but there is always the possibility of relocating. Resettling back home is always possible (Esau).

I wish I could maybe when I retire. But it's not a problem. My husband doesn't want to go. But I intend to go there because I can't, am not sure I can stand the cold weather here in my old age. But we are still planning it. We haven't come to a conclusion yet. But eventually, something will happen. But I personally feel I should when I retire (Mary).

However, Paul, Magdalene, and Mabel had no intention or desire to retire in their countries of origin. Although they missed their homeland, they felt they belonged here (Canada) because 'home' to them had become a place where they made a living and was not necessarily a place of birth. However, they indicated that they would continue to visit their countries of origin when necessary. The following are relevant excerpts from Paul and Magdalene:

Home has become where I am and not necessarily my country Ghana, as a home. So I don't intend to resettle there, I will go there, I will go home to visit, have fun, you know visit my people as often as possible. But to uproot myself from here that am going back to stay there, I think if I say that it will be a lie to myself and I want to be honest to myself. This is how I feel. I feel like home is where you make it (Paul).

I have lived outside more than I have lived my combined years back in Nigeria. The way of things that am used to here that I will not be able to get there. Personally, I tell people I will not deceive myself nor lie to them to say that am going to go back home someday. Is not gonna happen for many reasons. I left Nigeria for a reason, my dad took me out of Nigeria for a reason, why would I wanna go back. So, No (Magdalene).

**Maintaining ties with the country of origin (Transnational social ties).** Interestingly, many of the participants narrated that they maintained strong social and symbolic ties with their countries of origin through remittances, regular communication with non-migrant family members, investment in properties, regular homeland visits, marriage alliances (finding a partner back home), forming ethnic associations in their host country (e.g. The Ghanaian Immigrant Association in Lethbridge), joining other associations in the home countries, the celebration of national holidays such as their country's Independence Day, and forming religious groups and churches. Some of the participants indicated that many immigrants are unable to fully integrate into Canadian society due to the maintenance of home cultural practices, marriage alliance, and cultural blending. The following are relevant quotes from Margaret and Andrew:

I still connect with my family back home. And then you realize that even sometimes you would want to find a partner back home. Because you're thinking like people back home understand you more and also finding a partner back home would be far better (Margaret).

We need to integrate into Canadian culture. For instance, in my own culture is not good for me to drink, but the Canadian culture does not say you cannot drink in your own house. I go outside behave like am in you know in my country. But I can drink when am in the house. So if we have to integrate we need to understand the laws here and work together because if we have some issues we have a way to fix them. Because if we are not integrating into Canadian society, we will have issues all the time (Andrew).

Following migration, many of the participants narrated some of the challenges (e.g., environmental changes, cultural differences, racism, underemployment, and devaluation of foreign credentials) they encountered. According to them, these challenges fueled frustration, depression, and stress-related illness. Each research participant experienced and coped with the post-migration challenges differently. For instance, many of the participants relied on the social networks they formed in Canada, faith in God or religious texts, family goals and aspirations,

culture blending, immigrant communities, and family support to cope with the challenges they encountered. Below are relevant excerpts from Paul and Magdalene:

Is tough, is tough but the point is we have our vision, or goal in mind. So, once you have a vision no matter what that is thrown your way you can cope with it or you can find a way and live with it. We are resilient so we decided that look, this what we wanna do. We have better opportunities here than in my country of origin. I want my children to grow here, finish their education, and have a better lifestyle. You know even though is cold we brace ourselves for it. You know we've learned from the people that we met, and we adjusted to it. And if you make up your mind to do anything, you will do it. If you don't want to do it and then you make excuses (Paul).

I have done a lot of blending of cultures. At the time I left home, I was about 21 and that would have been, you know, I knew my culture well, the way my parents brought me up on both sides. So coming here and there were a lot of things that I wasn't personally used to. So here I have had to do a lot of blending; my culture, my husband's culture which does not always agree, and then, of course, this culture (Canadian) where we are raising our kids. So, it's we just have to find out the things that will work for us (Magdalene).

**Turning to home communities.** Many of the participants indicated that they often relied on informal social support systems such as friends, relatives, immigrant community leaders, and religious leaders more than formal social support systems to resolve relationship issues. As a result, many of the participants indicated that they initially settled in areas where there were already established immigrant communities which helped with their integration into Canadian society, reduced the boredom of living in a foreign land, and assisted them (e.g., with the costly issues of childcare). Most of the participants had established social networks that provided them with temporary accommodation, financial support, and job links when they arrived in Canada.

My uncle supported me in terms of finances, guidance, and also taught me why it's important to travel abroad to gain a better education. The whole idea of his support was to come here, get a better education, go back home, and support the family (Margaret).

I miss my church community as well. We started something here, is growing gradually, small but that's the part that makes me feel a little more at home to have the church community, the African immigrants. Our style of worship and everything is different (Paul).



However, some of the participants indicated that it was difficult to find support in Canada that approximated their premigration informal support systems, which made it frustrating at times.

There is more family support at home that we don't have here. Family support goes a long way especially when you have kids. You don't really have to worry about your child, there is someone around willing to help you with childcare for free without having to pay \$20 per hour or whatever minimum wage to the babysitter. The social life in this place is almost zero (Martha).

### **Sub-Theme #2: Navigating intersecting factors influencing power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.**

Interestingly, all the research participants attached different meanings to the concept of power in an intimate partner relationship. According to these participants, power meant a partnership, respect, authority, provider, influence, control, and collaboration. One of the participants indicated that power could take different forms: spiritual and economic. In their own words, Mark, Thomas, and Paul perceived or described power within intimate partner relationships as:

For relational power, I will take my view from the Christian perspective where power is shared. Shared in such a way that I believe is just, I always use the analogy of the head and the neck. Where in as much as the head is up there, I don't think the head is way better than the neck. Both of them have vital roles to play. They all hold positions of power. When both powers are well collaborated or used wisely it benefits the body. But when selfishness sets in where the head thinks am way better than the neck, how will the head sustain or live? Or how will the head be stable without the neck? And when the neck thinks is way better than the head too, without the head where is the neck? You know, so there is power in everything. I believe there is power, but power must be shared and there must be a collaboration yah for it to work sustainably (Mark)

Power in an intimate relationship means leadership. I would see it more as leadership not necessarily exercising power per se but I see it more as being able to you know to make decisions on behalf of the family and you know and even as the head you will take the opinions of your spouse or your wife and you know. So, at the end of the day power has to be agreed upon by both parties depending on your cultural backgrounds. For our culture, we accept that the man is the head of the home is not really a big problem. It only becomes a problem only when maybe the man is exercising his authority inappropriately

or you know stuff like that. But to a large extent, it's not, I don't see it as an issue when the man is the head of the home (Martha).

Power in intimate relationships means that you are in control. Power in a relationship means that you have a say, you can determine a direction of an event, power in an intimate relationship means you are a provider, so you can provide for your family, you can give a good suggestion and the other partner will listen to you. I don't want to use superior and inferior. I want to use influence, that is someone who has influence or who has control (not total control per se) but control in such a way over the other person (Thomas).

Power could be in several forms. To me, power could be an economic power, you know power could be in terms of spiritual power. Economic power is what most of us see, how much money you have? So how much you control? Ok, so in a relationship, control could be in financial control, who has control over the money, who has a bigger voice in the relationship. And it could also be spiritual power; one who supports the family in terms of prayer, in terms of counseling, decision making, and direction. So, I see power not only in terms of economic or financial power but also see the power in terms of the spiritual aspect. So, this is what I will define power. In a relationship I believe in, my style of leadership is collaborative. You collaborate. God did not give wisdom to one person (Paul).

However, Mabel, cited below that the word power shouldn't even be used in an intimate relationship in the first place because it establishes a superiority-inferiority kind of relationship, where one of the partners seems to have more power than the other. Based on her Christian teachings, Mabel further stated that an intimate relationship was a partnership, where both partners viewed themselves as equal because the Bible states that the man and woman shall both leave their families and become one body and not two different or separate beings.

I think that the word power shouldn't even be used in an intimate relationship. It is not something I would really agree with because marriage is a relationship and is supposed to be a partnership. And if you have a partnership and see it as like both of us having equal partnership, I don't think there will be an issue with power. Because most of the time when we think about power, we think of somebody who has a higher position and there is somebody having a maybe a little or lesser power position than the person that has the power. So, if we see marriage as a partnership in which we have equal stakeholders because it takes both parties to make the marriage work, I think it will help a lot of our relationships. Because sometimes the issue we have with marriage is just somebody feeling cheated or somebody feeling lesser than they are in the relationship (Mable).

Many of the participants stated that relational power often comes about as a result of societal gender role expectations (social construction of gender) and also through our daily interactions with others. This is what Magdalene had to say regarding the origins of power:

Some people just have it naturally. Just by their presence, once they walk into a room. Some people exhort something that draws people to them. Others by the way they talk, people listen to them. And you know one way or the other it makes sense what they are saying either because is a lived experience, so people know what they are talking about or what it is that they lay down is easier for someone to buy into and then follow what is being said (Magdalene).

### **Structural barriers**

Based on the participants own experiences and perceptions, these study findings provided answers to the research questions and demonstrated how gender intersected with social, economic, and cultural forces such as race, employment, religious beliefs, income, education, social status, age and health, children, and extended family pressure to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationship among African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta.

These study findings revealed that gender inequality intersected with income, employment, race, social status, children, education, and age and health to influence power dynamics within intimate power relationships.

**Gender roles, and patriarchal values and beliefs.** Apart from the biological differences that exist between men and women, which to some extent may explain the differences in their behaviors, gender, according to Butler (1990, 2004) is performed or enacted. Gender norms, which are behaviors or characteristics that are considered appropriate for both men and women, are deeply embedded in culture or social structure, thereby shaping, and defining behavior, and limiting what is considered possible in relationships. Therefore, women and men think and act in the ways they do because of feminine and masculine norms they adopt from their culture, which

are usually passed down from parents to children, older siblings to younger siblings, and peers to peers (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Courtenay, 1999).

Most of the participants perceived traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms as one of the contributors to power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship. All the participants came from traditional African societies where patriarchal norms, values, and beliefs were practiced. It is in this regard that Esau stated that the traditional gender roles are already established within an intimate partner relationship before the couples even come together, thereby, reinforcing power imbalance within an intimate partner relationship. In addition, Esau stated that gender inequality or power imbalance does not only occur within intimate partner relationships but also in economic, academic, political, and legal realms. Many of the participants stated that men are expected to be heads and providers of the family, while women are expected to support their husbands. For this reason, Margaret stated that women are often discouraged from pursuing higher education due to societal (home country) gender role expectations. Paul stated that gender roles in traditional African societies are clearly stated and handed down from generation to generation. However, Esau admitted that gender norms are not static but gradually changing due to globalization.

There is a lot of gender and equality issues in Africa but are not defined as power. Is just a kind of traditional attachment, where and you know most African countries and families are religious and so they borrow so much out of their religion and so their belief is the man is always the head of the home or the head of the house. So, that power is already established even before you get into marriage. And because it's already established even the other gender, the female gender already knows that her getting into a relationship or marriage she is a little bit, looking at the male as the head. And so there is that imbalance of power. And that just doesn't apply in marriages or relationships it also applies in career and workplaces and all that. There is a power struggle, but I can for sure say it has diminished based on the changes that are taking place in the world. And they're a lot of movements now that even enable or empower the women gender or the female to be able to recognize their place in the society and be able to, you know to be just equally productive and equally participate in the families, politics, communities, and workplace (Esau).

Men are expected to be leaders of the family, providers, be responsible in terms of finances, and also decision making, you don't have to contribute a lot in terms of house chores because it is seen as the responsibility of the women in the house. Even at a younger age, boys are refrained from going into the kitchen because the girls are in charge of the kitchen. And so those are some of the gender expectations of men. On the other hand, women are not expected to attain higher educational status like bachelor's degrees, etc, but rather just a basic education. For example, when I decided to continue with my education, my first boyfriend who was older than me was telling me that you're done with your bachelors that's it. What are you going to do with the master's degree? When you're done you will marry and stay home because am going to take care of you. These are some of the experiences or challenges women encounter. Women are seen as people who should be in the kitchen, cooking and taking care of the children, take care of the home while the men get the opportunity to study higher to prepare them for leadership roles while women are pushed aside (Margaret).

In the African culture, there is a role for the man and a different role for the woman. In the African culture, the man is the head, not just the head he is like the chief of the home. When the man says it, the woman cannot argue against it. So, the man is totally in control. What he wants is what he does. The man can decide to marry as many as he can and as many as he wants. In African culture, the woman's role is to manage the house. To manage the house means to cook, to clean the house, to make sure the children have food, and all those kinds of stuff. You know, in the traditional African culture, is the man who provides everything that the people need. So, the African culture pushes the woman down. The woman can not make her own decisions. She brings the ideas and most of the time the man is the one who has the final say. It's not the collaborative type of leadership but is the authoritative type. The man is the Oga of the house, he is the chief. The traditional African culture does not empower the woman that much. So is the man who is going up and up and the woman always has to look up to the man. So that's the difference (Paul)

Although most of the male participants advocated for gender equality and admitted that traditional gender roles can create a power imbalance within intimate partner relationships, some of the language used and their choice of words suggested otherwise at times. Esau, Paul, and Magdalene made it clear that it is only the weak-minded and typical traditional African man who feels he is in control or charge of everything. Mark, Andrew, and Margaret indicated that masculinity can either be consciously or unconsciously manifested. The following are some relevant excerpts from Mark, Andrew, and Margaret that demonstrate how some of the male participants exhibited a sense of masculine entitlement, either consciously or unconsciously:

The roles have been set clear from a Christian perspective. It will hurt me if I can't be the provider. It will not make me happy if I can't provide for my family. I will do everything to provide for my family. I was also brought up that way. I was brought to understand that if my wife or my spouse or girlfriend is making 99% of the household income, and I am making 1%, my 1% should be able to take care of the house. If I accept my role as a provider, I expect to find myself a female who sees or views me as the provider. I don't struggle with their own. So, if she is going to be with me, she must understand that I am going to be a breadwinner. Whatever she has I am not going to argue with her on it but I am still the breadwinner. And she needs to be and we both, the family is going to run with my few that I have to offer the family. We don't understand our roles in society and that's what's creating all these issues. Because I am being the breadwinner I embrace and I am happy about it. I don't want to be with a woman who makes things so much difficult from that point of view. I don't see anything wrong if my spouse is cooking for me to eat. I mean if I am in the house I don't mind helping her to cook. To me it is even more romantic when I am assisting my spouse in doing the cooking, cleaning the house, in washing the utensils, because at the end of the day when she does the cooking I am also going to enjoy it. I believe the fundamental problem the society is having is recognizing roles and playing our roles very much well (Mark).

Why should my wife deny me sex? Well, I don't have the power but that is where I start getting like is ok, maybe she is cheating behind, why does she refuse? Where will I go? What do you want me to do? What do you expect me to do when you refuse? When you tell me to go and sleep on the couch. Do I really need to spend the night on the couch when I need to have sex? But if I don't have sex with my wife in my own house what will I do? So, these are some of the questions I ask myself when she refuses sex (Andrew)

The men usually get angry when they are refused sex. Then they ask, why is that so, you need to be ready. You need to give me what I want and all that. That's the part I don't understand but if the men are not ready, it's ok you don't have to worry but if the woman is not ready for any intimacy then it turns into anger, frustration, stress, and all that. That is what I have observed. Most men get angry about it when the woman is not ready or I don't think this the time for sex, I am not in the mood right now. Yeah, most men don't like to hear the words "am not ready". You have to agree even if you're not ready. You even see parents advising their daughters to never refuse their husband's sex even if they're not in the mood or they're not on good talking terms with their partners (Margaret).

Interestingly, Mark and Mary did not perceive traditional gender constructs as one of the contributors to power dynamics within intimate partner relationships. According to them, they are just assigned gender roles, and that everyone is supposed to play his/her assigned roles and not feel cheated. They went on further to state that many relationship issues can be avoided if every couple played his/her role satisfactorily. To support this line of argument, Mark used the

anatomical analogy of the head and neck to explain why he thinks they are just normal assigned roles. Below are the relevant excerpts from Mark and Mary:

Where in as much as the head is up there, I don't think the head is way better than the neck. Both of them have vital roles to play. They all hold positions of power. When both powers are well collaborated or used wisely it benefits the body. But when selfishness sets in where the head thinks am way better than the neck, how will the head sustain or live? Or how will the head be stable without the neck? And when the neck thinks is way better than the head too, without the head where is the neck? I don't believe in singularity. I believe in cooperation and mutual understanding. You know I don't believe that exclusiveness where one gender thinks my position is better than the other. You know, so there is power in everything. I believe there is power, but power must be shared and there must be a collaboration yah for it to work sustainably (Mark).

Am an African, right? And where we come from, we all have our roles to play. As married couples we all have roles. We know what we are supposed to do, we know what is expected of us. So, when it comes to the power struggle, I don't have any. I don't see the need. My philosophy in life is, I always want peace, am peace-loving. That is the only thing that makes me happy in life. So, I always want to do things that will bring peace (Mary).

**Breadwinner role.** The interviews illustrated that gender norms are not static but dynamic. Even though the traditional breadwinner or provider role is perceived as a positive attribute and assigned to men, surprisingly, all the women stated that they never had any problem playing that role when the need came. For instance, Mary and Magdalene indicated that they played the breadwinner role because their husbands were either going to school or not making enough to meet family needs. Mabel emphasized that due to the shifting market economy, the male sole-provider role was unattainable. Consequently, many of the female participants were working full-time outside the home to financially support the family.

I will say since we got married, I work more because you know we have kids, I don't believe in babysitting. I believe as parents we should be able to take care of our kids. So we decided that one person will stay home and that the other person will work. And then we took a lot of things into consideration like how much each is earning, I mean something substantial to sustain the family. So, we decided that he will stay home and then I will work. And so, for so many years he was home taking care of the kids and I worked. I have no problem. The only thing I do is once in a while I will ask, so how much do we have? And I trust him so much. I don't know but I don't have any problem,

with me working and we are spending the money. Because I want the atmosphere to be peaceful. And luckily enough he doesn't overspend (Mary).

I tell people if as a man, you don't want your wife to earn money or bring in income, I think you're putting or sinking yourself in a deep hole. Because in the world that we live in today being a sole breadwinner is exhausting. It's exhausting and even my husband says it, we talk about it. Imagine you being the sole breadwinner and maybe something just cracks, or something just happens maybe at your workplace or you hear a rumor or something you begin, your blood pressure begins to rise because you're thinking how do I fend for my family? How do I do this? How do I do that? But if both of you were contributing, then at that point it balances, it even helps, it helps the marriage. Because imagine a man coming into this world that we live in now, imagine you going to work every day and ok maybe your wife is home and she is not earning money, financial responsibility stresses people out. Imagine what marriage would be if the man is the sole provider. Is going to be very stressful for him. So, I think that it's important that we look at it that both people contributing makes sense and is good for the marriage. Because that way one person is not stressed, and one person is not feeling like ok am sacrificing so much. Everybody sharing the burden of the financial responsibilities in the house (Mabel).

However, Margaret stated that even though the traditional breadwinner or provider role is presumed to be assigned to men, every immigrant becomes an automatic breadwinner the moment they arrive in the western world or the developed country, considering the importance Africans attach to the extended family system and the expectations that an immigrant should do well so that he/she can remit to the non-migrant family members. Despite her role as a breadwinner for her non-migrant family, she assumed a subordinate role in almost all her relationships. This is what Margaret had to say regarding both roles:

When you come here, you're automatically a breadwinner. You have to send money home regularly. If you don't send money home, you're just like dead or you don't exist (laughter). Everybody will say you traveled abroad, and you forgot about your family. Is like a responsibility to you now (Margaret).

In all my intimate relationships, I would say, for the most part, the men are in charge. But at some point in time, I realized that I also have a say in this relationship and I don't have to be trampled upon. So, when it happens like that and I know I can't also contribute or decide on somethings, I just leave. I don't stay. But you realize in most times, the men have more power because, for example, all the men I have dated are Ghanaians, so I think is from the culture (Margaret).



Many of the participants reported that sending remittances to the non-migrant family depends on the non-migrant family's financial standing. However, not every migrant in the western world sends remittance to non-migrant family members back home. For instance, an immigrant may be in good financial standing, and for varied reasons would not remit or financially support any non-migrant family member who struggles financially. Martha had this to say during the interview:

No, I don't see myself as the breadwinner because I am the last child and the least educated among my siblings (laughter). My other siblings make more money than I do. So am not a breadwinner. In my house, am the least educated with a bachelor's degree. And am trying to get another bachelor's degree and I have other siblings who have more degrees like Doctorate. Even my mum at her old age I feel like she has achieved a lot more than I have. I still have to work hard (laughter) (Martha).

**Decision making.** Almost all the participants indicated that it is very important to involve partners in family decision making because wisdom does not reside in one person's head. Although the majority of the female participants stated they were fully involved in the family decision-making process, they admitted that the men set the tone in the family decision-making process. Overall, the interviews illustrated that decision-making was shared among the partners. The following are some relevant excerpts from some of the participants regarding decision making.

I understand that men, it's even Biblical, in the home men are the heads and women are the necks. If the neck doesn't turn the head can't turn and so the man who is the head needs the support of the woman in terms of decision making to run the home. So, we are both equally involved in the decision-making process (Margaret).

When it comes to decisions, he takes the initiative, he will think about it and make sure that I understand what he is thinking. So, he doesn't leave me out even if he comes up with something, he will make sure that I understand where he is coming from. And am not coerced. No, never (Mary).

However, Andrew stated that though he had always wanted to involve his ex-wife in all family decisions, it didn't work out because they had conflicting ideas. This according to him,

led to his failed marriage because of their inability to plan well or have any meaningful discussions. The following is a relevant quote from Andrew:

She thinks she is the head and I think am the head of the family and this where I can see there is a power struggle in here. So, we are kind like, yeah we are equal. I wasn't really quite sure in my relationships, that I was the leader of the family. No, I wasn't seeing myself like that. She had her own and I had my way. And this where the problem started because we live in the west, we should be planning from time to time, like who should be in charge of what? But I was not seeing anything like that on her part. She had plans to buy a property back home. And that is where our marital issues started. You cannot invest where you are not going to see what you invest in and how are you going to monitor it? (Andrew)

Interestingly, Magdalene stated that her husband involved her in most of the family decisions but there were instances where her husband unintentionally made some decisions without consulting her. However, she never interpreted that as representing a power imbalance or a sign of disrespect but rather as one of the African masculine traits that can be performed or enacted unconsciously. Although many of the male participants indicated that it was very important to equally involve their partners in the family decision-making process, their choice of words and language used often indicated that they felt in control or charge of the family decision making process. The following are some relevant quotes from Magdalene and Paul:

As a man and as an African man am sure you would appreciate the fact that sometimes the decision can be taken and then I would become the afterthought. Is like oooh!! by the way, you know is just something that came to mind now that we are talking. So, sometimes it feels like it, I know is not intentional, but a decision might be made, and I hear about it; oooh!! by the way, XYZ is happening. I was like thanks for letting me know. You know I would have appreciated; you know someone has approached him and he goes, I will get back to you but once the answer has been given whether I like it or not. And once an answer has been given, I just have to flow with whatever the answer was rather than having the equal opportunity from the get-go to put in my two cents and then if there is supposed to be some kind of debate about it then one is there and then whatever the outcome may be so yah! Over 21 years you can imagine that has happened and I don't expect it not to happen again (laughter) (Magdalene).

In the traditional African community, it is always the man who is the head of the family, the man has control, what the man says is what is done. The woman has a little to say. I don't agree with that. I think before I got married to my spouse, I knew her, she was my

friend, she was living her life, she was making good decisions, she was doing well, and that's what attracted me. She was independent. You know, I didn't see her as a weak person, who did not know what to do. So, I feel that if we are married, we can do better if we put our heads together, and we reason together. I bring my resources, she brings her resources and in a collaborating way, we plan our lives. I think is better than to push her down because I have married her and then I will take control and she has little to say, No, I don't believe in that because if you have a vehicle that has two engines or you have an airplane, a jet that has two engines why do you turn off one just to use one. So you use both of them, has an advantage. So, you collaborate with your spouse in decision making. I don't think it is good, to me it is not prudent to control your spouse just because of gender. You will lose if you try to, one partner tries to control the other just because of gender. I can discuss anything with my spouse like what we are doing. For example, when we decided to move here. I didn't impose that idea on her. I discussed with her, I convinced her, and she bought into that idea. And then we worked together. It took about 2 years to do the application and to go through everything and to get the approval for us to move here. Then another thing will be like education. You know at a point in our marriage I decided she should go back to school, and she had that mentality, she wanted to go to school. So, we agreed, so it was her idea, she wanted to go back. I agreed with that idea and then she went back to school. So, I worked, I did two jobs to support her through school. Then when we moved up to Canada, I also decided that I will go back to school to change my career path and she agreed with me and she also supported me as I went through school. So, it is something that we agreed to do, we discuss and then we agree to do. We don't impose one person's idea on the other (Paul).

Importantly, many of the male participants reported that it is about time men acknowledged the contributions of women in society and involved them in the decision-making process because women have proven themselves for decades that they can run the family when their husbands are away from home. Margaret on the other hand indicated that both men and women need to cooperate for the relationship to function properly.

Men don't seem to understand women's contributions to society. Because I have been home for so long, for generations and they have always been the ones knowing how to advance the family, how to support the family, how to lead the family and everything. I mean everything in the communities and in the villages as we term it in Africa. But yet the men who perceive themselves as leaders in power and claim to know everything but yet they have no clue how to change kid's diapers (Esau).

Women are good. Some of us know what our mothers were doing. Some of us our mothers were basically, were running the house because our fathers were gone most of the time. Our mothers were running the house with the little that was given to as chop or what I term as the loans from husbands. Our fathers were gone for days or months. Our mothers were the people who were running day to day affairs of the house. They could

manage the finances of the house with the little that our fathers left for them as ‘chop money’. You know, and there are some schools that we know that the women who are in charge are doing so well. You know so I believe that the world will be a better place if we take advantage of resources and certain things that the women can bring to the table. If we push them down because they are women, we are losing (Paul)

Many of the participants indicated that many of the marital conflicts about gender roles were due to a lack of transparency and effective communication. Therefore, transparency and effective communication according to these participants are very important in an intimate partner relationship because they establish trust and strengthen the relational bond between the partners. However, some of the participants stated that even though transparency and communication are very important in an intimate partner relationship, not every relationship issue needs to be discussed because certain topics are better off not discussed to avoid serious marital conflicts. In their own words:

We have basically the same phones, we run the same Bank Accounts as we do most of everything together to the best of my knowledge. I found out that it makes our lives a lot easier especially when you have to deal with family. I always told someone that I was not to do that when I got married. Yeah, it wasn't something that I had wanted to do. I would never have thought in my wildest imagination that I will run a joint Accounts with my husband. Someone assuming that you're making more money than you're and then that triggers a lot of stuff or someone imagining that or maybe a husband imagining that the wife is taking or hiding money away from them (Mabel).

There are some things I can discuss with my partner but there are other things I won't. before I discuss anything with her, I will, first of all, evaluate that thing. I will have to assume what might be the end results. If I see that it could lead me to a problem. I will rather keep quiet. Wisdom is able to direct. I rather keep quiet and not start any problem at all. But definitely, I will also do my best not to do something that can put me into a problem or something I will not like. I will try my best not to do it. So, I will always try to do that. But definitely, if I look at the whole thing and it doesn't make sense and I don't have to tell her because it might cause problems, I won't even talk about it, I will just move on. Is a very complex question it depends on the situation. So, depending on the situation, I will say yes and no (Thomas).

Irrespective of whom you're talking to you have to be very tactful and mindful of the things you say. You know like you really don't need to say everything. I don't feel like everything has to be discussed. You know because sometimes there are things you don't talk about. I just feel like it's safer and be mindful of what you say and be sure that your

communication is to the like you communicate important issues for sure. Like not issues that could bring about terrible consequences in the future if the other person is not aware, but like certain issues don't really need to especially issues that could spike disagreements and all of that. Like its best to be very careful about how and what one talks about. So that's just my own opinion. So I don't feel like you need to communicate and talk about everything. Just being mindful of how and what you say (Martha).

Many of the participants admitted that Canadian culture has influenced their perceptions and views about gender roles. According to them, they have learned behaviors that promote a healthy intimate partner relationship and unlearned the ones that don't.

Yeah, I would say I have learned a few things since I have been here. I have realized that as a woman I also have power in the relationship and that I also have the power to express my feelings or opinions if I see something I don't want, I also have the power to say I don't want this or that and this is what I want, I am not interested in this. I have a choice in a relationship and I also have to be treated fairly and that I don't have to allow men to take advantage of me. so I have learned a few things about how I can also be independent, as a woman I can take decisions on my own. And that I don't have to wait on a man, I don't have to be married or I don't have to wait for my husband or any man to tell me what to do. Since I have some education and I would say the culture and the laws here support women a lot. Although some women abuse it I feel it is very good for women who are going through domestic violence and all that. So yeah, Yah! I have learned a few things here and my perceptions about gender roles have changed a bit (Margaret).

**Household labor: tensions and adaptation.** Many of the participants believed that gender norms are not static but rather dynamic. It is in this light that many of the male participants expressed the need for men to help their partners with house chores. Many of the male participants indicated that they are now more involved in household labor than they previously did in their countries of origin.

Yeah, in Africa, I know there are few things that African men won't do. But I say those things, we need to leave them behind because this a place where the gender issue should not play a role. You know, what a man can do, a woman can also do. For example, if my wife is working and I am at home, I don't have to wait for her to come and cook for me. I think we all can get tired of our jobs outside the home. So, you know, and this is part of being in Canada too or being integrating into this country. Because most of the Canadian men like to cook too when their wives are not there. So why are we not doing the same thing? Because we have the same, you know, the human body. So, I don't need to wait for her to come from work to cook while I was at home for the whole 8 hours. So, we

men have to do house chores too. There is nothing wrong with doing house chores if you can do that. It doesn't change you as a man at all (Andrew).

However, Thomas expressed his displeasure about the gender role changes especially with household labor, even though on the surface he admitted that there is a need for him to help his wife with house chores. This is what Thomas had to say:

I have come to realize that what happens in Africa as the wife will do all the cooking and cleaning is not obtainable here. So definitely I have known that if ok she will do the cooking and I will go and do another thing since she is also bringing in money. So, you don't expect the ladies to come back home and cook for you again or you want to eat a freshly prepared meal at home, you're just looking for a problem. So, you're making the whole thing not to be fair. So that one is reasonable to me. But the one that we will be sharing work, you go and do this, and I do that. No, no!! I don't believe in all those things. I will not do that. I know what I should do. But don't tell me that we should start sharing house chores, who does that? We don't believe those things in Africa. Let's say your parents come to visit you and see that your wife is instructing you to go and sweep the floor. That's a big problem because your parents will never be happy and may ask what sort of thing is this? I don't believe in gender role changes. I don't believe in all those things I will always stay in the middle. Take the one I think is good for me in the Canadian culture, the one I know before and have been doing before and people do in Africa, the good one I will take it, the one that is not good, I won't take it. So that's my position. Am in the middle (Thomas).

Interestingly, Martha admitted that she believed in gender equality but did not perceive doing most of the house chores as an indication of power imbalance. Although frustrating sometimes, Martha has wholeheartedly accepted her gender roles and done her best to accomplish them without any issues. This is what Martha had to say:

That is an everyday struggle (laughter). That is the only struggle I go through each day. It's nice that some men are willing to support. For me, in terms of chores, I just live with zero expectations. Because I don't want to live like my husband is supposed to do this and that at home. If for example, I can't vacuum, I wouldn't force myself to do it but I try my best to do as much as I can without having any expectations of him. And I feel like it works better that way because if you don't have undue expectations of each other. You guys can just know what you're supposed to do and just do it without unnecessary drama (laughter). I personally don't have a problem regarding house chores. Sometimes is frustrating even as a woman I feel like I always definitely have to do more but then what can we do (Martha).

Some of the female participants indicated that their husbands are more involved with household labor (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare) since migration to Canada. Contrary to the popular perceptions and views that women are better at doing household labor, Mary and Mabel indicated that their husbands were also good at doing household labor.

My husband does household chores better than I do. He is such a good father and so one time even my daughter asked me “so mummy can I get somebody like a dad to marry in the future? (Mary).

My husband is the one who does most of our cooking. Yeah, he does most of our cooking. like I just told you if he comes to the house and the house is dirty, the days I know he normally doesn't do it is, for example, am home today. He knows I will have time to do it. But if am working Thursday, Friday, am working back-to-back, when he comes, he will do the dishes. But even for like, because I know I can cook but am not a fan of cooking and he likes to cook. However, I wouldn't expect my parents to understand because when they come here, they know that my husband cooks, they see him do it. I wouldn't expect them to really understand but am sure maybe on their side is not going to be as bad as maybe when my in-laws come, and they see that he is the one cooking. But that is supposed to be how our relationship is. That's how our relationship is. That doesn't make him less of somebody in our relationship (Mabel).

Overall, many of the participants indicated that gender bias against women is a disservice to society because it prevents many talented women from developing their full potentials to contribute effectively to society and relationship. The following is a relevant quote from Esau:

I strongly believe that we have very, very, very, smart intellectual women, smart minds across the board, and those minds cannot be denied or stepped on based on gender. If we have smart female minds and we have female intellects, they need to be given the opportunity to be able to lead, to be able to lead the course in the society and in the community and the nations. Am not scared to speak out because I believe we all men have to be advocates of the right things (Esau).

**Policies/Structural barriers to employment.** Many of the participants indicated that the labor policies of various professional groups can influence power dynamics when one partner is dependent on the other. However, some of the participants stated that these policies did not influence their intimate relationships. While many of the participants indicated that a lot can be done to improve on some of the policies, a few of the participants felt that there was nothing

wrong with these various professional groups because they have to maintain certain international standards. Even though the labor policies of these various professional groups require foreign skilled immigrants to recertify when they arrive in Canada, some of the skilled worker participants added that the recertification processes were very tedious and required some financial resources which many of the immigrants lacked. Thomas who was working on his recertification stated that the process is difficult and frustrating which sometimes made him feel like giving up and sticking to jobs that don't align with his qualifications. Therefore, many of the male participants perceived their inability to get jobs that aligned with their pre-migration professions as a personal failure because they experienced financial difficulties which hindered their ability to adequately provide for their family. This influenced the power dynamics within their relationships. The following are relevant quotes from Thomas and Esau regarding these policies and the Canadian labor market.

Well to start with that is one of the reasons why the majority of the highly skilled African immigrants don't want to migrate to Canada. In cases like this, it is as if you're starting all over again. Is not only you're starting all over again and you're going to pay a lot of money for recertification. So, at a certain point, some people give up due to financial constraints due to their inability to secure good jobs that pay better for them to be able to save towards these recertifications. Is not easy going through all those things combining it with work and maybe family life. However, I think in certain provinces, like Manitoba, highly skilled immigrants are offered financial assistance for recertification or to go to school. But I don't believe or think that the Alberta province offers such assistance to immigrants. I wouldn't want to call it racism because they allow immigrants in and come to work but one thing, I can say is that those things are the effect of the media and how they portray Africa. Most of the negative things they hear about Africa are through the media and is no true because the land is portrayed as it is. Sadly, most people who hear the stories about Africa through the media in Canada haven't been to Africa, so they tend to believe whatever they hear whether true or false. The only thing they hear is bad or negative things that have been portrayed (Thomas).

You went to school, you obtained your degree, that's a very demanding program. You put in all your time and all that. You've acquired that, you're a graduate. But when you come here, and they evaluate that they feel like this doesn't match ours. And so, you don't, actually, even know your way because you're being more hands-on and more practical. So that's a big issue and it's very tough for migrants and skilled workers



because you may think your degree will do you a favor or will be equivalent. But when you get here it's not and that affects a lot of families. And actually, that makes a lot of migrants regret even relocating. Because again, they have to start from zero or they have to go back to school and do more classes, and more programs or more certifications to get to the standard of where they are, hence putting them in a position where they abandon their previous careers or certificates which took many years to acquire and now to a different course and get into a different field or job, or they settle like that on less skill low paid jobs. So now that's where Canada Federal Skilled Worker program loses the mind and labor they wanted because they never took advantage of them, and said ok, so there is a difference here or you have a different level of skills, but we can put you in a system where within 6 months you will be at the par with everybody in Canada. So, if they work on this then they will take advantage of skilled labor, the manpower, the skills they are looking for. A lot of those skilled workers come here, and they can't fit in their fields because they are under qualified or they are just evaluated differently. Even if they are qualified because their degree from their original countries is assumed not at par with the degree in Canada (Esau).

On the other hand, Mabel indicated that though the recertification process is difficult in Canada, she knew before coming to Canada that she couldn't temporarily practice as a Pharmacist when she arrived in Canada. This is what she said:

If you look at the immigration policies and laws, they already have it there that you would have to recertify before you can practice. Like, I will not blame them. When I was leaving Nigeria, I knew that initially that I couldn't practice as a Pharmacist when I get here. I knew that before coming here because it's already stated there that you would have to recertify and do according to what the province and college requires. Even in Nigeria if you're coming to practice as a Pharmacist and you come from somewhere else there is also a step for you to actually go through for you to become a Pharmacist in Nigeria. So the process might be difficult than the other but every country has its ways of actually recertifying you when you come in with, for example, a foreign Pharmacy degree. So I don't think I was really shocked at that because I kind of knew that when I was coming in I was not going to practice as a Pharmacist in a short time (Mabel).

**Intersection of racism and employment.** Most of the participants had a bachelor's degree before migration to Canada. Four of the participants who came to Canada under the Federal skilled Worker Program (FSWP) narrated the challenges they encountered while they were working on their recertification. Many of the participants indicated that they experienced racism in the labor market which made it difficult to get jobs that aligned with their pre-migration professions upon arrival in Canada. Therefore, they undertook lower-paid jobs that did

not align their qualifications to financially support their families, while concurrently working on their recertification. Due to the racism in the labor market, many of the participants stated that recertification does not guarantee that immigrants would get a job that aligns with their qualifications. According to some of the male skilled participants, this influenced the power dynamics within their relationship because they couldn't earn enough to perform their breadwinner or head of family roles.

In this regard, Esau and Paul who also came to Canada through the FSWP made some suggestions. Esau suggested that since FSWP is a federal program, skilled workers don't have to stay in one province if they can't get a job that matches their qualifications in that said province. They can relocate to other provinces where they can find jobs that match their qualifications. Furthermore, Esau suggested that the federal government can also create federal retraining programs for foreign skilled workers to prepare them for the Canadian labor market when they first arrive in Canada. On the other hand, Paul who migrated to Canada from the US through the FSWP suggested that foreign skilled workers who can't find jobs that match their qualifications upon arrival in Canada should first find jobs that pay their bills, find out which jobs are in high demand on the Canadian labor market, and switch to those high demand professions if possible.

Thomas believed that the recertification process has to do more with racism than qualification because Federal Skilled Workers are professionals who have many years of experience in their countries of origin. The following are relevant quotes from Thomas, Andrew, Mary, and Paul concerning racism and employment in the Canadian labor market:

Most of the highly skilled immigrants from Africa or from other countries they brought in were practicing in their various countries and they were doing well. You brought them in as skilled immigrants. And when they came in you're saying that they are not qualified again. Definitely, as I said before is just their mindset. Look, if they give these people the opportunity to prove themselves, they will even do far more than what they think they can do. But because you know there is a saying in the Bible that "Can anything good

come out of Jerusalem?" So, they don't believe anything good can come out of Africa until the Africans have come to prove themselves. Even though they have proven themselves over and over again a number of times still they are still thinking that ok we are still not going to change these standards. So, the basic thing is that I can't blame them but I am going to blame African leaders if the economy was good if there was no corruption if everything was being put in place where they ought to be, definitely nobody was going to come to this cold country to go through this. People would stay in their country and enjoy their country. I won't say it is a scam but definitely, there are discrepancies about the Federal Skilled Worker program. I don't think the immigration process is right. People should be able to come in here and start their practice because they are licensed where they came from. I think our school curriculum is almost the same as the school curriculum here. They even mimic the one in the developed (Thomas).

Well, with the labor market it depends on the kind of job you are interested in. You know, I have worked in many fields in Canada. And yes, I know when it comes to work, let's say in the oil industry, yes there is racism and discrimination there. You can feel and see it. And is not in every company that I have worked with. There are some good companies, you know they don't care who you are so long as you are a good worker. You know but individual yeah, you can see, and you will feel it down the road. Is not everybody that, you know, who like the black person especially the African. When I was working in the oil field, I was mistreated. So is something that I have seen and yes, I live on with it because I know where I was coming from and I deal with it. It took me a while, but I went with it. Yeah, it affected me but at the end of the day I made a tough decision and that's when I decided to go to school here in Lethbridge to get a degree. That was one of the things that brought has brought me this far. Yes, racism exists here (Andrew).

Oh yeah, a lot of discrimination, a lot of discrimination. My mental health is more important to me than any other thing. For instance, I got the job at the hospital here as a Nurse, but I realized that there was a group of people who were trying to make my life miserable. I said to myself that I have come too far to go through all that. Well at a point in time in my career I decided not to work in the hospital, I mean not work on the unit where we have patients. I have had so many experiences in the workplace. And I am like this thing is too much emotional trauma. So, I decided not to work at the units but rather would work at the clinics. At the clinics, you deal with the out-patients but on the unit, you work with a team of nurses. So there too much stress and am too old for that. I have decided not to stress myself; No. I want to enjoy life. Some of them tried to make life miserable for me. I call it bullying and all that, so this should tell you the kind of person that I am. I just stopped. I felt like I wasn't welcomed in that unit. And you may end up losing your license if you're not careful with them. So, I decided to call it a quit and maybe go to school or do something else with my life, maybe do something that will get me a job outside the hospital. They can mess you up and one other thing is that I am not tough like others who can fight their way through. Am not tough at all am so emotional and I don't have the strength and energy to fight those people. So, I am like I can't do this, it's tough. So, I have had a few experiences in the past and am still experiencing it. I just ignore them. I feel those people are not civilized because people who have traveled far and wide don't behave like that (Mary).

In my particular case, I worked with the American Red Cross when I was in the US, so when I came and saw that to get a job in the field, I need a Canadian license. So, I did any kind of job that I got, I did a support worker job which is lower than what I could job. But while I was doing it, I went back to school. Then I took a course that will give me the license to practice here. And that's why I did social work. And then I switched and after that, I got a job that I like and matches my qualification. I think what people are saying is very, very true, that you may come with the Federal Skilled Worker program but when you enter you may not find the job. In that situation, you need to be fast to adapt to the changing era, the new era. Look at the new places that you work, study the job market for any new thing that will work for you, switch as fast as you can so that you become employable (Paul).

Some participants stated that it is sometimes very difficult to get hired as an immigrant in professional fields such as marketing and management because those fields are dominated by the Caucasians. Therefore, Paul suggested that immigrants have to do a lot of research on the job market to find out which professions are in high demand. The majority of the participants believed that immigrants have a better chance of getting hired in the Health sector because of the aging population and the high demand for healthcare professionals. Accordingly, all the participants are in Healthcare related professions, with two of them pursuing a nursing degree.

The following are relevant quotes from Mark, Paul, Magdalene, and Mabel:

After my education, I was looking for employment, but I mean having a first degree and looking for a job sometimes is not easy. I was in the house for some time and I decided to get into the nursing program and am now in my second year (Mark).

I would say the Canadian labor market is not fair. Immigrants do not face a fair market in Canada. It is not. There are certain jobs, the Canadian job market favors, or preferences given to the Caucasians. Of course, there are certain jobs they have no other choice because they don't have enough of the skilled people on the market, and for those areas, you see a lot of immigrants. So, when you look at the job market like the health services, the technical stuff like engineering, construction, even when it comes to farming or things that need some technical skills. You know, in those areas you see a lot of the immigrants go there because the Canadian labor market needs them. So, they have a better chance in those areas than areas like marketing, management that the Caucasians have dominated and no matter the level of skill you have as an immigrant you don't have a fair chance there. Your probability of being hired there is very low. So as an immigrant you stay away from fields dominated by the Caucasians. So, it is not fair. We don't have a fair labor market when it comes to immigrants (Paul).

Sometimes is very tough to get into the Canadian job market. You have professionals that move from other countries, you come here, and basically what you provided to immigration when you are seeking admission here, which was good enough to get you here. Good enough to process your documents for them to give you permanent residence, make you a citizen, and all that. All of a sudden, those same documents are not accepted when you need your license here. That is a problem. Is like having a right hand and a left hand, and the one hand saying yes and the other saying no and then the person is stuck, right? So, you come with great expectations and then your expectations fall short. And you find yourself with your degree and your prior license and you are working far below what you know you can do. So, your contribution is far less than you know it could be. But you look at what you need to surmount to obtain that Canadian license, so some people just like to forget about it, and they either change careers altogether or pick something far less and retire on that. And so, to me I think the Canadian labor market loses a lot of talents. Because for people to move from their countries wherever they are whether is their countries of origin or somewhere else a lot has gone into them; education, experience, and then they come here and Canada squashes it and you know, in the end, they lose (Magdalene).

I think the truth of the matter is yes, yes immigrants are discriminated against because most of the time, they look, first of all, immigrants are discriminated also looking at the color of your skin. Yeah, some people believe that because you're black, you're dumb, some people believe that and when they see you and you do certain things, they look at you and say oh my God, you can do that. So, some of them already have a biased mind that because you're black, you actually cannot do anything so because I know that some immigrants who are not black-skinned may not experience what immigrants with black skin experience. Which comes about the point of racism, people discriminating against you because of your color. Yeah, absolutely, I absolutely believe that. Yes, there is discrimination as an immigrant and also based on the color of your skin (Mabel).

Contrarily, Andrew, who came here as a refugee appreciated everything that Canada has offered him. He believed that the Canadian labor system is good, though he admitted that he had experienced racism when it comes to the labor market. Although it is difficult to get a job that matches one's qualifications without Canadian work experience, Andrew suggested that immigrants should do whatever it takes to get the jobs that match their qualifications even if takes to go back to school to get recertified. This is what he had to say:

The Canadian work experience is a standard that has been set there by the government of this country, right? So, whether you're a Ph.D. from somewhere and you don't have Canadian work experience, is good to go to get some work and get that experience. No, I may come with my school qualifications, but the Canadian work-related experience is not

there. If I have a very good qualification from Africa, and being asked to get Canadian work experience, if that will get me to where I want to be, yes why not? So, I don't see any issue with the Canadian system (Andrew).

**Immigration policies and laws.** Although many of the participants stated that the Canadian immigration system was one of the best in the world, they still believed that a lot more can be done to improve on it. Some of the participants stated that some of the immigration policies and laws such as the English Language Proficiency Test were just a way of ripping off immigrants because they don't understand why for instance, immigrants who are Ph.D. holders from any of the Canadian universities should still have to be tested in English Language before they can apply for their permanent residence. One of the participants added that it seems like the immigration services either underrates the standard of English used as a mode of communication and instruction at the universities or it is a way of allowing these Testing Centers to make money off immigrants. According to some of the participants, this leads to stress-related illnesses because of the tedious processes immigrants often go through to get their permanent residence. Some of the participants indicated that immigrants without either permanent residency or citizenship status often find it difficult to get jobs that align with their qualifications to earn enough to financially support their families. This is what Margaret had to say:

I think immigrants experience stress and other related mental health issues due to the process they have to go through before they can regularize their stay here in Canada. Most immigrants are facing a lot of mental health issues. As I sit here right now, am thinking about how am going to apply for my permanent residence. I had to write an English test twice. What I got the second time wasn't exactly what I wanted but left it that way because I can still use it to apply for my permanent residence. Is not just being patient and go through the process but is stressful and is very, very, expensive too. One examination cost more than \$300 plus fuel, food, and maybe hotel cost if you want to get to Calgary the night before the examination since is not done in Lethbridge here. So if you fail twice and have to do it the third time, imagine the amount of money that goes into that. You can spend more than \$1000 just to apply for permanent residence. Then you have to get a Police criminal check back home. And you know the process is very long. So is a lot of frustration so sometimes people prefer to go through illegal means such as paying to get married to a Canadian citizen to get a permanent residence or

deceitfully marrying a Canadian citizen just to gain the pathway to citizenship. These are some of the things people wouldn't have done under normal circumstances if not for the pressure, stress, and frustration they go through. Hence, they are compelled to do what they have to do to survive. So, I don't think is fair. Is so much stressful and I don't think is fair on our side despite we decided to migrate here. I think the rules or policies should be more flexible and soften especially for students who have gained Canadian education and some Canadian experience, to be able to contribute, because already we are contributing to the economy. So, it should be flexible for us to settle down here and get our permanent residence. And the stress will be reduced especially the mental stress so the people wouldn't do that unnecessary hard work. It's really bad (Margaret).

Contrarily, Paul who immigrated from the U.S had different perceptions and views about the Canadian immigration system compared to the U.S immigration system. He stated that the Canadian migration process is less stressful, indicating that our perceptions and views about something may be shaped by our experiences and environment. This is what Paul had to say:

The Canadian immigration process is straight forward, if you qualify, you qualify. If you don't qualify, you don't qualify. So that was the motivating factor from my side. Then of course the stress level was also as I compared the two stress levels, the Canadian system was less stressful than the US. Canada tends to be socialist in a way, they support the people. You have children, they support the children, their tax is high but what you gain from the central government is worth it. You know, unlike the US where the tax is lower but if you don't have a job the gives you medical benefits then it is very difficult when you need the medical services, is very expensive. So, these are the two major factors that affected my decision making (Paul).

Overall, many of the participants indicated that restrictive labor policies adopted by professional groups hinder many skilled immigrants from getting the jobs that align with their qualifications when they arrive in Canada. Therefore, many of the skilled immigrants are compelled to settle for low paid jobs. According to many of the male participants, their inability to work in areas which matched their educational preparation or skill impacts immigrant men differently than women. Men's inability to earn enough money to perform their primary role as the provider of the family and head of the family, disrupts power dynamics in their intimate relationships and undermined their aspirations to perform hegemonic masculinities.

**Religious beliefs.** Many of the participants indicated that religion played an important in their lives as migrants. Some of the participants indicated that their belief in the creator strengthened them in their day-to-day activities. Many of the participants took their religious practices seriously and stated that their gender role beliefs, views, and perspectives about intimate partner relationships were based on their Christian teachings. Even though their gender roles were based on their Christian teachings, many of the participants' perceived gender roles to be flexible as some situations might call for role changes. Some of the participants viewed religious teachings regarding gender roles as biased against women, which sometimes prevented females from holding leadership positions in certain religious institutions. According to many of the participants, this leads to a power imbalance within religious institutions. One of the participants who is a Pastor stated the church and society loses because they are unable to tap into women's valuable contributions to society. Therefore, these religious gender role ideologies may place women in subordinate positions, thereby reinforcing gender inequality and power imbalance within intimate partner relationships. The following are relevant quotes from Esau, Martha, Paul, and Magdalene about some religious teachings on gender roles:

Religion plays a major, major role in power dynamics because, in most African places, nations, or communities, people will quote the Bible or misquote whatever they will say you know what, you are my rib because you came from the rib of the man, referring to a woman. And so we cannot be equal, right. In the African community or African nations, we have allowed specific or particular men that we call "*Men of Collar*" not color, the collar, being the Bishops, the Pastors, the Ministers, to teach us the Bible but then we don't read for ourselves to understand the real teachings. Or in Islam, we live it to the Imams and the heads of whatever religion. Because is the "Man of the Collar" or is a Pastor or is a Bishop who is saying it, it stays within the community and the society. And so there is a lot of things you hear about you know, women cannot be leaders from the Christian perspective or religious perspective; women cannot wear trousers or pants from religious teachings, women cannot do this, all these are religious beliefs and teachings that are you know, been added to the reading scriptures or whatever book you read to undermine the power of women in the society. And so, what happens is because the generations coming up know and instilled in them, that as a woman I cannot even be a



religious leader. Because am not allowed to be. So, you see the power imbalance starting from there (Esau).

I can for sure say almost 90% of the religious leaders are men and that's where we are supposed to have solace, that's where like or everybody is like whoever is religious thinks that's the best. You look at religion, Islam as a religion, I don't know, I don't follow it that much, but I don't know if there is any female Imam. Because they are not supposed to be Imams if am not wrong, I may be wrong. But from my understanding, I have never seen a female Imam or a leader in the Islamic religion. I don't know much about Buddhism and all these other religions. And so, you can easily see the imbalance of power from the religious perspective. Where, and I think even where it starts from because religion then gives a different definition of power. It says if you are male then you are supposed to be the head and supposed to be the head of the home and you are supposed to be the man to speak, you are the only one to be heard and women are supposed to be only seen, and some religion even dictates that women can never be seen where there are serious conversations about policies and issues of governance. And so yes, religion has played a major, major role in power imbalance or balance. When it comes to families, is the same thing. Because a lot of families are kind of bound to a specific religion. And so, you observe that and anything else other than the religion is wrong. And so, what does that do? It denies you the opportunity as a person to be yourself and to be a productive member of society or even whatever you want to pursue in your life, it will deny you the opportunity. Because the religion has said you cannot be this, right? Or you cannot do this, or you are the lesser human, or you cannot be heard, you have to be covered 24/7. So why would a man be exposed with no covering, nothing on the head, its ok but the female cannot do that because she is not allowed to. Who says so? Is that not the power struggle or power imbalance we are talking about? Because aren't they all human? Yes, so the religious teachings or traditions have infiltrated it or affected a lot of traditions, a lot of communities and families (Esau).

Am a Christian. My practice or role as a wife is based on what the Bible says. The Bible says "Wives submit to your husbands and husbands love your wives." And I feel like to a large extent based on the Christian principles of marriage and my little experience since I have been married, each time I give him the chance to, you know, to take the lead and I submit or allow him to make the decisions, I find it's easier for him to even love me. I allow my husband to just be the head. So yeah, our spiritual backgrounds definitely define our marriage, our home (Martha).

I am a Christian; I believe in the things that the Bible says. And I believe in marriage, I believe in the fact that we should support our wives, we should love them and all those kinds of stuff. There are some parts that also, I think the Bible sometimes can be biased against females. There is a lot of teachings in the Bible about submission on the part of women. Submission, the women should submit, ok. Which some people use that to bully their spouses. Some men may have some bogus ideas and because they are men, they will bully their wives to follow. Ok, so I also believe that women are as wise as men. When we were at university there were very smart lady Professors. They were smart. So, I

believe that the fact that am a man, it is not all the time that it means being right. And I should not push down my wife's nice ideas. That's why I believe in collaboration. We need to take advantage of the good things that women can offer. Some of our mothers were basically running the house because our fathers were gone most of the time. You know, and there are some schools that we know that the women who are in charge are doing so well. You know so I believe that the world will be a better place if we take advantage of resources and certain things that the women can bring to the table. If we push them down because they are women, we are losing. I think it's about time we brought in some changes. You know the church is losing. It is the church that loses. If we don't take advantage of the good things that women can offer (Paul).

Of course, our teachings are based on the Bible. But not such that if there is something different that will work for a family, for instance, the woman being the primary provider then that will be looked down upon, NO, and I know that first-hand. There was a time I was the primary provider and that did not make anybody think of my husband with the church as less nor did it affect our relationship, mine, and his, circumstances were what they were, and we needed to do what we needed to do for our family. So traditionally we do, yes teach the Biblical standards, the man providing but we also live in an ever-evolving world. So we don't train our girls just to be home as caregivers but to go out there and have an education, have job experiences, have your account, make your own money but at the same time, you know that you always have especially as a girl or as a woman you will always have a somebody covering you either your parents while you are them or your husband when you move or you get married and move into your husband's house, you have that covering. But if there is a need for you to be independent, you are not fumbling, like well nobody taught me how to earn a living for myself or I have to start begging because I can't or I don't know how to stand on my own two feet. So, we teach both sides of it with Biblical but at the same time strong young men and women to be able to stand on their two feet (Magdalene).

Interestingly, Mary and Magdalene stated that even though their religious institutions allow females to hold leadership positions, they were not interested due to family obligations and the huge responsibilities that come with the positions. Mabel stated that she wouldn't be part of any religious institution she perceived to be gender-biased against women. Andrew also stated that based on his observations, many African women are not taking any leadership positions in religious institutions because they are not willing to enroll in Bible schools to become Pastors. Mary, Magdalene, and Mabel had these to say concerning women and leadership roles in religious institutions:

Am that kind of person who doesn't want to be involved in any leadership role in the church because it comes with so many of my responsibilities. I don't care who takes up a leadership role and am not bothered by what happens in the church. I just go do whatever I can do and then leave. Because like I said leadership positions come with so many responsibilities. So why bother me? So, when people are in a position, I can help them to do what they can do. Am not really bothered about that (Mary).

Believe me, you know, I think I have been around long enough to see what these Pastors go through to be able to take a bow. I say thank you very much, but I will head that other way. Women do stand up in front of the church, who runs the church, we do have Lady Pastors, Lady Reverends who are the resident Pastors in their churches. Some of those Pastors or Reverends are married to men who are not Pastors or Reverends, right? So and the men have to be strong enough to know that my wife is the leader in the church that I go to, right? And you know they will joke when we meet at meetings so whatever and say she may be a leader out there but in the house am the boss (Magdalene).

The truth of the matter is that I think religion or Christianity is personal. If I go to a church and I think they are discriminatory against a woman I will leave the church. Am not supposed to be tied to the church. I will leave the church. So, I have not really been a part of where that is happening because I don't think I will find myself there. I don't think I will stay there. Because if you really want to think about it why did Jesus come through a woman? Women are very important in the church and they play an important role in the church which we will see even when in the life of Jesus when Jesus resurrected from the dead, he showed himself to a woman first. So, if you're discriminating against women, I particularly have issues with that and I don't think I will be part of any church that does that (Mabel).

Although she respected her husband's authority as head of the family, Mabel indicated there is nowhere in the bible where women and men are assigned different roles.

In the Bible, there was no particular role that was assigned to women to the best of my knowledge. There is no part in the bible that says this is what the woman should do Basically is women respect your husband and husband love your wife as Christ loved the church. So, in my opinion that is explanatory. I respect my husband and I respect his authority and I believe that he also loves me from the things that he does, the way that he behaves, from his understanding of the things that I do. Based on that I think those are the basic like that part talks about what men and women should do in marriage. And also, in the Bible where it talks about a man shall leave his father and mother and so as the woman and cling to his wife and become one. And I think that if you actually think about being one with someone in marriage there are some behaviors that you won't do, both the women and on the male part. So in the Bible, I can't remember any part that says women should wash dishes, or men should sit down doing nothing or men should be, there is really nothing that says that or insist that that's what it should be (Mabel).

On the other hand, Mark viewed the gender roles as Biblically assigned roles and he doesn't consider it as a power imbalance if everyone played his/her role. And this what they had to say:

Christian values from my understanding do not conflict or do not undermine anything. In the sense that my Bible tells me to love my neighbor as myself. Loving your neighbor as yourself goes a long way. My Bible also explains that a man will leave the home, a woman will leave the home. He and his spouse will come together and form one body. One body must work together to sustain it. I look at how God gave the rules to the man, woman to the man and that's how God created us. That's where the fundamentals always come from. A man has a role to play. I don't want to view things like somebody. My problem is there is always that kind of argument of why you are doing this and why can't I do this. Why don't we just accept our roles? I respect a woman totally and I don't see anything wrong with what I do or what she would do as long as there is respect. For instance, using the analogy of the respiratory and digestive systems, the respiratory system shouldn't get angry that am the one who is always bringing oxygen in and causing an exchange of gases and I don't like it, I think you think you're better than me so I want to play the role of the digestive system. If both of them don't agree on their separate functions, they are going to die. Because both of them play two separate vital roles for the body to function right. The roles have been set clear from a Christian perspective. What is expected of everybody? If we all embrace our roles and we raise our children from that point of view, and I think wouldn't be any chaos. The moment there is that kind of twist, inverse, or interchange of roles there will be chaos (Mark).

However, Esau argued it would be misleading to assume that gender roles are divinely ordained or instructed as some religious leaders would want us to believe. These roles according to Esau, creates a power imbalance within intimate partner relationships because they are man-made and imposed on the congregants. Esau suggested that those who believe in such religious teachings should find out how these gender roles came into existence by reading the scriptures to get a better understanding instead of just accepting them as divinely ordained roles. Esau believed that someone somewhere sat down and wrote all these roles without consulting the other gender (the female). The following are relevant quotes from Esau:

Are these religious doctrines or are these faith doctrines? There should be some distinction between them. Because if they are just religious doctrines then somebody sat somewhere and wrote all these and said this what is our religion is going to do. It wasn't based on the faith or wasn't a consultative you know doctrine, where you know they got a

female, a male, a young person, and old person, and they got these, these and put them in the same room and wrote all these doctrines (Esau).

However, Margaret pointed out that the established religious gender norms played a big role in power dynamics within her intimate relationship. According to her, these established religious gender norms sometimes make some women do certain things against their will. This according to her may lead to negative health consequences. This is what Margaret had to say:

Religious teachings play a big role in power dynamics. Yeah, it does they say as a Christian woman you don't have to be wearing these clothes, and as a Christian woman, you don't have to have sex before marriage, you have to wait after marriage so people tend to hide their sexual activities, people even tend to get pregnant and abort it because it will be shameful to have a baby when you're not married. I believe religious doctrines or teachings play a big role in power dynamics within an intimate relationship. Yeah in certain religious institutions, men and women don't sit on the same pew, men sit in front and women sit at the back (e.g. Islam religion). And in some religions, they would say as a woman you can't be a pastor or hold some leadership positions. I don't think is fair because women are good especially when it comes to organization and coordination of activities, and women are naturally multitasking. In certain religious institutions, is not really accepted and they see you as an outcast if you are in a relationship with let's say a Muslim or somebody outside your religious beliefs. Is not really accepted. You just avoid the whole thing and be with a Christian who may not even be interested in the relationship. So it plays and they will say as a Christian you don't have to do this and that in terms of intimacy and you hear things like Christian woman and you're showing all these things how did you learn all that? So, in terms of intimacy and how you relate with your partner, I believe religious beliefs also count or play a major role. I don't think these religious doctrines or teachings are being fair to women because if you think the woman can cook for you why don't you think the woman can also make decisions that may help other women. So, I think this should be addressed. I know because of our patriarchal system, is going to take like a million years (Margaret).

Thomas also expressed his views about religious teachings on gender roles and gender inequality. Though he believed that traditional gender roles create gender inequality, he stated that the roles are established by God and words like 'gender equality' are not in the Bible. However, he believed that there were other areas or fields women were good at and could lead as well. This is what he had to say:

Gender equality is a western concept. Equality is a modern-day term. Gender equality was never on the agenda of God. It's just now that people want to create gender equality.

The Bible says when God created Adam, after that he made Adam fall asleep and removed one of his ribs and he created Eve. So, Adam first then Eve. That's is what the Bible talks about. Definitely, am not a Pastor, but what the Bible preaches is that the husband is the head of the family as Christ is the head of the church. So, gender equality is not a Biblical term, is not in the Bible, and is not the Christian doctrine. In my opinion, all of us cannot be leaders. So, you can't have two drivers in a car. Is not possible you will get into an accident. So, when the order has been set if you follow it definitely there will be peace. you know what makes marriage works is not who is leading or not leading. You can lead in love. Ok, you're the husband but know that there is what they call servant-leader. Definitely, the power might tilt towards you but in anything that you want to do you always ask the opinion of your wife. You're a servant-leader. So, the way everybody will control our family is different. If you control your family in a diplomatic way there won't be a problem. When you get to the family regarding decisions making like what to eat, what to drink, and things like that, women are in charge. They will tell you ok this what am preparing for you today and you have to eat it. They are also in charge. So, everybody, we all have a place where we all are leading. So even if they can't become Pastors, and Bishops they may be leaders in other areas too. So it should be balanced. Is not like the male figure is a leader in all areas, NO. There are other places too where the female figure they are also leaders. So, most of the time when we balance things very well there won't be any problem. That is the truth (Thomas).

Mabel disagreed with Thomas' Biblical quotes (that the husband is the head of the family as Christ is the head of the church) because that was an incomplete text and often used by men to bully their partners. And so, they usually leave out the important part of that religious text which states that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church. According to her, men instead have a huge responsibility because there is a huge responsibility associated with the word 'love.' And this what she had to say:

I know a lot of people who like to quote women respect your husband and then they forget to quote the part that where the Bible says also men love your wife just like Christ loved the church. That passage actually puts a lot of responsibility on the men and the roles that men should play in marriage. But I think that people forget that they only just see because I think people look at, in the Bible, there was no particular role that was assigned to women to the best of my knowledge (Mabel).

Importantly, Esau indicated that religion also contributes positively to intimate partner relationships and society despite the influence of religious gender roles on intimate partner

relationships. For instance, many of the participants stated that they relied on religious text to resolve their marital conflicts. Mary and Mabel had these to say:

I will say religion, brings a lot of good things out of people or it helps us to become good people. You're a Christian as well so you know. I mean the Christian religion is based on love, when you love God you love your neighbor as yourself so if you have this in mind as your philosophy you wouldn't hurt other people. Sometimes you don't know that when you're hurting other people, you're hurting yourself as well. So why even go that direction. So, I would say yes, the Christian religion has shaped and molded me and that is affecting and influencing our relationship in a positive way (Mary).

Religious text is one of the things that has helped us in marriage I can tell you is that I can be very hard-headed and stubborn and one of the things that has helped me to be grounded in marriage is my relationship with God and also like just reading the Bible and trusting and believing in God's word and be guided by it. And also, my husband is a Christian, and he is also a practicing Christian, I think that has really helped us and influenced our approach to dealing with issues in our marriage (Mabel).

### **Contributors to power dynamics**

Many of the participants admitted that socioeconomic factors such as gender, income, education, employment status, age and health, and extended family pressure could to some extent influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships if the relationship is not viewed as a partnership/collaboration.

**Income.** Although many of the participants admitted that the differences in income levels could influence power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship, they stated that their income gaps did not influence their intimate relationships. These participants stated that a relationship is a partnership, and it doesn't matter who has more or fewer resources. They believed that once there is transparency, good communication, understanding, and mutual respect, everything else falls into place. However, Esau, Andrew, Thomas, and Margaret argued that the income gap between the two partners could influence the dynamics of power within their relationship. Money, according to some of these participants plays a bigger role in marriage than

people acknowledge. Accordingly, power may tilt towards the partner who brings in the most financial resources.

Let's say you bring in 70,000 a year, and your spouse who has a little bit of lower education and doesn't have a good job doesn't have a better paying job, brings in 30,000. That one right there is a power issue in a relationship. Because now you look at it like I am doing pretty much everything in this relationship, am funding the relationship (laughter). Relationships are not supposed to be funded. It's supposed to be a partnership. Yeah, its mostly African mind or traditions where they believe am the man whether you're making a 100,000 a year, I don't care, I don't want to touch your dollar, am taking care of my family, and again that revisits the religion and power in families. Because men always am talking about African men who feel like, no, my wife cannot take care of me, my wife cannot pay for my bills, my wife cannot pay for my car. But you're one, you're married, you're a couple. Why would it be so hard not to share the income or the money? So yeah, I think money is a big deal because when a female gender earns more money and is also interesting because there are women who feel like they are independent, so they don't need any man. You know like am good I can do everything by myself and for me, I don't care. So, you're not coming into this relationship to take care of me. And I think the whole mistake or the misunderstanding in this is not the money, is the reason why you got in a relationship. That's where we miss it. Because you didn't get in a relationship or partnership because of money or economic status, what do you bring to the table? You know you got in a relationship for companionship or whatever reasons, so are those reasons being fulfilled? Yes or no? if not, then money becomes an issue (Esau).

As an African man, you will never want to ask for money from your wife. That's just traditional. And I think that's a weakness, am sorry but I think that's a weakness because you raising a family, your family, you're one, if marriage tells me, right? You're supposed to be one, in one union, in one accord. So that basically tells me whatever you are doing, you doing as one. So, your income comes in, my income comes in, we budget for the home, the family, and all that, we do our projects together. This is for me, I think, when money becomes mine, mine, and mine, mine then that's a problem. If that's ours then there will be never a problem for a man to feel like my wife is making more than I make or my man is making too much money. And you see, men we also, the problem is men when they make too much money, they want to show their women that hey, I control everything, I am in power here, I run the home from the financial perspective to everything. So, you don't have to, you know tell me nothing. So those are the mindsets that have to be kind of changed, you know, or kind of adjusted. Because when you look at you know the mindset in this western world and here in Canada, you know, I have seen and had friends who you know they operate their finances together. And even in most cases is the other gender, the female gender that is making more money and yet supporting the entire family, It's ok, it's ok. The reason why we have to work and make money is to support each other. It doesn't matter who makes much or who makes less (Esau).



If one is working and the other is not working, yeah there is a problem. Yeah, in my first relationship when I was not working, she chose to leave me because she said that ok am not going to live with you if you're not working. Because she was there depending on me, right? When I lost my job, she decided to leave me. So, I guess there is a problem there when you know you are not working. But you know if both of us were working, that maybe wouldn't have been the case when I got laid off, or she got laid off. There will be a difference. But when is one person working, another person may be in a relationship because of your income, right? So, if you don't have the income, yes, now she living you, right? (Andrew).

Excuse me to say this sometimes I believe he respects me a lot because he knows that I am making most of the money (Mary).

Money is the food of love. When there is money there is love. Money is very important. Money answers all things. All those things are not just empty words. As we say in Lagos, Nigeria 'No money, no Love.' Money is very, very, vital, and very important. If you don't have money, you don't have control, you don't have power. Which kan power? In pidgin English translated to mean what kind of power is that? Power no dey anywhere, in Nigerian Pidgin English, translated to mean that one doesn't have power. So, money is very important. So, in families where power dynamics tilt towards the man, the man is doing very well, the man is wealthy. If there is no money, forget it. Either the power is not there at all or it will shift towards the woman. That's the way it is. Money is very, very important. There is a saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The bottom line is this, money answers all things; be it in a family, congregation, social gathering, etc., the financier always has a say. That's the way it is (Thomas).

Some of the participants who believed that money didn't play any role or influenced their relationship had this to say:

Money is the last thing, I don't remember the last time, we've never argued about money. And once in a while we will just come together and say, I have told him a few times that maybe we should hold on with this and wait till we have enough so we can do this. So we plan and we don't have any problem with money (Mary).

It depends on your cultural, and spiritual backgrounds. That's one's personality. As a woman, I believe that irrespective of how much you earn or how financially independent you are, your husband is your husband, and he is your head of the family. Respect him as much as you can even if he is not earning as much yours. Just having that at the back of your mind is what matters. That's my personal opinion. No matter how much I earn I wouldn't even if I earn more than my husband, my relationship with my husband is not going to be any different. Or even if I earn less you know like I just told you to give him that respect he deserves and mutual respect, you communicate as you should so I feel like financial independence should not be an issue for a woman in any marriage. That's is just my take (Martha).

**Education.** Many of the participants stated that one's level of education also plays an important role in power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship. According to these participants, power tilts towards the partner with higher education status. Margaret stated that African women are often discouraged to obtain a higher education because of societal gender role expectations of women. This according to some participants leads to a power imbalance within an intimate partner relationship.

It will be a little bit easier to have a spouse that you can reason on the same level. That's first. It will also be a little easier when you have a spouse, where you can, you have similar skills. Not skills in terms of employment, but rather skills in terms of life, life skills. So, what happens is you have a master's degree and you're marrying a high school spouse, either way, male or female, you can interchange who is higher and who is lower. When intelligence, the skill level is different that can be a problem. That one right there is a power issue in a relationship. Because you know you seem to know more, you're more socially aware of things, you know, you know what the laws say, you know all these. So, you can take advantage of that against your spouse because they don't know what happens in abusive relationships, where do I go, who do I report to (Esau).

To a large extent I feel is very important for couples to be on the same socioeconomic levels or educational levels prior to getting married because there is also the need for mutual respect, there is the need to respect each other's decision and opinions without thinking that the other person has lower educational levels so his/her decisions or opinions don't matter (laughter). Because you don't want to be in a situation where you feel like, how am I sure he/she knows what he is saying, you know I don't know, that's just what I feel though (Martha).

In addition, Margaret stated that it was very important to obtain a foreign education or credentials, preferably from a developed country especially if one has the intention of going back to the home country. Foreign education or credentials from a western country, according to Margaret puts one in a higher educational category compared to their peers who had all their education in Africa.

I always had the intention of advancing in my education and attaining a Ph.D. and so I wanted to do everything possible to be able to gain higher education here. When you earn a Canadian education or let's say education abroad, people really respect you, people think that you're higher and advanced more than them. I also wanted to gain that because I had cousins who had also traveled and studied abroad, and I was seeing the difference

in treatment. And so, I also wanted to receive that treatment. I will also travel and study more. But growing up I always told myself I would go higher in education than what my parents attained, I will learn more, I would advance in my education so that my children will also be able to get that opportunity. This was my intention. So, my main focus was on higher education and the privileges that come with it. And also, to get a better life (Margaret).

**Social status.** Although many of the participants stated that social status could significantly influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships, some of the participants stated it didn't play any role in their relationship because they viewed or considered an intimate partner relationship to be a partnership or collaboration. Accordingly, a good or healthy relationship isn't about who contributes the most resources in the relationship and social status but rather depended on collaboration, transparency, effective communication, and mutual respect. One of the participants who believed it played a significant role had this to say:

You're on the level of CEO for example and your interaction class is that of CEOs, then you come to your house and your spouse whichever way, am not picking on any gender, but your spouse is a high school guy so where does your spouse hang out, with high school guys? So, what's the knowledge gap here? The gap is so much big that what are you discussing at the dinner table? what are you discussing in your life growth and development? what are discussing? So that becomes an issue. To me, I believe and think that it's important to have a little bit of similar class, education level, etc, and you will fit in a relationship or society better. Because those things will affect your social status and social life. Because you know, life is about status and so you know, if you can't quite distinct yourself from who and where then it can be a problem and yeah, it's a tough position to not be able to fit in. You can again because its spouse, people love each other, people appreciate each other, they do things for each, that's ok. People will do that but there are levels in life where you feel like you're being dragged backward, or you're not being pushed or supported (Esau).

**Age and health.** Many of the participants indicated that age is often associated with wisdom, power, perspective, and respect in many traditional African societies. For this reason, the husband who assumes the role of the head of the family is expected to be older than the wife who assumes the subordinate position. Accordingly, the older partner in good health is presumed to have more power within an intimate partner relationship. However, as one's health and energy

declines with age, power will shift to the partner with good health and energy, who is often believed to be the wife or the woman.

In terms of power dynamics, yes. Age plays into it because naturally, people look up to older people for so many things when it comes to leadership, decision making, and direction, yes. Because we cannot look at the value of age. Wisdom generally comes with age. And so, do Experience also comes with Age. You know there are some things you can read in the book and there are things that you can't read in the book. It comes with time as you live it. You experience it. So that part is there. Then after a certain level in terms of age, you lose some parts of your abilities, in terms of your brain, you cannot retain so much information, your memory starts losing and so your performance also starts to deteriorate. So that time then you see that age becomes a negative factor. So the younger person play will a major role now since you don't remember so much. Therefore, when a spouse becomes older than the man, the power dynamics also change. Health plays into it because at a certain age, one's health declines. However, sometimes you may have older folks who may be healthier but because he is old, you know maybe his brain is still intact but because of his age, he needs to tone down his role a little for the younger one to pick up from there. You know we see old age associated with diminishing health status (Paul).

With age difference, it boils down to individual's personality but based on my own culture and my background, the man should be or better if the man is older than the woman because automatically men are the head of the family, men are in charge, the head of the house and so they are the leaders of the house. So, no matter how many years older, it boils down to how the man uses his power, right? So, if a man is much older and there is also an issue if the man is 15 years older than the woman, then that might be a big issue because the kind of interest might not be the same. For instance, while the wife is thinking of shoes and clothes, the man might be thinking of building or buying a house. You know I feel like a big age difference might be an issue and influence power dynamics within the intimate partnership. It's easier when they are both within the same age bracket, there is less tendency for the undue exercise of power or authority (Martha).

My ex was about 8 years older than me. Because The person thought I don't deserve him, or I don't know better than him and all that. A big age difference can make men exercise undue power and engage in multiple partner activities. So, he kind of treated me very unfairly and he was into another relationship serious with a woman somewhere. So, mostly you have men who are older than women, they take advantage of those women and they have the most power and they want to control you, tell you what to do and all that. And if the woman is also older than the man, the woman would also want to have control over the man (Margaret).

However, few participants believed that age has nothing to do with intimate partner relationships and therefore doesn't influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships. This is what Andrew had to say:

Well, you know, with my last relationship I was 15 years older than my wife. So, to me, the age difference was not the factor when we had issues. So, there was no concern based on the age (Andrew).

**Children.** All participants with children admitted that children play a very important role in intimate partner relationships because they influence the power dynamics of the relationship. In many traditional African societies, power and prestige are attached to childbearing. Children, according to one of the participants, increased the bargaining power of women in intimate partner relationships. In this regard, Paul stated that some men will continue to stay in an unequal power relationship for fear of paying child support if they should leave, while others will still leave no matter the consequences because they don't care.

I remember I heard it from someone here that if you have issues with your wife it's cheaper to keep her, considering the issues of child support. So, when you have children with her or in the family. Definitely, if you're responsible and you don't want problems you will run from anything called divorce because you know that if it happens like this your life is finished. So, all those things hold in this part of the world but in Africa, in most cases, it doesn't hold true. But in this part of the world sometimes people hold on to a relationship when children are involved even though he is not happy or things are not going on well, you will continue to hang in there because you don't want to pay child support. I even heard one story about an African woman who wanted to divorce her husband who is also an immigrant. I think they have four or five children. The husband tried everything to resolve issues with his wife. He even went to the extent of asking some leaders of the community to plead on his behalf so that the whole thing will die down, but the wife wanted a divorce at all cost. The lady went ahead with the divorce. The husband is gone back to Africa because he couldn't make ends meet due to child support payments. He had five children with the wife, what is doing here, considering the amount of money that goes into child support. He went back to Africa. "It cheaper to keep her so they say" because the children then it increases the bargaining power of these women, knowing very well the men are scared to leave the relationship. So that is it. People may want to stay in a relationship because if they come out of the relationship there is a problem (Thomas).

Yeah, it does. People are stuck to their wives because they are afraid to move on even though they are going through a lot of mental issues (depression, stress, anxiety, and fear) and they are living in fear. And they just may be dating women outside their marriage. Some people even end up being in the marriage, their body is in the marriage, but their soul and spirit are not in the marriage, they are in another place. You realize that a man may have two kids outside the marriage because they are not interested in the marriage, but they are afraid to divorce. So, these are some of the situations that some men go through. So, having children play a huge role because there are children involved you want to protect them. After all, you don't want the children to go through any stress. And so these women realize that because you want to do everything to protect the children they are going to stress you up and take more from you and put you in a position that you don't like. I think in this situation the men suffer more. But there are situations where the women also suffer, where the man will just run away and leave the children with the woman and the woman be alone will have to take care of the kids. But in this part of the world, you can't run away. Unless you're running away to Ghana (Margaret).

Yeah, it does whether you like it or not. I will say this in two ways. I will say one side and hit the other side. When you have children in the relationship then the children hold it together. Children become factors that hold the relationship together. Because you share the children in terms of responsibilities and then the love for the children and so you don't want the children to go through that confusion and that difficulties, emotional trauma when you break apart. Children suffer the most when there is separation in the relationship. So for both spouses once you have children, you try your best to hold on to the relationship, you kind of endure, you kind of try to reason together and then keep the relationship going. Some people may have to give up on somethings to accept certain things under normal circumstances they won't if there were no children just to keep the family, the relationship going. Of course, some men can decide to stay because they know that when they leave, they will have to pay child support and it can be very expensive. So, they stay. And of course, some women can also use that as the bargaining power to manipulate and leverage in terms of control. Ok, that one is there. That can work for some men. There are some men who don't care, if they want to go, they will go and they will pay. There are others also who think that if they go, they feel like their children will not have the support that they deserve. They may pay the money and the woman can use the money to do anything so they will also stay so that they can be in the life of the children and manage the life of the children. And men who have that reason when the children grow then you will see the whole marriage fall apart. Because they are also because they also want to keep, help, and support the children. I have seen both sides of the coin. So, children play a very important role when it comes to power dynamics in marriage. They hold the marriage together no matter how you think about it. But from the woman's point of view, there are so many women who sacrifice, they stick to it, they compromise so many things that under normal circumstances they wouldn't have just because they want their children to have a healthy development, have a good environment where they will grow and develop to their full potential (Paul).

**Extended family pressure.** All the participants came from countries where the extended family system is practiced. Family, in many traditional African countries, comprises of uncles, aunties, cousins, nieces, and nephews (Adinkrah, 2012). For instance, among the Akans of Ghana, uncles may take pride in paying for the living expenses of their nieces and nephews (Adinkrah, 2012). Many of the participants stated that pressure from the extended family members plays a huge role in influencing power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship and is one of the reasons for high divorce rates among African immigrants. This according to some of the participants is rightly so because the traditional marriage process has become very costly. Some of the participants stated that the marriage process has become a business now and that one has to be rich to get married.

Many of the participants reported that the traditional African marriage processes could create an atmosphere of dependence on extended families. Many of the participants admitted they often relied on some of their extended members for advice when they had marital conflicts. As Mark puts it “the extended family members are an extension of us.” The following are relevant quotes from some participants about the role extended families play to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

Extended family is largely you know I can't quote exactly the statistics but it's part of the top five leading reasons for broken marriages and divorces in families. Why? Because they kind of interfere with the spouses, the marriage and because of its external pressure, and one of the spouses will have to bow to that pressure regardless of where it's coming from. And so yes the extended family pressure can be draining that's for a fact, and because they will and now the money factor comes in, and the economic factor comes in because what they do is if you're the man and making more money and they know that and they will tell you why can't you get a woman who makes more money (laughter), you know or they will advise you very wired stuff like, oh ok, so why do you even give her all the money? why do even support their family? why can't she have her job? you know so those pressure will bring in a power struggle and if it's the woman who is making a lot of money supporting the man, oh my God now that's even going to be worse; why are you supporting a grown-up man? why can't he look for a job? why can't he do this? Why can't he do that? So external pressure from family, extended family

plays a major role in the power divide and power struggle among couples and families, big time (Esau).

In African communities we believe in families, we are knitted to the families and so you want to listen to your mother, you know you want to listen to your father because it's respectful to do so. And so, as you do all those you can kind of ignore that you're a man, grown up and you have your spouse, your family. And so, you just can't make decisions based on what your mother says, or your father says, or your cousin or uncle, nephews, and grandpas says. You have to make decisions based on what's happening between me and my spouse. So, we get a lot, African men get a lot of pressure from extended family. And unfortunately, it's never a positive pressure, it's very tough pressure. Because at the end of the day it becomes one of the top leading reasons for marriage breakdowns, or relationship breakdowns because it's just unsustainable. When you know you are supposed to be independently living your life. But again, the men are to be blamed you know or either way because we tend to listen so much and compare, make comparison and look at it and say yes, yes, I think I should do this. Because if you made the soundest decision as a man to marry or as a woman to be married, it's a choice you made so why do you allow external pressures of the family to break you down. It is good to respect your parents, listen to their advice, and pick what fits you. It is not one size fits everybody, no. So, I think that's where we have to be right. But now African men have to style up am sorry am one of them (laughter) (Esau).

Sometimes it's ok to rely on older relatives or maybe relatives who have been married for a long time. I know my husband has an older sister who has been married for a long time than we have. He relies on this older sister, whom they are very close to for advice. She and her husband give us a lot of advice and my husband listens to them. They advise us a lot and sometimes I feel is not enough especially for you men you don't just accept advice from anybody. So, for me am just blessed and grateful that he has such a family that he respects so much and each time they talk to him and they always give him good advice. In that aspect I feel like for me or even for anybody I feel like is important to have someone you both (Couples) respect and look up to (Martha)

Yes, that's the reason why I said before you can allow like maybe an external person to give you advice as regards to your family, you have to know that person will be objective, will be fair, or else that person will give you something that will not be good or might destroy the family or the relationship. is always good to have someone who is part of your family may be like a pastor or any religious leader. So that the person will be like a mentor to the family or an adviser or a counselor to the family. So, because is always very, very vital the kind of advice you get and most of those things have a huge influence on the family. Yes, pressure from extended family members can influence power dynamics in a relationship. That's is why I don't discuss the majority of issues in life with anybody because most of them will want to control you the way they think is best for you which you also think may not be the best for you. They can (Thomas).

You have situations where your mother-in-law comes to the house and then question you, why do you allow your husband to wash the dishes, why do you allow your husband to



do laundry, and so they come in and they start to influence either the wife or the husband. Like this, one shouldn't be done by you and they will be telling you what to do in the house even though both of you were previously ok with what you were doing but these people will just come in and be saying or influencing what people should do. After they are gone there are huge disagreements in the home. So external families contribute a lot so it will be good to avoid external family relations, not avoid them totally, but not in your marriage situations. That's why I will not advise anybody to go to aunty, uncle, or parents for advice. Though You may have some parents who could advise you very well on what to do and it will not affect your marriage. But there are other parents oh my God you don't want to let them know because they will say, and you are staying in this you should leave today but meanwhile this a situation that can be solved by both partners. But they may influence your decision on that. So, they contribute a lot. Yes, they do (Margaret).

However, not everyone allows the interference of the extended family members in their intimate relationships. To resolve marital conflicts, Mark indicated that he sought professional advice from family experts and also from mature and experienced individuals. He suggested that partners need to be selective when it comes to seeking relationship advice from relatives. In this regard, he indicated that he would rather seek marital advice from his grandmother than from his parents because his parents failed in their marriage.

I take advice from experts in the first place. It doesn't matter being old, young. I respect old age. I am from a broken home so I don't think I would go to my mum or dad for marriage advice. Not that I don't respect them, I mean they all have their reasons it didn't work. My father has been married three times. And so, I may learn from his mistakes about marriage and ask him why did your marriages fail? But will not take marriage advice from my father. I may take something from his mistakes so that I make mine better. But if am taking marital advice I would go to my grandparents. Because my grandmother married my grandfather until my grandfather passed away. And as far as I know, they were really in love for all the years they were together. And so, I would go to them. They are experts in that field. So, those are the people I will go to for marriage advice. So, I will go to different people based on my challenges and whom I deem as experts. I know that the extended family members normally cause so many marital issues because they are an extension of us. In as much as I respect the extended family members and love them, am very selective about who to consult for marital disputes because wrong extended family members can actually create a problem for you in your relationships (Mark).

Well, I like said, I told you I believe in a peaceful atmosphere. So even though I have extended family, am lucky I don't deal with other extended family members. I only deal with my siblings and my parents. And my husband understands that situation so well. So,

we don't have any problems. I mean like said is a partnership. When there is a partnership you always try to work together, we understand each other (Mary).

My husband does not believe in us taking our matters elsewhere. Like when we disagree about stuff, we can keep matters for days but eventually, he believes that we should resolve it by ourselves rather than introducing a third party to the marriage (Mabel)

While most of the participants relied mainly on the advice of external family members to resolve a relationship issue, some of the participants relied on the advice of church or faith-based counselors, community counselors, community leaders, or close friends. Accordingly, most of the participants believed external family pressure influenced power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship. However, some participants indicated that despite the problems the extended family members create within intimate partner relationships, some extended family members contributed positively to the success of many marriages due to the respect accorded them.

When you are going to marry, the woman's family would want to see your family. They want to know who are the people that are around you. So, you go with your uncle, if your parents are alive, they go with you. You go with some friends also. And if you go to church somebody in the church, a leader or the Pastor will go with you. So, these are the people that the family would want to see so that when something is going on in the relationship, they can call one of them and they will sit together and resolve it. It becomes a support network you know for that family. and is very, very important. Even here the support network is very, very important. So, they form part of it. Sometimes if something is going on in the marriage you look at your father-in-law, you think about your mother-in-law, you think about your uncle that came and stood in for you, you think about your Pastor, that supported you, then you think about your decision again because these people have come to support you and if you don't make a good decision the disgrace will affect them also. So, it affects the power dynamics in the relationship. It makes you think twice before you make any decision because you have all these networks and your decision that you make will affect all of them. When you do well, they will be proud of you if you don't do well also the disgrace will come to you also. So, yes, it's part of the network and it affects the dynamics (Paul).

### **Sub-Theme #3: Pathways to fair and equal relationships**

Based on participants' personal experiences, they shared different opinions surrounding the definition of a fair or equal relationship. However, despite these differences, there were some

commonalities. The following theme elements represent common recommendations from participants that promoted a fair and equal intimate relationship:

**Effective communication and mutual understanding.** Many of the participants stated that many African immigrant couples break up due to a lack of effective communication and mutual understanding. According to these participants, communication between partners can only be considered effective if the information relayed to the other partner is well understood. Therefore, many of the participants emphasized the need for partners to communicate effectively with each other and to seek clarifications when needed. Many of the participants believed that it was only through this approach to communication that a conducive environment could be created for partners to freely express their concerns and grievances before they got out of hand. Andrew stated that the divorce rate among African immigrants in Lethbridge is on the increase due to a lack of effective communication and willingness on the part of the immigrants to seek or reach out for help when faced with relational or marital issues.

This goes to both genders. You know, we are Africans, and we know where we come from. I don't know but many of our problems here in Canada can be solved if we communicated well and understood each other. One thing we have to understand is that there is no better man or a better woman anywhere, you know a woman is a woman, a man is a man. Am saying all this because there are too many broken families in our African community here. And this is not going to get us anywhere if we don't address these issues. For instance, in Lethbridge, if you really look at it, there are too many broken families. We are Africans so my advice to my people is that we can do better than keep breaking up as family by educating ourselves, have a better connection in the society or the community, go to somebody you know, it could be a person from the community, from the church community, talk, find a solution. Because breaking up should be our last resort when everything else fails. Unfortunately, some people or families are just breaking up because of small things. Because we are not talking to each other to solve our issues. Back home it was not like this. So that's the thing I could add, you know. Have more communication together. This what I think. Yes!! (Andrew).

Effective communication and mutual understanding are the very keys to fairness. So, we have to understand the environment we are in now and have to understand that is far different from Africa. One thing have I observed is that if the lady is not happy, she doesn't want any intimacy. So, the first thing you do is to find out why. If there is a

tangible reason why she is saying No or something like that. Then immediately you have to understand. But if it's because you had a small misunderstanding some days ago and she is still keeping it, ok let's resolve it and life goes on (Thomas).

**Accepting individual differences in views and values.** Many of the participants stated that the lack of acknowledgment and respect for differences in individual views and opinions often create relationship issues. Some participants stated that partners need to accommodate or tolerate their differences in views and values. Therefore, many of the participants stated that each partner should be free to express him/herself without fear of intimidation. Some of the participants stated that partners should avoid discussing topics that may be considered offensive, shameful, and embarrassing to the other partner due to differences in cultural values, norms, and beliefs.

My husband and I have been together for quite a while before we eventually got married. Yeah, we definitely have had issues starting the relationship as newly married couples. There are always going to be issues as you start living together because you come from totally different backgrounds, right? So, you cannot always see eye to eye on every issue and that might affect decision making or I don't feel like it's about maybe exercising power but I just feel is more about the fact that you're trying to you know combine minds or backgrounds together. Totally two different people coming together trying to make decisions together. And that can be difficult first but over time you get to understand each other better. And you're able to compromise. So, I can't say I felt I wasn't treated fairly or as an equal. Yeah, you will definitely. I feel like is normal for every couple to go through issues and experience their differences at a certain point in time. Accepting individual differences in views and values very important in any relationship. We may come from different cultural backgrounds, but we can still find a common ground through our disagreements. We can agree at a certain point through our disagreements and deficiencies. Finding a common ground (Martha).

I feel I need to be treated fairly and equally as well in terms of decision making and how things should be run in the home. How I can also express how I feel is very important. Because I realized that in a relationship where am not able to express myself, mostly it doesn't end well. There are a whole lot of mental issues, am most of the time stressed out, most anxious to talk to this person, and I leave out some conversations that I don't discuss because I feel is not going to be welcomed. Depending on culture, there are relationships I can talk about everything with my partner and there are others I don't feel comfortable discussing every topic with my partner. For instance, some guys will drive you away from topics such as sex those because they think we don't have to talk about

intimacy, this doesn't have to be a discussion. They feel this is personal and this is out of topic (Margaret).

In addition, some of the participants stated that as humans, we are bound to make mistakes, therefore, couples need to be careful with their choice of words especially when one of the partners offends the other or does something wrong. Many of the participants stated that it is important that partners accept their faults when they do something wrong, listen to each other, and unlearn behaviors or attitudes that do not promote an equal or healthy relationship.

I feel like correcting your partner with love goes a long way. The truth is I just feel everybody is different. Not being judgmental about your spouse's weaknesses, you know, or her inadequacies. Like don't just talk down on them, if you're doing something, if your spouse cooks a meal and you feel like it's not nice, you know you don't need to get mad. So little, little things like that. Just being able to say you know this food the salt is much. You know just say it with a soft tone and giving her the chance to do better the next time. Or just make fun out of it. Like correcting each other with love. Not that you wouldn't correct each other if not she is not going to progress. You should be able to tell each other the truth but you be extra careful about how you say it. And that whatever you're saying, you're doing so with love and with your partner's best interest at heart. So I think that's a major one. Try to treat each other with love and give each other support, support each other's dreams. Goes a long way (Martha).

Maturity, according to many of the participants, plays a big role in their relationship when it comes to accepting each other views and perceptions and creating a peaceful environment that promotes a healthy and equal intimate partner relationship. Maturity, to some of the participants, meant meeting each other at the point of need, being there for each other, and creating a peaceful atmosphere that promotes an equal and healthy relationship. Mary stated she has learned and experienced many things in life that have shaped her perceptions and views about life. Thus, according to her life experiences can either break a person or strengthen a person's relationship with others.

But We've all led our separate lives before we came together. So, we really understand what life is like. We've experienced life the way we want to, and we know what it means to be in a relationship. But I think maybe our sense of maturity is what is contributing to that. It hasn't changed. Our relationship is been the same. It actually keeps on getting

better and better. No, we don't have any problem at all. And then we try to, if we see something that we are not happy about, we talk about it (Mary).

Personally, nothing makes me feel good like a peaceful atmosphere in a home and around the home. I just want that peace of mind so that if I have a problem I can concentrate on the problem. I don't want to be thinking about many things at the same time. I have been through a lot in life. I have a very challenging childhood and so I told myself that I am going to make the best out of life now. So, most things that distract me in life, I wouldn't want to concentrate on those things. The thing that I hold most dear is to make sure that I have a peaceful atmosphere. That's all (Mary).

**Learning and unlearning behaviors.** Some of the participants emphasized the importance of learning behaviors that promote healthy and fair relationships and discarding those behaviors that don't. Some of the participants stated that partners who want to stick to the traditional African ways of doing things will eventually lose because they conflicted with the western culture.

Because of my previous experience with my failed marriage, I have learned to listen to inputs. I believe in collaboration, and with collaborative input am looking forward to something better. Yeah, but I cannot also say that my past relationships were all that bad you know. It was just a misunderstanding. It was just levels of you know understanding and what we believe in. I will put them down to values, what we value you know. So that is where I will say my divorce came from or my failed relationship, they came from our values. What I valued in and what they valued in. Am still learning, there is always room for learning. I still believe that I can be better, and I aspire to be better every day. And that is why I make room for criticism. I embrace all cultures and I believe that sometimes when you fuse some of the good cultures from outside it can actually enrich your own (Mark).

When African men move to Canada, they have to accept that times have changed. Women turn to adapt easily, turn to accept that am now in Canada and everything has changed, and am living a new life. However, from my observation, the men find it difficult to adapt to the new place. Especially in a situation where they feel power is being taken away from them, and they don't have any power to control like they are used to back in their countries of origin. I feel the men should integrate more, be open to learning what is here, and adapt more (Margaret).

Coming to any western world as I have said before, you learn and unlearn a lot of things. That is the reason why many broken African homes, I don't have the statistics, but I know that a lot of divorces occur within the migrant community. I have seen it a lot in broken African homes because of the power dynamics or struggles. Because of this, there is a power struggle between the husband and the wife. So, if you don't unlearn what

you've already learned in Africa, might be a problem for you in your marriage over here. We have to understand the environment we are in now and have to understand that is far different from Africa. And you have to understand that everybody works here so if my wife also brings in Income, the way I bring in income definitely for me to be fair to her I don't expect her to be doing all the cooking, I don't expect her to be doing all the cleaning of the house (Thomas).

Many of the participants implicitly or explicitly stated that our upbringing plays a very important role in how we relate to people. Some participants stated that each partner's perspective and mindset may be influenced by their cultural beliefs, norms, and values. Therefore, some of the participants indicated that the choices they made in life and how they related to each other were influenced by their cultural beliefs, values, and norms.

Growing up, I wasn't treated well as a child. I became independent so early, making most decisions for myself and that was so stressful for me, but I managed to pull through. So, I don't like being stressed out it because doesn't help the situation. So, I would say my childhood experiences have shaped me to be what I am today. I don't like to offend people. I just want to remain in my small corner. So, I have already told my husband that the day or the moment he starts to mistreat is the day I will leave him and never look back. Am not outspoken, and I hate to be bothered, so don't bother me (Mary).

I think one of the things that contribute to a fair or equal relationship is perspective and mindset. I think that like I have friends that I have spoken to that says that he cannot do this, he cannot do this for his wife, or he cannot do that for his wife and am wondering why can't you. If my husband comes to the house for example, if am not home and my husband comes to the house and the house is literally dirty, he will go ahead and clean it. Whereas I have people who will say ok when my wife comes. I have heard other people tell me that the husband gets home before the wife and then still expect your wife to come and cook why is that. I think the mindset and just looking at the relationship as a partnership would go a long way in ensuring that we are treating our spouses equally. I would say that in my opinion in the world that we live today, even I have a son I would teach my son to see in marriage the things that help the marriage to work; are seeing yourself as equal in marriage (Mabel).

**A relationship is a partnership/collaboration.** Many of the participants expressed the need for partners to collaborate to create an equal sense of power for the relationship to be considered fair. According to some of the participants, the opinions and views of each partner are important and should not be ignored. However, some of the participants believed that power is

not fixed but dynamic depending on one's social location. Some of the participants indicated that we all have our strengths and weaknesses in different areas. For instance, one partner might be good at managing the finances of the house, while the other partner might be good at planning and organizing activities for the family. Therefore, some participants believed that partnership/collaboration in a relationship meant combining each other's strengths for the relationship to function properly. Regardless, some participants believed that one of the partners would have to lead in the area(s) where he/she has the strongest capabilities. In this regard, many participants considered partnership in a relationship as sharing of responsibilities, changing roles, or stepping up to take other responsibilities when the need arises. Therefore, having more or fewer responsibilities, according to many of the participants had nothing to do with power.

A fair relationship is where each member of the relationship has a role to play. Where each member's voice is respected, and heard, you know even if the idea of one person is not accepted, you give the person the chance for his/her voice to be heard. You know, or a voice to be heard is very, very important is different from whether you implement it or not but a voice must be heard. It can also be in the form of financial access, you know, every member of the relationship should have access to the resources that you have. You collaborate. God did not give wisdom to one person. And if you have a vehicle the engine has two or you have an airplane, a jet that has two engines why do you turn off one just to use one. So, you use both of them as an advantage. So, you collaborate with your spouse in decision making. I don't think it is good, to me it is not prudent to control your spouse just because of gender. You will lose if you try to, one partner tries to control the other just because of gender. (Paul).

I personally believe that marriage is a partnership. So, in my opinion as a Christian and also based on what I think, I personally believe that there is really no power in marriage. I see marriage as a relationship. It should be a relationship because two people coming together to commit to living together shouldn't be seen as one person having power or not. So, if we see marriage as a partnership in which we have equal stakeholders because it takes both parties to make the marriage work, I think it will help a lot of our relationships. Because sometimes the issue we have with marriage is just somebody feeling cheated or somebody feeling lesser than they are in the relationship (Mabel).

Many of the participants believed that transparency plays a big role in creating a partnership. Transparency was noted by many of the participants as one of the key elements for



successful and fair intimate partner relationships. For instance, a lack of financial transparency was considered as one of the issues that lead to marital conflicts. However, some participants believed that transparency does not mean sharing everything with your partner because certain topics cannot be discussed because of their consequences.

We don't hide anything from anyone. For instance, you don't hide the money from your spouse just because of gender or just because of how much she brings into the family resources. It doesn't matter how much she brings home. She should have access and you should all agree on how you spend the money. It could be like any amount that is more than \$100 both of you should each member or the spouse should inform the other spouse and agreed on before he/she takes that money out anything less than you can go ahead you don't have to inform the other person. I believe that is fair (Paul).

I think finances are an important part of marriage that can actually make or break a marriage. Yeah, because if you're able to go or move beyond finances and say that you see yourselves as having the same income, I think it will make a lot of things easier in your marriage to actually talk about. Because either way I know how much I earn, you know what is happening with the money, you know what to do with the money, you know how the money is. I know that when I was growing up in Nigeria, one of the things that caused a lot of issues within my parents' relationship was finances. Someone assuming that you're making more money than you're and then that triggers a lot of stuff or someone imagining that or maybe a husband imagining that the wife is taking or hiding money away from them. Like there are just a lot of things that most of the time, money has a lot of roles to play in marriage than people actually acknowledge (Mabel).

## **Summary**

These study findings illustrated that gender intersected with other factors such as race, income, social status, social location, labor policies, religion, children, age, and health to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. Even though gender roles were embedded in participants' culture and religious beliefs, many of the participants reported that these roles were not static. In some cases, partners switched roles due to their specific context, thereby illustrating the contextual, dynamic and intersectional nature of power-relations. Surprisingly, all the female participants embraced the

masculine breadwinner role when the need arose. However, this was not always the case with male participants if they had to occupy feminine identified gender roles when the need arose.

The study also illustrated that those gender roles performed in public may be different from what happened in private, because some of the participants sought to maintain the appearance of a culturally appropriate gendered social location. These gender role changes often occur due to changes in the market economy and globalization. For instance, financially independent, full-time employed female participants expected her partner to help, especially with household labor. Therefore, many of the men were more involved in household labor than they previously were in their countries of origin. However, some men resisted these gender role changes following migration for fear of being ridiculed or questioned by in-laws and parents.

Overall, within the transnational space, the female participants experienced feelings of empowerment due to becoming economically independent, more involved in decision making, and consequently developed expectations that their partners should help, especially with household labor. Therefore, many of the male participants discarded those traditional gender roles that did not promote fair and equal relationships and adopted the ones that promoted more equitable and fair relationships.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Introduction

This study explored the factors that influence the shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, southern Alberta, Canada. Applying Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis, and the theoretical lens of intersectionality, these data were rigorously analyzed, coded, categorized, and themes generated. These themes and sub-themes were subsequently organized and detailed in Table 2 and a thematic map (Figure 3), which illustrated the intersecting factors that influenced power dynamics within relationships of these West African immigrant participants, and the pathways many participants took to fairer and equal relationships.

These analyses answered the three primary research questions: 1) what are the power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants since immigration to Canada?; 2) how do these power dynamics operate within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants?; and 3) how do intersecting factors such as gender, patriarchal norms, beliefs, and values, religious beliefs, age and health, income, education, and social status influence power dynamics within intimate relationships among West African immigrants to Canada?

This chapter will situate these study findings in the context of the existing literature on power dynamics and the experiences of African immigrants and will discuss the importance of pathways to establish a fair or equal intimate partner relationship among West African immigrants. I also highlight the challenges that emerged as a result of immigrants living in two different worlds (transnationalism), and how these challenges influenced power relations. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of this study, make recommendations for further research, discuss the

significance of the study findings and their implications for practice, articulate a knowledge translation plan, evaluate the utility of the intersectionality framework as a theoretical lens in this context, and discuss my reflexivity in the context of this research.

### **The Participants**

The study drew on interview data from ten eligible West African immigrants, purposively selected to maximize diversity in the study. The participants were interviewed at a mutually convenient time using Zoom video conference software due to COVID – 19, and the directive to restrict in-person interactions by the University of Lethbridge Ethics Review Board. These interview data reflected participant’s views, values, norms, perceptions, and experiences surrounding the phenomenon of study.

Research participants migrated to Canada for varied reasons: four of the research participants came to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP); four came in as students; one came in through the Family Sponsorship or Family Reunification program and; one came in as a refugee. Interestingly, many of the participants indicated that the decision to move away from their home countries wasn’t an easy one, as they left behind their spouses, children, and relatives. The participants also indicated that a lot of preparation went into the migration process. One of the participants indicated that her uncle (an extended family member) sponsored her financially to migrate to Canada (Korevla, 1999). In return for this gesture, the uncle expected her to do well in Canada so that she could offer financial support to the non-migrant extended family back home (Baffoe, 2009). Unfortunately, some of the participants indicated that their inability to meet these expectations often led to stress-related illnesses such as high blood pressure, anxiety, frustrations, and depression (Baffoe, 2009).

Before migration, many of the participants had already established social support systems and networks (e.g., relatives, friends, and acquaintances) in Canada. For instance, many of the participants indicated that these social networks provided them with temporary accommodation for some days before they found their places. The participants frequently stayed connected to their countries of origins in diverse ways, such as the use of modern technologies like computers, phones, social applications because they often felt that they did not belong in Canada, and that they may not be fully accepted by the host country (Mensah, 2010). For instance, one of the participants who came as a child illustrated the feelings of connection to his homeland when he stated that he would prefer that his body be returned to his ancestral land for burial when he dies (Cohen, & Odhiambo, 1992). Accordingly, many of the participants had established social relations or social networks that linked the host and home countries, consequently, creating a transnational space that provided the opportunity to address issues of belonging and not belonging (Muthuki, 2016). While many of the participants identified a desire to go back home, they also acknowledged that their ability to go home depended on their financial standing, the political stability in the home country, and their attachments in the host country.

### **Experiencing Intersectional Power-relations in Transnational Space**

Some of the participants indicated that they experienced a simultaneous loss and gain of status in both the host and the home countries respectively (Nieswand, 2011). They felt they had lost status because they had to start life all over again after leaving their well-paid jobs in their home countries, and experienced their foreign credentials being devalued in their new country. However, they also believed that they had gained status in the eyes of their peers and family members they left behind in the home country by the mere fact of living and working in a more developed country, through remittances, and business investment. Living in this transitional

space (the host and home countries) impacted their social status, and led to a constant renegotiation of new forms of social identities (Muthuki, 2016). Sometimes their renegotiated social identity in Canada made it possible for some of the participants to experience an elevated status, capable of settling disputes within his/her clan in Canada because he/she may assume the role of an elder in the host country, while concurrently experiencing feelings of subordination in relation to dominant groups in the host country. Therefore, it was possible for immigrants to experience privilege in the home country due to their relative education, social status, gender, financial status, the predominance of patriarchal structures, and cultural factors. While changing location or context created a new intersectional social location influenced by racialization, immigrant status, gender, and a devaluing of foreign education. Within this transnational space, these individuals concurrently experienced privilege, and subordination depending on who they were interacting with, or where they were physically located. Therefore, the complexity of the shifting power dynamics within an intimate partnership can be partially explained by the interaction of gender with multiple independent factors such as race, religious beliefs, social location, culture, social status, children, extended family pressure, income, education, and employment.

### **Discussion of Themes**

The overarching theme of the study findings was *navigating partnership/collaboration in transnational space*, with three core sub-themes generated through the data analysis: (a) living with nostalgia; (b) navigating intersecting factors influencing power dynamics within intimate partner relationships, and (c) pathways to a fair and equal intimate partner relationship. Applying the theory of intersectionality, the thematic map helped me to answer the research questions by

identifying factors that participants perceived contributed or influenced power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

### **Navigating Partnership/Collaboration in Transnational space.**

The participants attached different meanings to what constituted a fair or an equal relationship. Despite the differences that existed between the participants in terms of migration history, values, norms, and beliefs, there were some commonalities as to what constituted a fair and equal relationship. Therefore, many of the participants had a common goal when it came to intimate partner relationships: to improve and promote equality or fairness within their intimate relationships. To achieve fair and equal relationships, many of the participants indicated there was a need for partnership/collaboration.

**Defining partnership.** Based on their interpretations of the Christian faith, some of the participants defined partnership or collaboration within an intimate relationship as each partner playing his/her assigned roles. However, as each partner either plays his/her assigned roles, switches roles, or takes on additional roles to maintain peace, issues may occur as these assigned roles may keep them in a dependent or relatively powerless state with decreased agency. Many of the participants believed these gender roles were borrowed, or derived, from their religion and so long as each partner played his/her role, there was no gender inequality. However, one of the male participants believed that these gender roles are made-man, and not divinely ordained as some of these Pastors or religious leaders would want people to believe. Therefore, this participant believed that traditional gender roles established a prior power imbalance within intimate partner relationships (Connell, 1987, 2005).

Surprisingly, one of the male participants who is a Pastor admitted that some of the Biblical teachings were biased against women and prevented women from developing their full

potential and from contributing effectively to society. Hence, many of the participants felt that partners needed to be reasonable and flexible when it came to gender roles. One female participant believed that even though her views about gender roles were based on her Christian teachings, she felt that these roles are not static, consequently, partners may need to switch roles sometimes to get things done. Therefore, an equal or fair relationship is not a 50-50 partnership but rather each playing his/her role and stepping to the plate when the need arises. Participant's ideas surrounding assigned gender roles were mostly influenced by their upbringing or the social construction of gender, largely derived from their religious teachings. Interestingly, depending on one's social location, some of the participants believed that, for equality and fairness to be achieved in a relationship, partners may need to learn new behaviors that promote fairness or equality in a relationship, and unlearn or discard old behaviors that do not promote fairness or equality in an intimate partner relationship. Despite some disagreements as to what constitutes a fair or equal relationship, many of the participants felt that a fair or equal relationship can be achieved when there is effective communication and mutual understanding, acceptance of individual differences and views, willingness to learn and unlearn behaviors, and a recognition that a relationship involved partnership and collaboration.

**Effective communication and mutual understanding:** Within social interactions, Park and Antonioni (2007) noted that the partner's behavior or attitude may dictate their communication approach and its associated consequences. For instance, some of the participants experienced a reciprocal hostility from the other partner any time they adopted a hostile approach to resolving conflicts, (Bowen, Winczewski & Collins 2016; Wiebe & Zhang, 2017). Therefore, the type of communication method partners adopts to resolve disputes or relational conflicts can either lead to negative or positive outcomes (Drake & Donohue, 1996).



Papp, Cummings, and Goeke-Morey (2009) noted that one of the challenges intimate partners encountered during conflict resolution was the ability to identify the right communication method to address their disagreements. In this regard, family therapists indicated that a partner's ability to identify the right effective communication method is the key to solving relationship issues or conflicts (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Many of the participants believed that effective communication or the right communication method promoted a healthy intimate partner relationship because it made them understood their spouses better, and consequently, made relational conflict resolution easier. For instance, one of the participants indicated that the high divorce rate among African immigrants in Lethbridge was due to a lack of effective communication. Many of the participants adopted a communication method that worked best for them to resolve their conflicts (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997).

As reported in previous studies, many of the participants resorted to informal social support services and networks such as friends, religious leaders, community leaders, and relatives whenever there was a relationship issue or marital conflict (Rasool, 2017; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). The participants stated that their tendency to rely on informal support services and networks to resolve their relationship conflicts was embedded in their culture. The culture of seeking help through informal support services made some participants reluctant to obtain professional advice from family experts on relationships or marital issues. However, a few of the participants relied on both informal and formal support services to resolve their marital or relationship issues.

**Accepting individual differences in views and values.** The interviews illustrated that the participant's perceptions and world views varied due to differences in their cultural background and upbringing. Therefore, many of the participants indicated that their inability to

accommodate their spouses' differences in perceptions and views about intimacy, life expectations, power imbalance, and shared domestic family responsibilities often led to negative social and health outcomes such as stress, frustration, and depression (Papp et al., 2009). Therefore, many of the participants reported that partners, who failed to acknowledge their differences in views and perceptions, deprived themselves of the right to freely express their grievances and frustrations (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012).

Importantly, many of the participants indicated that unresolved relational conflicts often placed even the most satisfying relationship at risk of collapsing (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). Many of the participants indicated that resolving relational conflicts is often a difficult task, considering that each partner may have different perceptions and views about the issue at stake (Le et al., 2010). Therefore, many of the participants reported that they accommodated their spouses' divergent opinions and views, which facilitated a more integrative approach to resolving conflicts as they compromised to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution and derived much satisfaction in the relationship (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). The participants who adopted this approach to resolve relational conflicts indicated that it did not only allow them to exercise their rights to communicate their views and perspectives (Rogers, Howieson, & Neame, 2018) but they also felt that their perspectives and views were also taken into consideration (Howieson & Priddis, 2015). This research study revealed that the participants were equally involved in their relational conflict resolutions rather than allowing one partner to dictate or impose their views on the relationship.

**Learning and unlearning behaviors:** Many of the participants believed that gender roles are continually reconstructed and renegotiated within transnational spaces or activities (Ojong, 2005). Therefore, they admitted that living in a new environment that has norms, values,

and beliefs different from their countries of origin, required adjustments and discontinuity of those norms, beliefs, and values that were divergent from those prevalent in Canada (Muthuki, 2014). Interestingly, many of the participants admitted that they have discarded certain behaviors that did not support their well-being (Gergen, 1999). For example, many of the male participants were more involved in household labor including childcare (Gergen, 1999). As one of the participants puts it “it’s more romantic to support or help your wife with household chores.” However, some of the male participants found this easier to say than do, as the words they used, and some sentiments shared, suggested that their acceptance of these changes to gender roles was often more superficial than substantive.

One of the male participants seemed unhappy with some of the cultural changes. Even though he admitted that there was the need to unlearn some of the behaviors that did not promote relationship fairness, and adopt behaviors that promoted fairness in relationships, he resisted equal sharing of household labor for fear of incurring the displeasure of his parents when they visited and also because it wasn’t Biblical (Guruge, 2007). Based on this male participant’s feelings towards gender role changes, it could be argued that there is a possibility he may revert to his old traditional gender role should he return to the homeland or at times in Canada. Contrarily, the words used by the female participants suggested that they had adapted faster to their new cultural environment which included divergent or less patriarchal beliefs and norms than the male participants (Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy, 2008). Also, many of the participants indicated that they have blended cultures (the home and the host cultures) to live comfortably in Canada.

**A relationship is a partnership/collaboration:** Many of the participants indicated that an intimate partner relationship is a partnership or collaboration. Many participants defined

collaboration as having common goals in a relationship and working towards them (Berg-Weger, & Schneider, 1998). Overall, Hammond, McNulty, and Finkel (2016) have emphasized that the lives and goals of individuals in an intimate partner relationship depend on the cooperation or collaboration of each partner. Accordingly, many of the participants collaborated in their relationships to achieve their common goal of fairness in the relationships. However, many of the participants' indicated that collaboration or partnership doesn't necessarily mean an equal contribution, but rather recognizing a partner's contribution as important for the functioning of the relationship. Many of the participants believed that 'collaboration' was a work in progress because it depended on several factors such as mutual trust, understanding, respect, coordination, commitment, and role expectations in line with the common relationship goal of fairness (Bronstein, 2003; Larsen, Broberger, & Petersson, 2016). For partners to achieve their common goals, many of the participants indicated that it required flexibility and reflection on the part of the partners (Larsen et al., 2016). Some of the divorced participants reported that inadequate collaboration often led to diminished marital satisfaction (Mitchell, Parker, Giles, & White, 2010). Importantly, many of the participants indicated that many of the intimate partner relationships often fell apart due to one partner exercising undue authority or dominance over the other as many partners are unwilling to stay in unequal relationships (Greenberg & Goldman, 2008).

### **Living with nostalgia.**

Many of the participants experienced emotional and psychological challenges due to separation from their natural physical and social environment, and the problem of adjusting to the new environment (Muthuki, 2016). Therefore, many of the participants experienced nostalgic feelings for the homeland. Food, family, and social gatherings were the main things many of the

participants missed most from their countries of origin. Accordingly, Ojong (2012) pointed out that food plays a vital role in the lives of many immigrants and may also help immigrants to regain their self-consciousness and belongingness. Even though some stores sell ethnic food, many of the participants argued that they did not have the same taste as the ones in the homeland. This nostalgic feeling may have influenced participants' sense of taste because these ethnic foods that are sold in these stores are imported from Africa.

Family and social gatherings were also important to the migrants because many of the participants were used to collective or community-oriented living, which formed an integral part of their upbringing. The social and family gatherings created the opportunity to know the family and community members, establish social support networks, both home and abroad, and develop a sense of belonging. Therefore, some of the participants were able to gradually transit smoothly into the Canadian society with the help of their already established social networks in Canada.

Many of the participants lived with nostalgia because of some of the post-migration challenges such as cultural differences, discrimination, isolation, loss of pre-migration social support systems or networks, and lack of feeling of belongingness that they experienced. Many of the participants reported that they had not fully integrated into the Canadian culture or society because there was always that part of their African identity that could not easily go away.

**I don't feel like I belong.** Many of the participants experienced racism, prejudices, discrimination, and the devaluation of their foreign credentials, which made them feel like they did not belong in Canada. Some of the participants were shocked at the discrepancy between their pre-migration expectations of a better life or greener pastures in Canada and their postmigration realities in their host country, and this situation created challenges and stress for them (Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, & Karimi, 2019).

Many of the participants felt that they had experienced discrimination and that many Canadians felt they did not belong here (Canada). This was especially the case when they were asked questions such as where do you come from? where did you learn English? how long have you been here? Oh! you have an accent, and many more statements in a similar vein. Many of the participants also felt that they didn't belong in Canada because they lacked a conscious connection to the dominant group (Fouron & Schiller, 2001). Yuval-Davis (2006) has indicated that 'belonging' helps migrants to understand the boundaries that are created in the host country and how people judge their own and others' belonging(s).

Although there is a general perception in Canada that non-Whites are foreigners no matter how long they or their ancestors have lived in Canada, there is also the tendency of some blacks of African descent or who haven't lived their formative years in Africa, to join the dominant group to put down African immigrants (Mensah, 2014). This is consistent with Lipsky's (1987) definition of internalized oppression, as a situation where a minority group turns upon themselves, upon their families, and upon their people as a result of oppression by the dominant group. Because of these experiences of 'othering', many of the participants felt they did not belong in Canada and retained intentions to settle or retire in the homeland one day. For instance, one of the participants who came to Canada as a child indicated that he preferred that his body be returned to his ancestral land for burial when he dies because he did not belong in Canada (Cohen & Odhiambo, 1992).

Some of the participants indicated that the lack of feeling of belonging often led to many immigrant's unwillingness to improve on their standard of living in Canada, since they planned on going back to the homeland. Therefore, some immigrants may invest their acquired wealth in the homeland, which according to few participants, was a bad idea because many migrants often

do not get the opportunity to enjoy their acquired wealth in the homeland either due to ill-health, political instability, or family issues. Therefore, some of the participants acknowledged that the decision and ability to return homeland depended on the migrant's economic prosperity, and political stability in the home countries (Abbasi-Shavazi, Sadeghi, & Mohammadi, 2017). Although many of the participants indicated it was difficult to adopt the host country as a permanent home because it involved a complex process of emotional, cultural, and social deconstruction and reconstruction of home (Korevla, 1999), a few of the participants had adopted the host country as their permanent home because to them home had become a place where they made a decent living and spent most of their time but not was necessarily their land of birth. Therefore, these participants appreciated all that Canada had offered them in terms of opportunities which were not available to them in their countries of birth.

As reported by Mensah (2014) many of the participants joined migrant associations, worshipped with other immigrants of similar ethnocultural backgrounds, and also blended cultures (the host culture and the culture of the country of origin) to reduce the feeling of alienation. In addition, the immigrant churches also played a big role in cultural reproduction and the provision of social services to participants in this study (Mensah, 2014).

**Maintaining ties with the country of origin (Transnational social ties).** To understand the realities of these participants, Ojong and Muthuki (2010) suggested that we look beyond the borders of the destination country because many of the participants lived in a transnational space. Muthuki (2016) defines transnational space as a social space consisting of a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, and solidarity and cooperation. While Basch, Glick, and Szanton (1994) define transnationalism as the process by which immigrants establish and maintain multiple social networks which link their countries of origin and host countries

together. On the other hand, Mahler and Pessar (2001) used the term transnationalism to refer to immigrant's political, economic, social, and cultural processes (e.g., remittances, investments in home countries, celebrations of home country's national holidays, and formation of ethnic Associations in host countries) that go beyond the borders of a specific country.

Many of the participants continued to maintain ties with the homeland through investments, marriage alliances, and remittances. Although participants physically resided in Canada, many of the participants made conscious efforts to maintain ties with their countries of origin following migration (Ojong & Muthuki, 2010). Therefore, many participants found themselves living in two different worlds (the home and host countries), which contributed to power dynamics within intimate partner relationships because they had to negotiate between gender role and relationship expectations of the host country and that of the home country (Ojong & Muthuki, 2010). Coming from traditional African patriarchal societies, the women seemed to have adapted faster than the men because these changes in gender relations favored the women more than the men when they migrated to countries where there is less emphasis on patriarchal norms and values.

Consistent with transnationalism, all the participants continued to stay connected with their home country, often considering it as their true home, while working and living in Canada. Most participated in an African cultural association and continued to maintain connection and identity with their culture, while concurrently engaging with the culture of Canada by necessity and choice (Muthuki, 2016).

Although cross-border interactions have existed for years, all the participants used modern technological devices such as tablets, computers, and cellular phones to stay connected with their non-migrant extended families, making contemporary transnationalism easier, faster,



and extensive than was seen previously (Ojong & Muthuki, 2010). This idea of living ‘here’ and ‘there’ made it difficult for many immigrants to integrate well into Canadian society, and this task was further challenged by their feelings that they were not seen as belonging in Canada by Canadians and some Canadian institutions.

Many of the participants fit into the “integrated” modes of acculturation, rather than the “separated” “assimilated” or “marginalized” modes of acculturation because they maintained strong ties with their mother country, and maintained some of their cultural norms or values in the host society (Sussner, Lindsay, Greaney, & Peterson, 2008). Interestingly, the acculturation experiences of many of the participants influenced certain aspects of their cultural beliefs and values despite the strong ties they maintained with their mother country (Smith et al., 2006).

**Turning to the home communities.** Many of the participants migrated to Canada because of their already established social support system and networks (Haug, 2008). The participants’ social support networks such as: family, friends, and their religious and immigrant communities or associations, played a huge role during both the pre and post-migration process by offering them support services such as temporary accommodation, important job information, and other social and economic assistance, psychological and emotional support that helped them to integrate into Canadian society. Therefore, many of the participants relied on the continuity and support of their community, religious beliefs, and social networks to cope with the stressful conditions of the unfamiliar environment.

According to Ryan (2007) and White (2010), the social network formation process may be different for both immigrant men and women. For instance, some migrant women may form their local social networks by establishing acquaintances with other parents in the community to help each other with childcare, thereby cutting the cost of daycare (Ryan, 2007; White, 2010).

However, one of the female participants indicated that these pre-migration social networks or informal support services, where family, friends, and neighbors took care of their children with little or no payment to enable women to take up employment, were unfortunately not available to her (Ryan, 2011). The participants with children who did not have these pre-migration social networks depended on the support and collaboration of their partners, which often strengthened their relational bond as they relied on each other for moral, emotional, and psychological support (Ahmed & Rasmussen, 2020). Importantly, some of the participants experiences demonstrated that social networks did not remain static but that they were dynamic and changed with one's social status or social location (Gill & Bialski, 2011; Putnam, 2000).

### **Navigating intersecting factors that influenced power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.**

The interviews revealed that power dynamics within intimate partnerships shifted or changed due to factors that influenced these immigrant's social locations, such as: income, employment, and social status. Some of the male participants indicated that power within intimate partner relationships exists in different domains including economic, household, and spiritual domains. Therefore, to understand the power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship, one must understand the different domains within which relational power operates. For instance, a husband may assume he deserves and therefore possesses more power over financial decision-making, while the wife may have more power over household decisions.

**Defining power.** The participants in the study attached different, and gender specific meanings to power. Power, to most of the participants, meant control, authority, respect, being in charge, leadership, economic, spiritual, partnership/collaboration. Simpson, Farrell, Oriña, and Rothman (2015) define power within an intimate partner relationship as the ability or capacity of

a partner to change the other partner's thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior so that they align with his/her own desired preferences, and also the ability or capacity of the other partner to resist such influences. In general, power is understood as having some form of influence or control over another person. Therefore, Knudson-Martin and Huenergardt (2010) argue that relational power is considered balanced when both partners can influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of each other to a similar degree, have similar levels of dependency on one another and share equal responsibility for maintaining the relationship. In other words, relational power imbalances occur when the degree of influence shifts to only one of the partners (Knudson-Martin and Huenergardt, 2010). Therefore, many of the participants reported that power imbalance within an intimate partner relationship can be detrimental for partners because it may lead to psychological and emotional stress (Mikula, Riederer, & Bodi, 2012; Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Some of the participants indicated that power within a relationship was a consequence of day to day interactions with others, our upbringing, and already established gender power relations. However, some of the participants indicated that we all have some level of power in areas where we hold specialized knowledge or skills. Therefore, we all have the potential to abuse power given the chance. Consistent with the resource theory, some of the participants indicated that power tilts to the partner with more resources (e.g., money, and education).

### **Gender roles, patriarchal norms, values, and beliefs**

**Gender roles.** Some scholars have argued that traditional gender roles have their roots in the patriarchal system (Bell, 2004). Bell (2004) defines traditional patriarchy as a political system that promotes male dominance and superiority over everyone considered weak especially females. Many of the participants indicated that their perceptions and views about gender roles were derived from their culture and upbringing, which in effect were grounded in their religious

doctrines or teachings. Contrary to the general perceptions that gender roles are associated with hierarchies, Davis (2013) noted that different roles do not necessarily imply hierarchies but rather demonstrate the complementary roles both men and women play to achieve a common goal. However, colonization and slavery disrupted the complementary nature of gender roles within African communities before these practices (Davis, 2013).

Gender roles are usually associated with one's biological sex (Butler, 1990, 2004). Thus, males and females are assigned masculine and feminine roles respectively immediately after birth. Therefore, masculinity and femininity ideologies are not natural, but taught from the moment one is born. In other words, one does not become a man or a woman automatically but rather this process is dependent on an individual's acceptance of those expected gender norms of masculinity or femininity to become either a man or a woman. Therefore, masculinity and femininity are not innate or by the mere fact of either being born a male or a female but rather the result of the social construction of gender.

Based on their narratives, many of the participants entered into relationships with an a priori set of established gender power relations and a preconceived notion of gender roles informed by cultural/religious norms and structural forces that privileged men over women (Connell, 1987, 2005). Even though masculinity and femininity were practiced in diverse forms in different traditional African societies, many of the participants from different West African countries demonstrated some commonalities. Some common masculine traits were dominance, aggression, competition, physical strength, self-reliance, courage, heterosexuality, sexual activity, the role protector and provider of the family, and honor (Hooper 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009). The following were some of the phrases used by some of the male participants to either consciously or unconsciously exhibit their masculine

traits: *“I convinced my wife and she bought into that idea,” “I decided she should go back to school,” “It will hurt me if can’t provide for my family,” “my wife can’t tell me what I should do in the house,” “I explained my plans, this and this and that is what I want to do and she agreed to it,” and “why should my wife deny me sex?”* Interestingly, it was mostly the men who initiated sexual activity, while the women controlled its engagement (Sakaluk et al., 2014). Previous studies have indicated that some women may withhold sex from their partners as a strategy and a source of power within the relationship (Senn, Carey, Vanable, & Seward, 2009).

Some of the common feminine traits exhibited were humility, respect, submission, politeness, and obedience (Hooper 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009). The following are some of the phrases used by some of the female participants to consciously or unconsciously exhibit their feminine traits: *“I have to respect my husband as head of the family,” “my husband does everything for me,” and “I would then become the afterthought.”* These words demonstrated that these women also played a role in maintaining these established gender hierarchies (Goldstein, 2001). In addition, one of the female participants indicated that women contribute to the establishment of gender hierarchies by often ignoring the warnings signs during the dating period, believing that things will get better the moment they get married or believing in the boys will be boys mantra.

Contrary to the general perceptions that women are tolerant, caring, and sensitive (Hooper 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schrock & Schwalbe 2009), Mabel indicated that she was very stubborn and confrontational. According to Mabel, women in many traditional African societies are often blamed for failed relationships or marriage, which may be partly due to some women’s resistance of caring and nurturing feminine traits that women are assumed to possess. Therefore, many African women are pressured to make their relationships work, even if

it is not working. According to Mabel, this was unfair and influence power dynamics within the relationship because of the daily sacrifices women make to sustain their intimate partner relationships. In addition, Margaret indicated that some men are naturally controlling, and they never change. According to Margaret, even though these signs might be present in the early stages of the relationships, some women often ignore those signs, believing things might get better.

**Patriarchal norms, beliefs, and values.** Stanistreet, Bambra, and Scott-Samuel (2005) described patriarchy as a system of male domination and female subordination. Many immigrants in Canada come from countries that are traditionally patriarchal societies; and this enhances the likelihood of male hegemony and reinforces the power imbalance between men and women (Statistics Canada, 2017). In many traditional African cultures, patriarchal norms are taught and passed on from generation to generation (Uchendu, 2008). Undoubtedly, men in traditional patriarchal societies were the favored class from childhood to manhood, and they had multiple privileges including, but not limited to, the right of dominance over women and children (Uchendu, 2008). For instance, women in many traditional patriarchal societies cannot represent their families in any important family or social gathering, because they are considered the neck and not the head of the family, and it would be considered disrespectful for any female member of the family to go against these patriarchal norms, values, and beliefs (Uchendu, 2008). Many of the participants considered that to be wrong because it created a power imbalance within the family and prevented many intelligent women from holding certain key positions in society and denied them the opportunity to productively contribute to society.

Many of the participants practiced some of their social and cultural norms supported by religion, and ethnic ideologies that privilege men's power over women (Holtmann & Rickards,

2018). In this regard, all the female participants respected their husband's authority as the head of the family, which according to Kalunta-Crampton (2013) reinforces men's assumed position of power in the family.

**Breadwinner role.** The interviews illustrated changes in gender relations such as the provider/breadwinner role following migration. The women had adapted faster to the changes than some of the men who in their words resisted some of the gender role changes. Some of the male participants perceived the breadwinner role as prestige and power. Accordingly, Mark felt he would feel hurt, ashamed, and emasculated if for any reason he could not fulfill his economic male provider or breadwinner roles (Adomako-Ampofo & Boateng, 2008; and Adinkrah, 2012). Therefore, according to some of the male participants, a man's failure to perform to the provider/breadwinner role meant a personal failure, which affected his position and influence within the family, and his perceived value as a man.

The interviews illustrated that power dynamics within intimate partner relationships shifted when there was a switch of breadwinner or provider roles. Some male participants experienced a loss of breadwinner status, either when they were in school, or when they were doing lower-paid jobs and not making enough money to support the family, which affected their sense of masculinity during the reconstruction of life in Canada (Pasura & Christou, 2018). Furthermore, as some of the female participants acquired the breadwinner status, traditional gender relations, and men's hegemonic masculine role as the sole provider of the family was threatened, and consequently, forced male participants to negotiate other acceptable forms of masculinity (Pasura & Christou, 2018).

Despite the women's willingness to assume the breadwinner role when the need arose, some of the male participants perceived the breadwinner role as not just the role of a good

husband, but that it also represented or consolidated the man's identity and his sense of masculinity (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011). However, some of the female participants indicated that being a male sole provider, or breadwinner, was unattainable due to neoliberalism and the market economy market, where two incomes are often necessary to make ends meet. Consequently, this reality paved the way for adaptation wherein it becomes acceptable for women to seek employment outside the home to financially support the family. Financially independent, full-time employed female participants expected their spouse to help, especially with the household labor (Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, & Sidani, 2010). Therefore, the interviews illustrated in many ways that it was the market economy and the need for both men and women to work that was driving some of the shifts in gender roles. While these changes in gender roles are occurring more gradually in the African context because of strong traditional beliefs in patriarchal norms and values, these changes may accelerate when Africans migrate to western countries that hold less patriarchal values and norms, and necessity mandates female immigrant's participation in the market economy.

**Decision-making.** The female participants were equally involved in the family decision-making process, even though there were instances where their husbands (un)intentionally took some decisions without their consultation. This was perceived as one of the masculine traits their partners unconsciously exhibited and not an indication of power imbalance within their relationships by many female participants. Although all the male participants reported that their partners were equally involved in family activities, including decision making, their words sometimes betrayed their ambivalent feeling about these gender role changes. However, there was generally more shared decision making in the relationships of the immigrant participants, which allowed partners to express themselves freely.



**Household labor: tensions and adaptation:** Contrary to the general perceptions that gender norms are static, fixed, and unquestionable (Rwafa, 2016), many of the male participants had adopted a more flexible gender role and were more involved in household labor (e.g., childcare, cleaning, laundry, shopping, and cooking), which were traditionally assigned to women. Therefore, gender roles may be portrayed differently in public, than what may be demonstrated in private (Sullivan, 2006; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Hook, 2006; and Coltrane, 2004). Accordingly, some of the participants indicated that men who wanted to stick to the old traditional gender roles, will lose at the end (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). According to Frisco and Williams (2003), unequal distribution of household labor may lead to decreased levels of marital satisfaction (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Even though, all the male participants indicated that they did house chores, one of them indicated his displeasure with the gender role changes because he perceived household labor (e.g., washing dishes, laundry, cooking, and sweeping) as reserved for women (Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). Interestingly, one of the female participants also could not understand why some men did household labor without complaint when they were single or lived alone, but strangely positioned these same activities as a huge task for these same men once they got married. The male participants were more involved in household labor following migration but the overall responsibility for household tasks remained with women even if they worked outside the home (Craig, 2006) because it was associated with the qualities of a good wife and mother (Shirpak et al., 2011).

In general, many of the participants especially the women perceived that doing more or fewer household labor wasn't associated with power but rather a fulfillment of their assigned roles. However, they admitted that there could be role changes as situation demands.

**Gender relations in transnational space and intersectionality.** Contrary to the general perception that men are often the principal actors in the skilled worker migration process (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018), because many of these immigrants come from traditional patriarchal societies where male education is prioritized over females (Banerjee & Phan, 2014), two of the male participants who entered Canada under the FSWP were sponsored by their wives, who were the principal applicants. In addition, two of the female participants who also came to Canada through FSWP, were the principal applicants for their families. Importantly, many of the female participants reported that their exposure to Canadian culture and their financial independence influenced their perceptions and views about gender roles, and made it easier for them to renegotiate new and acceptable gender roles. Therefore, according to many of the participants, post-migration gender roles change can influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

Glick et al. (1995) indicated that migrant's social, economic, and cultural activities are not all situated within one physical space, but rather within and between the host and home countries. Therefore, migrant's realities may be understood within the collective context of the home and host countries. In other words, migrants are not only nationals of one country of residence, but rather are active members of an interconnected global community (Glick et al., 1999). However, some migrants may experience feelings of isolation when they lack sufficient ties with either or both their home and host countries. This arises due to their inability to fully integrate into the host society, while at the same time being considered as strangers in their culture of origin.

Transnationalism, according to Morawska (2014) and Glick et al. (1999) may impact the lives of many migrants in various ways, thereby influencing their integration into the society, and

causing problems of disunity, social instability, and exclusion. Though transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, Glick et al. (1995) indicated that the use of new technologies (e.g., airplanes, telephones, satellite technology, faxes, and computers) have made movements and communications across borders easier and faster.

Importantly, at the core of transnationalism is the gender factor that intersects with other multiple factors such as cultural values, norms and beliefs, religion, age, race, and ethnicity, to create, change, and strengthen the transnational spaces (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Thus, gendered ideologies and processes were negotiated within intimate relationships, which shaped the gender relationships (Mahler & Pessar, 2003). However, as participants navigated through the divergent cultural norms and values surrounding gender roles in both countries (host and home), some of the participants felt they neither belonged to Canada nor the home country as they discarded some aspects of their home culture (Mahler & Pessar, 2006). As the meaning of home was negotiated through participants' fluid social networks, their sense of belonging was further influenced by the multiple locations of home (Muthuki, 2016; Ojong, 2012).

Based on participants' views, experiences, and perceptions, patriarchal authority has waned since many women have become financially independent and offer financial support to the family (Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, & Sidani, 2010). Importantly, transnational space created an opportunity for many of the participants to contest traditional gender roles, and compare and contrast them with those of the Canadian society or culture (Pasura & Christou, 2018). Many of the participants indicated that the conflicting gender roles or relations that exist between the home and the host cultures were often manifested within diaspora households, and at religious and social gatherings (Pasura & Christou, 2018). A few of the male participants experienced a loss of breadwinner status and a reduced sense of masculine identity

due to their inability to provide for their family in some cases. This led to negotiations of gender roles and redistribution of power within their households, which often resulted in either resistance, negotiation, or conflicts (Pasura 2008; Tinarwo and Pasura 2014). According to Pasura and Christou (2018), the diaspora is increasingly becoming a transnational space to reorder social categories and social status and negotiate other acceptable forms of masculinities. Accordingly, many of the participants indicated that their exposure to western culture, values, and norms transformed their perceptions and views about traditional gender roles.

Within the transnational space, Levitt and Glick Shiller (2004) stated that immigrants often experience alienation, loss of family ties, and lack of power to take full control of their lives as they see themselves in several transnational contexts or spaces and do not belong anywhere. Accordingly, Levitt and Glick Shiller (2004) indicated that immigrants experience alienation at multiple levels due to subordination and the feeling of starting a new life in a new country with few social and economic resources. Although transnationalism aids in the transformation of migrant's perceptions and views, some have argued that these changes would still have occurred if the migrant had remained in his/her country of origin (Pasura & Christou, 2018). This is because culture is not static but changes as individuals interact with their culture so that the culture is constantly challenged and redefined (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004).

The gendered intersection of gains and losses in hegemonic masculine status in the diaspora may contribute to the negotiation of other acceptable forms of masculinities (Pasura & Christou, 2018). However, previous studies indicate that men may respond to the loss of hegemonic masculine status in unproductive and negative ways such as resorting to domestic violence, drug, and alcohol abuse (Kabeer, 2007). Pasura and Christou (2018) suggested four

possible strategic responses of men who experience loss of hegemonic masculinity: (a) *Withdrawal*: This is where an African migrant man withdraws from the traditional marriage and/or return to their homelands to regain their privileged position again; (b) *Accommodation*: This refers to a situation where an African migrant man consciously negotiates and embraces his new masculine identity; (c) *Resistance*: In this case, an African migrant man resist the new gender roles or changes in gender roles and values to preserve ‘ideal’ African cultural practices; and (d) *Endorsement and Subversion*: This refers to a situation where an African migrant man consciously embraces and enacts respectable forms of masculine behavior such as sharing household duties, while simultaneously and strategically using religious and social spaces to resist changes to gender relations and roles.

Some of the male participants reacted differently to post-migration gender role changes due to the different migration backgrounds and history (Pasura & Christou, 2018). Based on data analysis, many of the male participants in this study fit into the fourth strategy (endorsement and subversion) because on the surface they seemed to accept the gender role changes and that they were more involved in household labor for example, but some of their words were inconsistent with acceptance of these changes and betrayed their feelings about these gender role changes. For instance, one of the male participants stated “*I decided she should go back to school.*”

Within the transnational space, some of the female participants assumed the breadwinner role, either when their husbands were not working, or, not making enough money, or through the act of sending remittances to their non-migrant extended family members back home. Many of the participants indicated that remittances to their non-migrant families formed an important source of income for those remaining in their country of origin, and this was influenced by the immigrant’s financial capabilities and level of employment (Merla, 2010). Previous studies have

indicated that immigrants who have good financial standing are more able to send remittances to their families back home than those who are not (Merla, 2010). According to Jolly and Reeves (2005), remittances can be an instrument for changing gender relations. For instance, women who send remittances to non-migrant female family members may disrupt gender hegemony by providing more resources and control of resources to women who receive them, while men who also send remittances to other male family members may reinforce gender hierarchies (Jolly & Reeves, 2005). Consistent with intersectionality theory, some of the female participants acquired power in the eyes of their relatives in their home country by assuming the breadwinner, or provider role through remittance payments, while concurrently assuming a subordinate role within their intimate relationship. The interviews illustrated that the participant's transnational experiences had profoundly impacted their lives and power dynamics within their intimate relationships because both partners had to negotiate for acceptable gender roles.

In general, many of the participants indicated that traditional gender roles are one of the key factors which influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships because people act the way they do due to the established gender norms which favor men more than women. The interviews also revealed gender inequality intersected with employment, income, social status, and education to influence power dynamics within intimate partnerships, because these social inequities are maintained and reinforced by the political, religious, economic, and legal structures or institutions.

**Policies/Structural barriers to employment.** There has been a significant increase in the number of female migrants, constituting about half of the world's migrant population (Crush & Dodson, 2010; UN, 2005; Jolly & Reeves, 2005). According to the UN (2016), this may be due to the high demand for feminine dominated professions such as customer service, nursing,

nursing aide, and sex trade workers. Contrary to the general perceptions that immigrant men feel reluctant to pursue female-dominated professions such as nursing, and nursing aide (Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami & Karimi 2019), all the male participants were in healthcare-related professions, with one of them, pursuing a nursing degree after he could not find a job related to his previous degree.

**Employment barriers.** Galabuzi (2006) considers the Canadian labor market as a form of ‘economic apartheid’ due to its racialized nature. In many instances, many of the participants indicated that their financial standing worsened following resettlement due to the devaluation of foreign credentials (Bui & Morsah, 2008). Despite having high levels of educational achievement, many of the participants were frequently disadvantaged in the labor market and initially undertook jobs that were below their educational qualifications, which led to the feeling of alienation, dissatisfaction, and loss of self-esteem (Kaba, 2007). Racism, shortage of manufacturing jobs, and the devaluation of foreign educational qualifications were noted as some of the reasons why many immigrant men do not get jobs that match their educational qualifications (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Kaba, 2007). According to some of the participants, these employment barriers are a significant cause of stress and ill-health among immigrants (Dossa, 2004).

The policies of various professional groups in Canada require that all skilled workers recertify when they arrive in Canada. Many of the skilled participants stated that structural barriers such as the financial cost involved in the recertification process and lack of jobs that match their qualifications disconnected them from Canadian society due to loss of income. Therefore, they experienced frustration, stress, and failure to achieve economic prosperity (Bartram, 2011; Shen & Kogan, 2020). Consequently, many of the participants with high levels

of education or skills, settled for lower-paid jobs that did not match their qualifications while working on their recertification, and this made it hard for them to earn enough to support their families (Kaba, 2007). For instance, one of the female participants, who is a Pharmacist (and worked as a Medical Representative with well recognized Pharmaceutical firm in her country of origin), had to work as a health care aide while she was working on her recertification for several months. In addition, one of the male participants, who also came to Canada as a Pharmacist, stated that the recertification process was tedious and very costly. According to him, these challenges frustrate some of these professionals, who in some cases may withdraw from the recertification process and may settle for jobs below their qualifications. During the recertification process, some of the skilled male participants were unable to fulfill their breadwinner roles since they were unable to get jobs that aligned with their qualifications to financially support their families. However, other participants felt that Canadian labor policies were better because Canada maintains international labor standards. According to these participants, the labor/employer policies required foreign skilled workers to recertify when they arrive in Canada and have sufficient funds before they even apply for the Federal Skilled Worker Program. Therefore, migrants cannot blame the Canadian system for not having sufficient funds to support themselves.

Some participants also suggested that policymakers should look into these policies and make some amendments because they create challenges for these skilled migrants. This would make it easier for skilled immigrants, especially those who obtained their degrees from Canadian Universities to get hired in areas of their expertise, including those dominated by the Caucasians. Participants felt that these type of policy changes would help reduce the mental stress or stress-related diseases within the migrant community.



**Intersection of racism and employment.** Some scholars argue that Canadian immigration policies and laws are not just discriminatory but exclusionary because these policies and laws are more concerned with economic/material gains rather than humanitarian ones (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999). According to Elabor-Idemudia (1999), this link to race, class, and gender of those seeking entry into Canada. For instance, a poor migrant seeking asylum in Canada, with no English or French language background may not meet the language proficiency requirement and guaranteed financial bonds (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999). These immigration requirements limit the entry of immigrants from non-white countries and increase immigration from white European countries (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999). Many of the participants experienced and continue to experience racism in their workplace. According to Alexander (2012) and Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche, and Tschann (2013), African migrants, especially the men in the low-income group, frequently experience racist actions against them, and they are often profiled, stopped, searched, arrested, jailed, imprisoned, shot, and killed much more frequently than Caucasians. Many of the participants especially the male participants had to navigate through loss of status related to both gender norms and racist barriers, which affected their perceived role as head of household or breadwinner. To cope with these challenges of structural or systemic racism, some of the participants relied on their religious beliefs as a source of strength, while others ignored the negative stereotypes about Africans. Interestingly, one of the participants, who came to Canada as a refugee without a high school diploma reported that he had experienced racism in many of the places that he had worked and indicated that his experiences with racism motivated him to do better in life by going back to school to obtain a high school diploma and a degree. In this case, the experience of racism may have either motivated some of the migrants to

achieve more in life, or led to low self-esteem when they were unable to get jobs that aligned with their foreign qualifications.

Some of the participants felt that Canadian labor policies created employment challenges or barriers for migrants. According to them, these labor policies are contradictory, racist, and offered false hope to skilled immigrants that their skills and expertise would be valued when they arrive in Canada. Some of the participants reported that felt they had failed in their quest for greener pastures because they could not get jobs that aligned with their qualifications due to the devaluation of their foreign credentials, and the challenges associated with the recertification processes. The challenges encountered by these participants in the labor market, affected not only these participants and their nuclear families but also their non-migrant extended family, since some of them depended on remittances from these participants for survival. This according to some of the participants led to financial stress and other stress-related illnesses.

Interestingly, two of the male participants (one of them came to Canada as a refugee, while the other came to Canada through the family sponsorship program) who obtained their degrees from a Canadian University, reported that they fully supported the Canadian labor policies because Canada wouldn't be where it is now and attractive to immigrants if Canada hadn't maintained certain international labor standards. However, Mabel indicated that the issue is that many migrants don't do enough research about the host country before initiating the immigration application process. Therefore, she recommended that migrants do more research about the host country before initiating the immigration application process, to get a better understanding of the host countries, and choose host countries that best meet their needs so that some of the policies don't come as surprise to them.

Due to structural racism and bias, some of the participants indicated that the completion of a recertification program does not guarantee that an immigrant will get a job that aligns with his/her qualifications. Therefore, some immigrants may be compelled to stay in low paid employment that is not commensurate with their level of education or expertise to survive (Benerjee & Verma, 2012). According to some of the participants, this situation affects men more than women especially when they are unable to fulfill their breadwinner role, leading to low self-esteem and shifts in power dynamics within their relationships.

Contrarily, some of the participants disagreed that Canadian labor policies created challenges or barriers for migrants in the labor market, considering that the media sometimes publish true stories that do not portray a good image of Africans. For instance, it was published on [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), Apr 28, 2017, that Tanzanian President John Magufuli had sacked nearly 10,000 civil servants for having fake education certificates. And on May 15, 2020, [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com), the Ghanaian Auditor-General, Daniel Domelevo, revealed in his report to parliament that 19,203 workers were suspected to have landed their jobs with fraudulent academic certificates.

In comparison with some developed countries like the United States, some participants felt that Canadian labor policies were better. Based on individual's experiences and migration history, one of the male participants who came to Canada as a refugee appreciated whatever the Canadian system had offered him and continued to offer him because he felt that he would not have been able to achieve what he had achieved if he had he stayed in his war-torn country. This perspective is consistent with the general saying that privilege is sometimes invisible to those who have it because many people place emphasis on what they do not have rather than what they have.

**Religious beliefs.** Many of the participants felt their attitudes, views of life, and ways of life were influenced by their religious beliefs (Ojong, 2005; Muthuki, 2014). Therefore, religion played an important role in these participants' identity formation (Muthuki, 2014). All the participants were Christians, even though some had little interest in religious practices before leaving their home country (Dupre, 2008). To cope with the challenges they faced as immigrants, many of the participants relied on religious teachings because they believed that God restores hope amid life's struggles and anxieties (Masthidze, 2004). Accordingly, Pentecostalism has gained popularity in West African countries because of its ability to produce radical changes in believers' lives (Masthidze (2004).

Many of the participants expressed their identities through their religious beliefs or teachings and participated in their religious activities (2014). According to many of the participants, religion, had positively impacted their lives because it provided social, spiritual, and economic assistance to them (Hirschman, 2003; Dupre, 2008). Consequently, the participants' religious beliefs provided a solid foundation for their traditional beliefs on gender values and norms that were threatened by adaptation to the cultural norms of their host country (Hirschman, 2003). Many of the participants also felt at home worshipping with other immigrants of similar ethnocultural backgrounds because of the racism, discrimination, and Xenophobia they experienced from the dominant group (Dupre, 2008). Therefore, religious institutions can become agents of social isolation for migrants, and may have contributed to the participant's feelings that they did not belong, thereby potentially hindering their full integration into Canadian society (Dupre, 2008).

Consistent with their religious teachings, many of the female participants respected their husband's role as head of their families, and therefore allowed their husbands to set the tone or

initiate the family decision-making process as a sign of respect. Consistent with Komter's (1989) hidden power or invisible power concept, one of the female participants had to leave the Catholic church to join her husband's Pentecostal church because the husband wanted the whole family to worship in one place. The interviews revealed that religious beliefs influenced power dynamics within intimate relationships, because some of the participants did certain things that they wouldn't have done under the normal circumstances had it not been for their religious beliefs about respect for husbands as heads of the families.

With the rise of new evangelical and Pentecostal churches, many of the participants attested that women in many religious institutions held leadership positions (Stacey, 1990). The female participants had no problem with taking up leadership positions in their religious institutions, however, they felt they could not do it because of their overloaded family obligations, which demonstrate how structurally embedded gender expectations placed on women may interfere in their ability to acquire power in other spheres. One of the female participants further indicated that even though she was not interested in any leadership position in the church, she will not join any religious group that prohibited women from holding leadership positions.

Consistent with the theory of intersectionality, one participant indicated that her female friend was a Pastor and head of a church, while the Pastor's husband occupied a subordinate role or position in the church. However, at home, the husband assumed the role of the head of the family, while the wife also assumed a subordinate role within the family. Therefore, privilege and subordination can be experienced simultaneously.

Some of the participants pointed out that their religious teachings and activities positively impacted their marital or intimate partner relationships and overall health (Stacey, 1990). For

example, to cope with relationships issues and challenges, some of the participants engaged in religious activities such as prayer meetings, meditation, and Bible reading, which also increased their sense of self-worth (Stacey, 1990). Accordingly, some of the participants worked on the quality of their relationships as they internalized and accepted the gender roles as divinely ordained and perceived deviance from it as disobedience to the divine covenant or order (Stacey, 1990).

Unfortunately, some of the participants indicated some of the religious teachings are gender-biased against women, limiting women's ability to productively contribute to society. For instance, some religious doctrines don't allow women to wear trousers, wear earrings, require them to cover every part of their bodies, forbid them from holding leadership positions, and forbid them from marrying outside their religion. One of the participants was of the view that these gender-biased religious doctrines often portray women as outcasts, if they go against these teachings. In addition, another participant stated that these gender-biased religious teachings establish a power imbalance within the relationship because it bestows the head of the family and the provider roles on the men. Many Christians according to him, are misled by the false teachings of their leaders because they do not read the Bible to get a better understanding of the scriptures.

**Colonialism, Pentecostalism, and Globalization.** According to Morrell and Ouzgane (2005), colonialism, Pentecostalism, and globalization have reshaped social relations and social reproduction. Furthermore, Morrell and Ouzgane (2005) argue that African masculinities are produced through the intersection of colonialism, neoliberal capitalism, and Pentecostal Christianity ideologies. Pasura and Christou (2018) indicated that the notion of the male as the sole breadwinner or provider, head of the family, and monogamous marriage ideologies were

reinforced as a considerable number of Africans converted to Christianity. Although maintaining the male sole provider role was considered as part of successful masculinity, some of the male participants indicated that they couldn't play the traditional sole breadwinner role in some cases due to financial constraints (Ratele, 2014).

Importantly, Pentecostalism introduced the concept of 'born-again' Christians in Africa, and this consequently, influenced the diverse nature of African masculinities (Van Klinken, 2012). It was through this system of beliefs, that 'born again' masculinity was also introduced, which meant a break away from hegemonic forms of masculinity, that promoted social vices such as drinking alcohol, sexual violence, and family neglect (Van Klinken 2012). Therefore, this concept of 'born again' masculinity challenged boys and men to change the harmful perceptions of hegemonic masculinity.

One of the participants who is a Pastor stated that the religious teachings were gender-biased against women and that is not helping these religious institutions to tap into the full potentials of women. He suggested that it was about time the church involved more women in its activities because the world would be a better place if women are allowed to productively contribute to society.

**Education.** Due to the inefficient social security system in many African countries, many African parents invest in their children's education (Roubeni, De Haene, Leuven, Keatley, Shah, & Rasmussen, 2015). This is done with the view that their children will also return the gesture by taking care of them in their old age (Roubeni et al., 2015). Therefore, some of the participants indicated that the financial expectations from parents put a lot of financial stress on their relationships especially when they were unable to get well-paid jobs. According to one of the

participants, this could lead to marital conflicts and a power imbalance where one of the partners can remit to his/her non-migrant family back home, while the other cannot.

Interestingly, many of the female participants indicated that financial constraints and patriarchal gender role expectations often hindered many immigrant women from pursuing their educational goals, or may cause them to put their career advancement on hold to either raise their children or sacrifice their educational or professional careers for their husbands (Salaf and Greve, 2011). Although immigrant men are often presumed to have a greater human capital relative to the wife, other scholars indicate that immigrant women with lower human capital relative to immigrant men are more likely to upgrade their previous educational skills and training when they move to the western countries (Banerjee & Phan, 2014).

Consistent with the resource theory, some of the participants indicated that power within intimate partner relationships tilted to the partner with more resources such as education, income, and social status. Statistics indicate that 1 in 3 immigrants has higher education skills (Loxely et al., 2015). Many of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree but indicated that it was difficult integrating into the Canadian labor market due to the perceived low quality of foreign education or credentials by employers (Hum and Simpson 2004; Aydemir and Skuterud 2005; Banerjee and Verma, 2012). Banerjee and Verma (2012) and Friedberg (2000) pointed out that many of the immigrants with prior higher education and managerial skills from non-traditional sources (outside Europe) are more likely to enroll in Post-Migration Education (P.M.E) programs to improve their earnings. According to Banerjee and Verma (2012), the P.M.E enrollment program provides immigrants with locally relevant skills, introduce them to important social networks, helps them establish credentials that add to their existing skills, and improve their level of confidence and understanding of Canadian society.



Previous have studies indicated that an immigrant's age plays a big role when it comes to P.M.E programs (Hum and Simpson 2003; Tubergen & de Werfhorst 2006). Therefore, the younger the migrant, the more likely he/she will reestablish his/her previous careers in the host or destination countries, because of the greater or long-term benefits associated with pursuing higher education in the host country (Hum and Simpson 2003; Tubergen and de Werfhorst 2006). Many of the skilled participants indicated they enrolled in post-migration education programs when they arrived in Canada, while they undertook low-paid jobs that did not commensurate with their prior level of education or expertise to survive and financially support the family (Benerjee & Verma, 2012). However, many of the participants indicated that P.M.E programs may not necessarily translate into high earnings for immigrants or may not be enough to get jobs that align with their qualifications because it is based on multiple factors such as demand for that kind of professional skill and training, prejudices, selection biases, and racial discrimination by employers (Coates and Carr, 2005; Banerjee & Verma, 2012).

Many of the participants indicated that family obligations and financial constraints may hinder enrollment in the P.M.E programs (Breen and Cooke 2005; Hum and Simpson 2003). Among participants in this study, immigrant women were more likely than their men to enroll in higher education or skill training programs to facilitate their integration into Canadian society, while at the same time supporting their spouses to reestablish their pre-migration professional careers (Cobb-Clark & Crossley 2004; Man, 2004; Meares, 2010). According to many of the male participants, a well-educated and full-time employed female participant depended less on the relationship for financial security (Kalmijn, 2013).

Consistent with the theory of intersectionality, one of the female participants indicated that many African women previously could not get the opportunity to obtain higher education as

women's role in African society were restricted to household labor. Therefore, obtaining a master's degree from a Canadian University made her feel more respected among her peers in Africa, while simultaneously experiencing subordination in her interactions with men or in her intimate relationship because of her gender. Many of the participants reported that higher education status placed individuals in a higher social category, and it is often associated with power. Therefore, according to some of the participants, higher education status influenced power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship because an individual's perceptions and views about life are often shaped by their level of education and associations. In this regard, one of the participants indicated that it is very important that both partners have the same level of education to maintain respect and power within the relationship.

**Income.** Some participants reported that differences in levels of income influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships. Canadian women are on average paid less than men for equal work (Statistics Canada, 2013). Many of the participants reported that income or money is very important to fulfill the financial needs of the family. Many of the female participants reported that each partner's financial contribution to the family was of equal importance as many families cannot survive on a single income. Almost all the female participants stated that although income could influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships this was mitigated by transparency, communication, and the partnership within the relationship. Some participants felt that only the weak-minded believe money is everything. However, some of the men felt that their primary provider role could be affected if they were not making enough money to meet the financial needs of the family, which they considered to be a personal failure or failed masculinity by their cultural standards. Therefore, financial independence and autonomy can influence power dynamics within an intimate partner

relationship. For instance, many of the female participants were financially independent, and this influenced their beliefs about gender roles surrounding being a breadwinner, and their husband's involvement in house chores, and childcare activities (Guruge, Shirpak, Hyman, Zanchetta, Gastaldo, & Sidani, 2010).

**Social status.** Many of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree and some had attained higher socioeconomic status before migrating to Canada. Depending on multiple factors such as level of income, education, employment, social networks, and opportunities for the advancement of their career, immigrants may experience a gain or loss of social status following migration (Aldridge, 2001; Hyman, Guruge, Mason, Gould, Stuckless, Tang, Teffera, & Mekonnen, 2004). For instance, an immigrant with stronger social ties or networks in the host country may be fortunate to find employment quickly including career advancement opportunities compared to those with weaker social ties or bonds (Hyman et al., 2004). However, some scholars argue that social networks are dynamic and are influenced by time and circumstances. Therefore, migrants with weaker social ties may benefit from the opportunity to associate themselves with people in privileged positions, who may have the potential resources to help them with the necessary social support (Hyman et al., 2004).

Aldridge (2001) defines this loss or gain of social status as the movement, or opportunity for movement between social groups. Many of the participants experienced a loss of social status when they arrived in Canada due to the devaluation of their foreign credentials by employers. Consequently, many of the skilled participants were compelled to find unskilled jobs to support their families, while at the same time attempting to re-establish their professional qualifications and careers in Canada. Consistent with previous studies on post-migration changes, some of the male participants who experienced a loss of social status considered to be a threat to their

masculinity; therefore, they sought to find ways to re-establish themselves in their new socioeconomic and cultural location (Creese, 2012). However, it is also possible for an immigrant to experience a gain of social status without necessarily translating into a higher income (Creese, 2012).

This study revealed that the changes in social status seemed to affect the male participants more than female participants due to societal gender role expectations of men (e.g., men are supposed to be the sole provider and head of the family). Some of the men experienced low self-esteem when they were unable to adequately perform their breadwinner role because it influenced the power dynamics of their relationships and their perception of themselves as men. Interestingly, all the married female participants assumed primary provider roles in some cases, when their spouses could not earn enough to fulfill the primary provider/breadwinner role because they either did jobs far below their qualifications or were in school to advance their careers. The primary provider role meant a lot to almost all the male participants. However, some of the participants felt that a loss of social status in one area was not the end of the world because it could be compensated for by a gain of social status in another area. For instance, one participant who is a Pastor experienced a loss of social status by doing jobs that were lower than his qualifications when he first arrived in Canada. However, although he had to start all over again, he was well respected in his community as Pastor and counseled people based on his position within the African community. Consistent with the theory of intersectionality, the Pastor experienced subordination and privilege simultaneously. Many of the participants indicated that their partner's loss or gain of social status did not influence the power dynamics in their relationships.

**Age and health.** Many of the participants indicated that age played an important role in marital relationships (Adinkrah, 2012). Age, to them, was associated with wisdom and respect. Most of the participants indicated that the beliefs, values, and norms of many traditional African societies discourage men from marrying older women to promote the respect given to men, and also to promote the continuity of patriarchal norms, values, and beliefs (Adinkrah, 2012). However, some participants felt that the age difference did not influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships because a relationship is about love and understanding. Many of the participants believed that as one gets older and experiences health decline, the partner with ill health who is often the older, relinquishes his power and authority to the other partner with good health, who is often the younger spouse. Many of the participants believed power associated with age within intimate partner relationships diminishes with time as one's health declines. However, one of the male participants stated that age did not influence power dynamics within their relations because it depended on an individual's world views because his two ex-wives were many years younger than him and age never played a role or influenced the power dynamics within their relationships.

**Children.** Many of the participants with children reported that children played an important role in the power dynamics within their relationships because the traditional African culture considers childbearing to be both a social and religious obligation in marriage (Abasili, 2011). All the participants came from traditional African patriarchal societies, where the idea of voluntary childlessness or voluntary motherhood was foreign to their culture because of the high social status, power, and prestige attached to childbearing, especially producing a male child for the continuation or perpetuation of the family name or lineage (Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Gyekye, 1996; and Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, & Van der Spy, 2004). Therefore, many of the

participants felt that the decision not to bear children was a protest against normative notions of masculinity and femininity (Horne, 2010). Although many of the participants stated that the norms, values, and beliefs surrounding marriage have changed, a childless marriage was still abhorred in many traditional African societies. Therefore, according to some of the participants, a childless woman had lower bargaining power during negotiations within the family compared with one with a child (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007).

Interestingly, some of the female participants stated that often the in-laws are the problem because they put so much pressure on the couple to bear children within a year or two into the marriage (Dyer, Abraham, Hoffman, & Van der Spy, 2004). All the participants with children indicated their children shifted the dynamics of power within their relationships. Some of the participants reported that women with children have more bargaining power within an intimate relationship than women without children, because children strengthened the relational bond between couples. However, some of the participants also indicated that children may cause some unhappy partners continue to stay in their relationships to help with parenting. Some participants believed that some unhappy men may also continue to stay in their relationships for fear of paying child support which can be costly if they should leave the relationship. While some participants indicated that some men don't care about anything and would leave if they were unhappy in their relationships. The interviews clearly illustrated that children influenced power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship.

**Extended family pressure.** Almost all the participants reported that extended family pressures influenced power dynamics within intimate partner relationships. For instance, few of the participants admitted that they came to Canada with the financial support of their extended families, which often influenced the power dynamics within their intimate relationships

(Korevla, 1999). The financial support from extended families was offered with the intention that they do well in Canada and return that gesture by financially supporting the non-migrant extended family back home (Baffoe, 2009). Some of the participants considered these expectations as a huge financial responsibility because they had to work harder which often led to frustration, stress, depression, and consequently, influenced the power dynamics within their intimate relationships (Baffoe, 2009).

Many of the participants acknowledged that many of the traditional Africa marriage processes create an atmosphere of dependence on extended families. However, Meekers (1993) indicates that many of the customary African marriage processes are gradually changing to more informal types of union, especially among the well-educated and those living in the urban areas due to globalization and colonialism. Furthermore, some scholars believe that the colonial governments and missionaries, who led the cause for modernity in Africa had a strong influence on the African political organization and economy and the traditional African culture such as the kinship systems, gender roles, and traditional customary marriage (Mawere & Mawere, 2010). Fortunately, some traditional beliefs and practices such as customary marriage still prevail despite the call for modernization (Mawere & Mawere, 2010).

In many traditional African societies, customary marriage is understood as a union and bond between two people of the opposite sex due to the prestige attached to childbearing and the perpetuation of the family name (Mawere & Mawere, 2010). It is during this customary ceremony that the bridegroom pays the 'dowry' or the 'bridewealth' to the bride's family to indicate his readiness and willingness to take good care of the bride. The ceremony also creates an opportunity for both the bridegroom's family and the bride's family to meet, establish a cordial relationship, and most importantly act as witnesses to the marriage. According to

Meekers (1993), the dowry or the bridewealth payment signifies that both families have a keen interest in the marriage and that their influence over the married couples should be deemed considerable.

According to some of the participants the dowry payment used to be a small token paid to the woman's family (Meekers, 1993). However, as culture evolved the original idea surrounding the dowry payment shifted due to the market economy (Meekers, 1993). According to some of the participants, the high cost of the dowry contributed to the financial stress of some newly married couples, as some men may be compelled to go for loans to get married. Consequently, some of the participants stated that this may compel some men to maltreat their wives once the dowry is paid in full because it is very costly, which they believed further reinforced the men's dominance over women (Kalunta-Crampton, 2013).

Regardless of the pressure, an extended family can put on couples, some of the participants indicated that there were psychological and emotional losses by not maintaining ties with the extended families (Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008). Contrarily, some participants also perceived that staying away from the extended family is considered positive because it made them depend on each other for support, made mutual decisions independent of the influence of other family members, increased mutual self-disclosure, and built their lives and families, independent of extended family influences and interferences (Hyman et al., 2008). Thus, the close bonds of the extended family may be replaced by closer bonds and improved communication between the couples (Hyman et al., 2008). Therefore, the extended family's involvement in a couple's marriage may be considered as assistance or interference depending on the context of the individual marriage. A few of the participants stated they did not allow the influences or interferences of the extended families in their relationships, which encouraged a



more shared decision-making process with their partners and strengthened their feelings of closeness to each other (Hyman e al., 2008).

In general, many participants believed the respect accorded extended family members and elders in the traditional African societies often held the marriage together for fear of not bringing shame to family members, friends, and neighbors who witnessed the marriage if they should divorce.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study is one of the few studies conducted on power dynamics among African immigrants in Canada. Many of the previous studies conducted in this area focused on immigrants as a homogeneous community. This study highlights the shifting power dynamics within the intimate partner relationship among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada. Despite the contributions of the findings of this study towards an understanding of the complexity of the shifting power dynamics within the intimate partner relationship among African immigrants in Lethbridge, there are some limitations.

First, the small sample size and the research setting restricted to Lethbridge limited the transferability of the study findings. Even though the sample size was small, this study captured diverse views and perceptions of the participants. The sample was composed of participants with higher education levels and a diverse migration history. Nine out of the ten participants had a minimum of bachelor's degree and had been living in Canada for at least two or more years. Therefore, the study findings cannot claim to represent the opinions, views, and perceptions of people with lower levels of education. Inclusion of more participants from an array of educational backgrounds may have contributed valuable data by capturing the perspectives of a sample with more intersectional diversity. This suggests that these study findings may not be

generalizable to other West African immigrants, with lower and higher levels of education in diverse social contexts or locations. Second, the researcher interacted with the participants for a short period due to the research time constraints, which placed limitation on these data collected. Third, the interviews were done using Zoom video conference software, which might have influenced the responses of some of the participants who were not used to online interviews. This method of interviewing also made it difficult for the researcher to fully capture the nonverbal communication gestures or body language which may be important for the interpretation of the data. Fourth, the study was conducted in English which excluded participants who could not communicate in English. This excluded some potential participants who might have had valuable information for this study. Fifth, all the participants were Christians, which limited the research to study to views and perceptions of Christians when it came to religious beliefs, which unintentionally excluded other people with different religious backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives. Sixth, this research focused solely on a heterosexual intimate partner relationship, which unintentionally excluded those in homosexual intimate partner relationships who may have had different perspectives and views. Seventh, my preconceived knowledge about the phenomenon of the study may have affected my methodology, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. However, I sought to minimize this impact by attending to my reflexivity throughout the study. And lastly, my African origin could have affected participant's responses to some of the questions; therefore, it is possible that participants withheld certain vital data on the assumption that I should be in the know as an African. This is evident in one of the participants quotes "As a man and as an African man am sure you would appreciate the fact that sometimes the decision can be taken and then I would become the afterthought."

Despite the aforementioned limitations, these study findings contribute to knowledge surrounding power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African migrants in Lethbridge. Based on the limitations of this research study, the following are the recommendations for future research on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the noted limitations for this study, I recommend the following for future research on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada. First, I recommend that future research will build on this study and seek to include participants from a wider geographical area. Second, future research should include people with little or no educational background to gain a better understanding of the complexity of power dynamics within intimate partner relationships, when participants are facing greater challenges due to their intersectional social location and frame of reference. Third, the study should include people who speak other languages to gain broader views and perceptions about the phenomenon. This can be done by the researcher working with translators, or through partnering with other researchers with other language competencies. Though this would not be easy to accomplish it, I believe it can be done with a concerted effort on the part of the researcher. Fourth, since less time was spent with participants due to research time constraints, I recommend a longitudinal study so that the researcher can spend more time with the participants to gather more data that may be valuable for the study. Last, I suggest that future research should include those in homosexual intimate partner relationships to get their views and perspectives on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships.

## **Significance of the study and Implications for Practice**

My reason for conducting this study was to explore the shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada. The study findings were based on participants' perceptions and views of the phenomenon of the study. Diverse views and perceptions that reflected participant's realities were captured; therefore, this study contributed significantly to the existing literature on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada. Also, it addressed the literature gap related to power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Canada.

The findings from this study may inform efforts to address the issue of power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada by the researcher, family therapists, policymakers, community agencies, and religious leaders. These data gathered have broadened our knowledge and understanding of the nature of power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, and its potentially negative outcomes for health and well-being. The findings may help stakeholders such as healthcare providers, religious leaders, community leaders, and policymakers to utilize available resources to educate people about the negative health outcomes that may be linked to power imbalance, and how to care for themselves when they are exposed to these power imbalances. Additionally, healthcare providers can also use such information to clinically assess and provide the necessary therapy for West African immigrants in Canada who may be diagnosed with diseases such as depression, and sexually transmitted diseases and explore the links between these diseases and power imbalances in relationships.

These study findings may help inform health care professionals, policymakers, service providers, and researchers to understand how post-migration changes can lead to positive and negative outcomes on intimate partners. Consequently, health care professionals may be equipped with the necessary culturally safe approaches to working with West African immigrant partners surrounding more effective ways of communicating stresses and frustration, to build healthy intimate partner relationships, and reduce the negative impact of post-migration changes on men, women, or both partners. In addition, it may assist health care professionals to understand the need to collaborate with the community leaders and other service agencies to develop culturally sensitive policies that may promote the well-being of West African immigrants and their integration into Canadian society. Finally, it may help health care professionals, policymakers, and service providers to identify the structural barriers (e.g., gender/patriarchy, policies/structural barriers to employment, and religious beliefs), and contributors to power dynamics (e.g., income, education, social status, age, health, and energy, children and extended family pressure) that may negatively affect West African immigrants following migration to Canada.

### **Knowledge Mobilization**

These study findings are shared with my supervisor, my Thesis Committee, and some of the research participants for feedback and recommendations. I plan to make the findings available to the public by publishing it in scholarly journals such as *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, and also through presentations at Immigrant Associations, Immigrant Churches, Lethbridge Immigrant Services or agencies with human service workers, Victim Services, and Lethbridge Police Services to increase the knowledge and understanding of power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African migrants in Lethbridge. A

copy of the Thesis will be made available at the University of Lethbridge Library and ProQuest Thesis Database to add to the already existing body of knowledge in related areas of study.

### **Evaluation of the Theoretical Framework**

The theory of intersectionality was the guiding theoretical framework for this study. I applied intersectionality theory to explore the post-migration changes to power-relations, such as gender role changes and how they intersected with other socioeconomic forces such as age, income, employment, social status, social location, extended family pressure, children, and religion. The intersectionality framework revealed that an individual's social location or identity influenced one's beliefs about and experience of gender (Shields, 2008). In other words, the issue of gender can be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities or locations (Collins, 1989; 2000). The theory was appropriate for this study because it helped to rigorously analyze participants diverse perspectives, views, and experiences of the phenomenon, and also provided an in-depth understanding of how social or geographical locations influenced gender role negotiation within intimate partner relationships, shifting power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship in ways that promoted healthy and fair relationships or in a direction that led to poor relationship outcomes.

The study findings revealed that gender intersected with other socioeconomic forces such as race, religious beliefs, social status. age, geographical locations, employment, income, children, and extended family pressure to influence the experiences of these participants within the context of transnationalism. For instance, within the transnational context, some of the female participants assumed the breadwinner roles, which influenced participants' experiences of power dynamics within intimate partner relationships following migration. The study findings indicated that gender intersected or interacted with other socioeconomic forces such as age, race,

social class, culture, income, employment, geographical locations, religion, children, and extended family pressure to influence power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada.

## **Reflection**

I learned a lot from conducting this qualitative research study on power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. Notwithstanding the short period of interaction with the participants, the interviews provided me an opportunity to better understand the phenomenon of study as the participants shared valuable data based on their views, perceptions, and experiences. Although there were some challenges, the interview guide helped me to navigate the interviews and it played a huge role in the success of this research study.

As a novice researcher, I encountered some challenges during the research study. First, my inability to spend more time with the participants was due to the time constraints of the research study. The amount of time spent with the participants according to Liamputtong (2013), makes a lot of difference as to what the researcher may find because the longer the research period, the more likely it is that the researcher will learn about sensitive issues and obtain valuable information that may not be possible in a short time. Second, to capture nonverbal communication gestures, such as body language and sign gestures, and to be accurate in its documentation was a challenge in itself. Even though time-consuming, the data transcriptions, generating codes, categories, and themes were a very good experience.

The final challenge was the difficulty of separating my beliefs, values, and gender biases from the data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation because, in reality, a researcher cannot completely separate his biases, values, beliefs, and previous knowledge of the

phenomenon of the study (Liamputtong, 2013). However, with the help of my supervisor, and member checking with some of the participants the validity of the data was obtained.

Overall, I believe I learned a lot more than I expected in my first experience and hopefully, the subsequent ones will be much easier to deal with.

## **Summary**

The study findings highlight the intersection of multiple factors such as gender roles, and patriarchal beliefs, norms, and values, policies/structural barriers to employment, and religious beliefs, income, education, social status, age, health, and energy, children, and extended family pressures to influence power dynamics within the intimate partner relationship among West African immigrants in Lethbridge, Southern Alberta, Canada.

Importantly, at the core of the challenges migrants encounter, are the changes in traditional gender roles that impact intimate partner relationships. Consequently, many of the migrant men are compelled to adjust within intimate partner relationships in ways that would have been unacceptable in their countries of origin (Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, & Chinichian, 2011). Many of the participants viewed postmigration gender roles changes as one of the challenges that needed to be well addressed within the African immigrant communities through education. The women seemed to have adjusted more quickly than the men, with few of the men resisting acculturation. Some of the women stated that African men need to realize that they live in a new environment that requires discarding of the old cultural values and beliefs that do not promote healthy and fair relationships. Many of the study participants stated that their views and perceptions about gender roles were based on their religious teachings. Therefore, religion played a big role in the lives of these participants. Unfortunately, some of the participants indicated that some religious teachings are misinterpreted to favor the men. Hence, the need for



more research on these Biblical texts to get a better understanding of the teachings instead of depending solely on religious leaders for the interpretation of Biblical texts. As one participant puts it *“Africans need to do more soul searching and self-seeking. And self-seeking basically means read out more religious books, research more, get some knowledge and understanding of more of the things, then you will get a different perspective of religion.”*

Kasturirangan, Krishnan, and Riger (2004) indicated that culture is not a static phenomenon, and individuals interact with their culture so that the culture is constantly challenged and redefined. Therefore some scholars argue that it would be wrong to assume that the immigrant’s cultural norms and values change purely as a result of migration, because even without migration the immigrant’s original culture is subject to change with time since culture is not static (Pasura & Christou, 2018). In addition, Campbell (1992) notes that the African patriarchal authority is under constant challenge due to rapid economic, social, and political development that has occurred within the past few decades. For example, this study illustrated that the traditional male primary provider role or breadwinner role was under constant challenge as many of the female participants worked full-time jobs outside the home, became financially independent, and contributed significantly to the economic needs of the family (Tichenor, 2005; Choi & Ting, 2008). However, other scholars have argued that there hasn’t been any significant shift in power relations within intimate partner relationships even though there has been a significant increase in the number of women getting employment outside the home and taking up breadwinner responsibility (Tichenor, 2005).

These interviews illustrated that many of the male participants fit into what Pasura and Christou (2018) termed as ‘endorsement and subversion’ response strategy to loss of hegemonic masculinity. Because on the surface, they seemed to have accepted changes in gender roles

following migration but their choice of some religious quotes or language used at times indicated otherwise. For instance, some of the participants used phrases such as “*she may be a leader out there but in the house am the boss,*” “*I took the initiative and I explained to her my plans,*” “*Equality is a modern-day term, gender equality was never in the agenda of God.*” and “*Let’s say your parents come to visit you and they see that your wife is instructing you to go and sweep the floor,*” This also demonstrates that these men are engaged in protest masculinity by trying to assert that they are ultimately the ones in charge and the dominant ones.

The intersectionality approach to this study was appropriate because it does not only reveal the fluid and plural nature of gender but also its interactions with multiple other factors such as race, religious beliefs, social status, education, income, employment, children, age and health, and extended family pressures to influence power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship (Sinatti, 2014). According to Farahani (2012), these multiple factors continually interact with gender to influence power dynamics within an intimate partner relationship.

Intimate partner relationships shape how West African immigrants adjust to life in Canada and this research brings a unique perspective to understanding the complexities shaping these dynamics.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

I would like to invite you to voluntarily participate in a study that aims to explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. Sometimes after moving to Canada, West African immigrants experience a change in the perceived degree of power held by women and men in a relationship, which may improve the relationship, or potentially create tension and challenges in the relationship. This study plans to explore these changes and will be conducted by Emmanuel Ato Moses Desbordes, a Faculty of Health Sciences, Master of Science student at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. This study is supervised by Dr. Peter Kellett, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge.

Below are the detailed description of the purpose, procedure, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and participation of the study:

#### **Purpose**

The overall purpose of this study is to explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge and also to address the existing literature gap related to power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. This study is a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Health Sciences).

#### **Procedure**

Due to COVID -19, participants will be interviewed using Zoom video conference software. Each participant will be interviewed for approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants will be interviewed in a natural setting that preserves their confidentiality, possibly including their home (if they live alone) or any chosen place of convenience outside their homes, which provides them the safety, security, and confidentiality needed to engage in the research interview. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon a convenient time for each participant. If participants agree, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. You may be contacted again to ensure I have correctly understood what you have told me.

#### **Risks**

I anticipate that engaging in this study will represent minimal risk to participants. Some of the questions may be sensitive, which may lead to emotional and psychological distress. A list of counseling services will be provided to any participant who experiences emotional and psychological distress and wishes to access additional support. You may decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. I will take every possible measure to ensure the safety, security, and privacy of each participant.

### **Benefits**

I believe this study will be beneficial to both the West African immigrant community and agencies that interact with them, to broaden their understanding of power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants to Canada.

### **Confidentiality**

Privacy and confidentiality of your data will be maintained at all times, with the following exceptions: 1). Alberta law states that everyone has a mandatory obligation to report any revelation of potential crimes such as child abuse, elder/vulnerable adult abuse, to appropriate authorities (e.g. law enforcement); or 2) you disclose information that places your safety or the safety of others at risk. To further ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality, the interview recording will be done only locally, using a secured place in my home (where I live alone), and will require a password to join a meeting. However, while all security precautions will be taken when using Zoom, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed since the Internet is being used as a medium of communication. All data collected will be kept confidential in a safe and secure filing cabinet in a locked office. The data will also be encrypted and saved on a password-protected computer. The data will be used only for this study and the raw data will be shredded or destroyed after 5 years.

### **Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. The eligibility criteria for this study include being: (a) a first-generation immigrant from West Africa; (b) at least 18 years of age; (c) a person who has knowledge and experience of being in a relationship (e.g., married or cohabiting, divorced or widowed for at most 5 years, and people in long term relationships); (d) in a relationship that began before or after they were in Canada; and (e) able to communicate in English and (f) someone who has lived in Canada for at least two years. You are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time, for any reason, without any penalty or consequence. As a show of appreciation, each participant will receive a \$10 gift certification by mail or e-transfer for participation, which they may keep even if the participant decides to withdraw. This should not be perceived as an inducement of any kind of participation. Participants who wish to have a copy of the final report of my findings may willingly provide any contact information such as an email address so that a copy can be emailed to them.

### **Dissemination of the Study findings**

I will share this study's findings by publishing it in scholarly journals, and also through presentations at Ghanaian Immigrant Associations, Immigrant Associations, Immigrant Churches, Lethbridge Immigrant Services or agencies with human service workers, Victim Services, and Lethbridge Police Services to increase the knowledge and understanding of power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African migrants in Lethbridge. A copy of the Thesis will be made available through the University of Lethbridge Library and ProQuest Thesis Database to add to the already existing body of knowledge in related areas of study.

### **Kindly respond to the following statements by checking out either "Yes" or "No"**

I agree or consent to participate. Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree or consent to be interviewed through virtual communication applications Yes [ ] No [ ]



I agree or consent to be audio recorded during the interview. Yes [ ] No [ ]

I wish to receive a copy of the findings. Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree or consent to give my contact information. Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree or consent to be contacted again to ensure the researcher has correctly understood what I have told him. Yes [ ] No [ ]

I agree or consent that all the information I share with the researcher will be strictly kept confidential except for 1) disclosure of potential crimes such as the abuse of a child/elder/vulnerable person, or 2) disclosing information that places your safety or the safety of others at risk. Yes [ ] No [ ]

The nature and purpose of this study have been explained to me by Mr. Emmanuel Ato Moses Desbordes. I have not been in any way coerced to partake in this study. I have also read and understood all of the above information. I have signed this form to indicate my willingness and readiness to be among the study participants.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*\* Contact information of the participants

Phone number or Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me (phone: 403-915-3755 or email: e.desbordes@uleth.ca) or my school supervisor Dr. Peter Kellett at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge (email: peter.kellett@uleth.ca) or the Office of Research Ethics, the University of Lethbridge (phone: 403-329-2747 or email: [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca)). I will be very willing to answer all your potential questions.

**Thank you very much.**

**You will be given a copy of this form for your records**

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT POSTER



### **Would you be willing to participate in a research interview?**

*Exploring factors that influence power dynamics within intimate partnerships among West African immigrants in Lethbridge.*

#### **Eligible Participants must be:**

- (a) a first-generation immigrant from West Africa,
- (b) at least 18 years of age,
- (c) a person who has knowledge and experience of being in a relationship (e.g. married or cohabiting, divorced or widowed for at most 5 years, and people in long term relationships),
- (d) in a relationship that began before or after they were in Canada,
- (e) able to communicate in English, and
- (f) someone who has lived in Canada for at least two years.

*The interview will take about 45-60 minutes. Each eligible participant will receive a \$10 gift certificate.*

For further information contact **Emmanuel Ato Moses Desbordes @ 403-915-3755** or email: **[e.desbordes@uleth.ca](mailto:e.desbordes@uleth.ca)**.

*This study has received Ethical Approval from the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee – Protocol #TBD*

## **APPENDIX C: MEMBER CHECK GUIDE**

1. Is there any part of the text that does not accurately reflect or represent your views?
2. Is there any part of the text that you want to further develop, clarify, or change?
3. Is there any part of the text that you want to be removed?
4. Is there anything in the text that stands out for you?

**APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM**

Participant ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to begin by asking you some basic information about yourself.

- 1) Please indicate your gender.
  - Man
  - Woman
  - Other (Specify).....
  
- 2) Please select the category that includes your age.
  - 18-25
  - 26-35
  - 36-45
  - 46-55
  - 56-65
  - 65 or above
  
- 3) Do you have children living with you?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 4) What best describes your marital status?
  - Single, Never Married
  - Married
  - Common-Law
  - Separated
  - Divorced
  - Widowed
  
- 5) What best describes your level of education?
  - Elementary School
  - High School
  - Some college education
  - College diploma
  - Some University education
  - University degree
  - Post Graduate Studies
  - Other (Specify) .....
  
- 6) What best describes your employment status?
  - Employed full-time

- Employed part-time
  - Not employed
- 7) What best describes your Immigration Status?
- Non-Permanent resident
  - Permanent resident
  - Canadian citizen
  - Student
- 8) What best describes your economic status?
- Less than \$800 per month
  - Between \$2000 to \$3000 per month
  - More than \$3000 per month)
- 9) What best describes your religious affiliation?
- Christian
  - Muslim
  - Other.....

## **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Interviews, according to King and Horrocks (2010); and Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, and McKinney (2012) are an important part of qualitative research to make sense or meanings of our lives. This interview guide aims to explore shifting power dynamics within intimate partner relationships among West African immigrants to Canada. The guide will include open-ended, broad, and more focused questions to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The following questions in various parts will guide the interview with participants.

### **Part 1: Introduction**

Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with me today. This research is about exploring the shifting power dynamics within the intimate partnership among West African immigrants in Lethbridge. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions. I would like to learn your opinions about the topic of today's discussion. Please let me know if any questions make you uncomfortable. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Can you please tell me something about your family and immigration experiences?
  - a. How did you meet each other?
  - b. How long have you been living in Canada?
  - c. How long have you been in your current relationship?
  - d. What connections do you maintain with your country of origin?
  - e. Do you have intentions to return to your country of origin someday?

### **Part 2: Structural Factors**

1. What is power? How does this look in your relationship? How do you think this came about? What are the origins of the dynamics?
  - a. In your experience, who is in charge of your relationship? Or who makes major decisions regarding house chores, sex, spending time together, and outings? Who controls the money? Who makes the money? How are decisions about spending money?
  - b. In your experience, do you think power varies depending on the type of relationship (e.g. girlfriend/boyfriend, common law, married, parent of children)?
  - c. Since migrating to Canada, have you noticed any power shifts in your relationships?
  - d. Do you feel comfortable or safe disagreeing with or arguing with your partner?
  - e. What are some of the topics that are difficult to discuss with your partner?
  - f. Does one partner have a greater chance of winning the argument when there is a disagreement about something?
  - g. How do you negotiate intimacy/sex with your partner?
  - h. Have there been instances where you felt you were not treated fairly or as an equal?
  - i. In your experience, what contributes to a fair or equal relationship?
2. How does gender influence power in an intimate relationship? To whom could you turn for support/for a conversation about some of the gender (man/woman) challenges in the relationship?

- a. Can you tell me what it means to be a man or a woman in your culture?
  - b. What happens when your behavior does not align with the expected gender role or you act in ways you are not supposed to act?
  - c. What do you think are some of your gender strengths or limitations?
  - d. How have you managed gender role changes and other cultural concerns?
  - e. Who makes decisions with regards to family planning or sexual health choices (e.g. use of condoms, use of other birth control methods such as the birth control pill, IUD, Spermicide, diaphragm/cervical cap, and rhythm method).
3. How do immigration policies influence power in your intimate partner relationships?
    - a. Did anyone assist you to acquire immigration to Canada?
    - b. Do you feel you owe your partner for helping you to get here?
4. What religion do you practice? And how do your religious beliefs influence power dynamics and decision-making in your relationships?
    - a. What ideas are there in your religious institution about gender (man/woman) relationships?
    - b. How does religion play a role in setting/sustaining expectations around the nature of relationships?
    - c. Do you see any gender bias among people holding leadership positions in your religious institution?
    - d. Do you depend on the teachings of religious texts (e.g., Bible and Koran) to resolve marital conflicts?

### **Part 3: Socioeconomic Factors**

1. In what way do resources such as income, education, social status, children, age, etc. influence power dynamics in intimate relationships?
2. Has there been any gender role reversal in your relationships since you migrated to Canada?
  - a. Is one partner more economically dependent on the other?
  - b. Do you feel your masculinity or femininity has been strengthened or threatened because of shifting gender roles?
  - c. Are both partners equally benefitting from the relationship?
  - d. Have you at any point in time thought about ending your relationship because of shifting gender roles?
  - e. Do you have the external family support? do you succumb to external family pressures? Or do your in-laws in any way influence your decisions?
3. In your experience, do you think you have integrated well into Canadian society?
4. How has the Canadian culture and the culture of your country of origin influence power dynamics in your relationships?

#### **Part 4: Conclusion**

1. How do race, gender, class, and culture intersect to influence power dynamics in intimate partner relationships?
2. How does being an African, as well as a male/female, and holding different cultural beliefs intersect to influence the dynamics in your relationships?
3. I don't have any more questions. Is there anything you would like to add or need clarification before we officially end this interview?
4. Can I please contact again if there is/are any responses that need further clarification?

**Thank you so much for this valuable information.**



## APPENDIX F: COUNSELING SERVICES

List of Professional Counselling Resources in Lethbridge:

1. Lethbridge Counselling Services  
740 4 Avenue South  
Tel: (403) 942-0452
2. Associates Counselling Services (subsidized through City of Lethbridge)  
Family counselor  
239 12b St N  
Tel: (403) 381-6000
3. Lethbridge Family Services - Main Office (subsidized through City of Lethbridge)  
Non-profit Organization  
1107 2 Avenue N  
Tel: (403) 327-5724
4. Alberta Health Services Mental Health Clinic – 403 329 4775
5. Mental Health Helpline (24 hrs. a day, 7 days per week) – 1 866 303 2642
6. Domestic Violence Action Team  
102 – 1221 2 Ave S  
Tel: (403) 381-3900
7. YMCA Harbour House  
Women’s Emergency Shelter  
604 8 St S  
Tel: (403) 329-0088

**Crisis line:** (403) 320-1881

**Toll-free line:** 1-866-296-0447

**\*If you are in immediate danger call 9-1-1**