

Exploring the Impact of Familial and Cultural Values on Physical Activity
Engagement Among International Muslim Women Students in Canada

by
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Abstract

This study explored the experiences and perspectives of physical activity participation among Iranian International Muslim women graduate students living away from their families in Canada. Specifically, this study investigated how distancing from Islamic society and Muslim familial supervision could affect their perspectives on physical activity participation within Canadian culture and system, compared to their experiences before migrating to Canada.

The literature review indicated that previous research on Muslim women and physical activity has mainly focused on identifying the barriers that prevent them from participating in physical activity. This study, therefore, sought to understand the cultural and familial influences on Muslim women's participation in physical activity when they live in a non-Islamic country.

The study used an interpretive approach and focus group to gather data from the participation of 10 Muslim women at the graduate level of education. Thematic analysis was applied to identify the themes that construct the participants' experiences. The study's quality was ensured by adhering to six quality criteria: reflexivity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and coherence.

The findings from this research provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing physical activity participation among Iranian Muslim women graduate students in Canada. The interplay of cultural capital, societal expectations, supportive environments, and the negotiation of cultural identity all play crucial roles in shaping their experiences in Canada. In addition, this research contributes to the literature on Muslim women's participation in physical activity by providing insights into the cultural and family influences shaping their experiences in a non-Muslim country. Additionally, the research findings will assist policymakers and practitioners in promoting physical activity among Muslim women outside of Islamic countries.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend, my love, and my partner, Dina. Your unwavering support and kindness have illuminated my life's path. Thank you, Dina, for standing by me from Iran to here, and for always encouraging me to be my best.

I also dedicate this thesis to my mom, a strong woman who has battled life's challenges at every step. Mom, you are my role model, inspiring me with your strength and resilience. Your support has been my foundation, and I am forever grateful for your love and guidance.

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Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Background

Islamic culture emphasizes developing and maintaining spiritual and physical strength for all individuals regardless of gender¹ (De Knop et al., 1996). Islamic rules also emphasize the importance of health and physical activity (PA) for both men and women (Dagkas et al., 2011). While PA is considered an Islamic duty, religious leaders' varying interpretations of Islamic doctrines may have negatively affected the viewpoints of Muslim women who wish to participate in PA (Nakamura, 2002). Extensive research-based literature from the early 1990s to now has identified areas of tension between Islamic cultural practices and physical education (PE) for Muslim girls in schools (De Knop et al., 1996; Benn, 2002; Ahmad et al., 2020). Scholars have highlighted the role of misinterpretations and misuse of religious texts, historical and cultural influences, family values, the significance of gender-segregated environments, and considerations for women's modest clothing as contributing factors to Muslim women's limited participation in PA (Benn, 2002; Dagkas & Benn, 2006). This thesis investigates how family values and cultural influences impact Muslim women's attitudes and behaviours toward participation in PA by examining these aspects. Understanding the interplay between cultural norms and familial expectations is crucial for creating effective strategies to promote inclusivity and overcome barriers to engagement in PA for this demographic.

1.2 Gender Equity in Islam and Its Impact on PA

Although Islamic jurisprudence provides a strong foundation for gender equity, many

¹ Gender is not a binary notion, and it is crucial to recognize and respect the diversity of gender identities. However, in this study, gender roles and expectations for men and women will follow a traditional Muslim explanation as this study will examine the subject matter within the Islamic religion and cultures. This approach has merits, because Muslim participants may have different interpretations of gender in Canada compared to the ones they have in Islamic societies. Additionally, the study's value lies in its potential to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity by exploring the relationship between gender, culture, and physical activity in the Islamic religion and culture.

Muslim societies remain patriarchal, in part due to differing interpretations of these principles (Darakchi, 2018). Interpretations have ranged from fundamentalist to modernist, leading to ongoing debates among Muslims, particularly Muslim feminists, regarding gender issues within Islam. Significant contributions to this discourse have come from scholars such as Benn (2002), Darakchi (2018), and Mernissi (1991). They argued that the biased patriarchal structure of Arab societies has influenced how Qur'anic doctrines have been conducted, leading to the misinterpretation of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths². These misinterpretations have had a negative impact on the social and practical representation of Muslim women. It is important to note that certain teachings of Islam have been interpreted in a way that reinforces men's dominance and limits women's agency (Darakchi, 2018). Additionally, legal references that affirm women's equity with men have historically been disregarded and women's participation in society has often been overlooked (Engineer, 2001).

Islam is not just a religion but also a belief system that affects all aspects of a Muslim's life, including PA (Testa & Amara, 2015). In Islamic countries, PA experiences and participation levels are influenced by sociocultural contexts and various religious doctrines (Agergaard, 2016), as it can be challenging to separate religious values from culture. According to some scholars, Islam supports the participation of girls and women in PA while adhering to modesty requirements (Dagkas et al., 2011). Many studies have shown that different interpretations of Islam can affect Muslim women's participation in PA (Engineer, 2001; Agergaard, 2016). When the Qur'an, the main source of Islamic thinking and practices, is only selectively followed, it can create a problematic balance between genders (Benn et al., 2010). Marwat et al. (2014) also

² In Islamic terminology, *Hadith* refers to the collection of traditions and sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is considered one of the primary sources of Islamic law and guidance, after the Qur'an.

assert that in the Muslim world, PA is often regarded as a men-dominated activity, with women encountering numerous obstacles and constraints in pursuing PA.

1.3 The Role of Patriarchy and Family in Shaping Muslim Women's PA

Besides Islamic culture, the role of Muslim families in shaping the PA levels of girls is a critical cultural context in Muslim societies, possibly due to Islamic teachings that emphasize obeying parents' wishes (De Knop et al., 1996; Kay, 2006). Islam explicitly encourages Muslim families to teach their children various PAs in an attempt to make them strong and physically active. The Hadith says, “Teach your children to swim, throw arrows and ride horses” (Ali, 2003, Hadith no 19742). Elliott (1996) places family at the heart of cultural identity and depicts different family arrangements and values as crucial distinguishing characteristics of various ethnic groups.

Muslim parents often feel that PA is inappropriate for girls and prioritize academic achievements over PA (Benn et al., 2010). Muslim women often face societal and cultural expectations that prioritize academic achievement over other activities like sports. This emphasis on education is rooted in cultural, religious, and practical considerations, with families viewing academic success as a pathway to social mobility, respectability, and financial stability. Ahmad (2001) highlights that education is seen as a culturally acceptable means for Muslim women to gain empowerment and independence without compromising traditional values of modesty and propriety. Similarly, Shain (2003) explains that Muslim families often encourage their daughters to excel academically as a way to secure future opportunities while avoiding activities that might conflict with conservative gender roles. This focus on academics is seen as aligning with religious values and societal expectations, offering a respectable way for women to navigate their dual identities while staying within the boundaries of cultural norms. Consequently, education

becomes a priority, often superseding other pursuits like sports, which may be perceived as less important or even contradictory to traditional expectations of femininity and modesty (Ahmad, 2001; Shain, 2003).

A study carried out by Qureshi and Ghouri (2011) with a group of Muslim students reveals extensive parental influence over girls' lives and the extent of their PA participation. As another example, Walseth and Fasting (2003) encountered powerfully negative Muslim parental attitudes towards girls' participation in PE at schools. These parental points of view were often found to be grounded in cultural and religious values that prioritized women's domestic roles and discouraged them from engaging in activities perceived to be more suitable for men (Marwat et al., 2014). Furthermore, Aziz et al. (2020) explored how Muslim women often hold a weak position in families and society and are frequently viewed as inferior to men due to local patriarchal cultures and religious beliefs. After examining such patriarchal hegemony, Qureshi and Ghouri (2011) concluded that this context reinforces the belief among women that Islamic rules and Muslim culture are incompatible with being physically active.

According to Mernissi (1991), patriarchy is a critical issue in Muslim countries that causes inequities for women. She believes that there exists an attitude about men's superiority and women's subjection that contributes to a general misunderstanding of Islamic law within Islamic countries. Mernissi (1991) views patriarchy as being the result of historical and cultural events that have led to an interpretation of the Qur'an that is unrelated to Islamic values. She argues that Islam is not inherently patriarchal, but instead that patriarchy has been heavily involved in the history of the Middle East and has subsequently seeped into the ways Muslims interpret their faith. Several other studies have also highlighted the role of patriarchy in limiting women's access to PA in Muslim societies (Makama, 2013).

In many Muslim communities, high value is placed on the role of women as wives and mothers (Engineer, 2001). Consequently, participation in PA has been seen as a distraction from higher-order pursuits in religious and familial duties. PA has also been argued to be associated with 'play' and, therefore, not worthy of time, commitment, and dedication (Benn, 2002). Such views continue to affect young Muslim women's lives and choices, potentially discouraging them from pursuing life-enhancing PA participation or career options and higher-education studies in this field. According to Mir-Hosseini (2006), some Islamic practices are misused to control women's social behaviours, keep them at home, and make them invisible and silent within society.

Exploring the mechanisms of the patriarchal hegemony in Islamic countries would help demonstrate how this hegemony and its related family values affect the way Muslim women conceive of their identities as physically active people. Specifically, moving away from their Muslim societies and Muslim familial influences may alter their meaning systems around the uses and practices of PA, potentially leading to the recreation of new identities based on new cultural influences. (Abichahine & Veenstra, 2017).

1.4 Navigating Identity and Participation in PA Among Muslim Immigrants

Research indicates that young Muslims reinterpret and renegotiate their religious and cultural practices when they experience challenges and opportunities in multicultural societies (Agergaard, 2016). Agergaard (2016) concluded that this perspective helps explain the diversity of cultural interpretations of religious values and practices negotiated not only by individuals but also within societal relations. For example, after migrating to a new society, Muslim women may encounter differences that challenge previously experienced dominant views or embodied dispositions regarding their participation in PA. Additionally, the representation of Islam in

Western contexts can significantly impact the Muslim diaspora, which often faces displacement and migration while striving to maintain its traditional customs, languages, and practices (Handa, 2003).

Studies have highlighted the intricate orientation of Muslim girls and women as immigrants in Western societies. For instance, a Canadian study conducted by Jiwani and Rail (2010) showed that while Muslim women may practice their religion and adhere to gender roles by wearing hijab (here meaning covering of the head and often the arms and legs), they may also choose to focus on fitness and bodily appearance in ways similar to their Canadian counterparts. Similarly, a Norwegian study carried out among Egyptian Muslim women by Walseth and Fasting (2003) revealed that several women saw their participation in PA as a means of taking care of their bodies, with some even rationalizing it as a requirement for being a good Muslim. Furthermore, Kay (2006) described how British Muslim women navigate between their family identity and Westernized experiences on a daily basis. It is important to note that the concept of identity used here is not essentialist but rather dynamic, contextualized, and constructed through difference (Walseth, 2006). This means that identity is formed through the relationship with others and the recognition of what it is not, which involves understanding one's own identity by distinguishing it from others (Walseth, 2006). Brah (2005) has argued that through the process of displacement, migration, and integration into the West, Asian Muslims have had to redefine their identity within the host society.

According to Prieur et al. (2023), within migration studies, the relationship between individuals and cultures can involve individuals being both controlled and constrained by their culture, or, conversely, individuals concurrently creating and shaping their culture. Scholars such as Schwartz et al. (2010) emphasize the aspect of continuity, viewing culture as constraining to

the lives of young women with immigrant backgrounds. However, this thesis focuses on the latter perspective, where Muslim woman students with immigrant backgrounds actively combine different cultural impulses in the context of their identity formation work. The dynamic, fluid nature of cultures and the process of influencing and being influenced by the cultures of others is a reality of the modern world and will be influential in this study. More specifically, in the context of PA, Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of having more in-depth discussions with an intersectional perspective that takes into account the interconnectedness of categories such as culture, ethnicity, identity, and gender. Combining these aspects can address the challenges Muslim women face in relation to their participation in PA.

1.5 Purpose Statement

Traditional cultural beliefs, values, and practices can significantly influence Muslim women's ability to participate in PA (Benn & Pfister, 2013). Therefore, a better understanding of these factors is necessary to discover the experiences of international Muslim women students in PA contexts. The purpose of this research is to provide new insights into the perceptions of Iranian international Muslim women graduate students, who were born and raised in Iran and are now studying in Canada, regarding their participation in PA in a non-Islamic society.

Focus groups were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of these women's lived experiences. This study aims to shed light on the complex interplay of culture, religion, family, and societal context in shaping Iranian Muslim women's experiences of PA.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How have family values and cultural norms from participants' Islamic countries influenced Iranian Muslim women students' engagement in physical activities before and after immigrating to Canada?

2. In what ways do family values and Islamic cultural influences shape the current participation in physical activities among individuals who have moved to Canada, and how have their strategies for engaging in physical activity evolved due to cultural and societal transitions?

1.6 Study Rationale

Since the late 1980s, a considerable amount of literature has been available about Muslim women's participation in PA, especially Muslim girl students in high school (Bauman et al., 2012; Carrington et al., 1987). Certain studies have specifically examined ways to promote the involvement of Muslim girls in school PE, addressing the issue of parental opposition to their daughters' participation in PA (De Knop et al., 1996; Kay, 2006). Despite the significance of the works outlined above, there are a number of gaps in the literature about international Muslim women students' participation in PA. Immigrant women have been suggested to be especially inactive, reporting lower rates of PA than men (O'Driscoll et al., 2014). Moreover, among ethnic subgroups, South Asian and West Asian immigrant women have been shown to have the lowest rates of PA (Dogra et al., 2010). Racialized girls and women have had to face multiple intersecting barriers that act together to restrict their participation in PA and may go on to contribute to the exclusion and discrimination they face within PA, sport, and recreation (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Deol & Johnson, 2023).

While research has explored the experiences of immigrant populations, particularly regarding sports, recreation, and PE, the focus on girls' perspectives has been lacking (Benn et al., 2011). Indeed, there has been little research aimed at discovering the willingness of international Muslim women students to participate in PA after realizing their ability to create a new physically active identity in a less patriarchal society (Qureshi & Ghouri, 2011). For

example, studies investigating the experiences of newly arrived immigrants noted that girls were particularly affected by feelings of exclusion (Lleixà & Nieva, 2018; Lane et al., 2021).

However, these studies did not provide an in-depth understanding of the specific challenges faced by immigrant girls related to PE, potentially overlooking an important aspect of their experiences (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). This gap is significant because Muslim women may face distinct social, cultural, and systemic barriers to participation in PA that other immigrant groups do not experience. Furthermore, the intersections of gender, religion, and immigrant status create a complex set of circumstances that shape individual experiences in unique ways, necessitating a more focused and nuanced exploration.

In addition, despite abundant research concerning the positive influence of non-Muslim families on young people's engagement in PA (Schwarz et al., 2005), few studies have considered the role of Muslim families in young Muslim women's explorations of the different ways of making meaning of, and participating in, PA (Macdonald et al., 2004). While current sociological research on immigrant Muslim women and PA has primarily focused on school-based PE, little attention has been given to how family influences intersect with young Muslim women's participation in PA outside of school (Knez et al., 2012).

With 7.5 million immigrants, Canada currently has the second-highest percentage (21.9%) of foreign-born nationals in the world (Statistics Canada, 2022). Current annual immigration into Canada amounts to around 300,000/year new immigrants—one of the highest rates per population of any country in the world. Statistics also show that 16,900 international students came to Canada from Iran (an Islamic country) in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2022). Understanding the specific barriers that Muslim women encounter in PA systems in immigrant societies is crucial for improving their PA experiences. These obstacles can include

cultural and religious restrictions, limited access to female-only exercise spaces, lack of culturally sensitive programs, and societal stereotypes (Abichahine & Veenstra, 2017). By identifying and addressing these challenges, institutions and communities can develop strategies to support and encourage Muslim women's participation in PA. Approaches to overcoming these barriers might involve creating more inclusive and accommodating PA programs, offering female-only exercise times or spaces, and promoting awareness and education to reduce stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim women in sports and PA.

The Canadian government continues to emphasize the significance of effectively integrating immigrants into Canadian society, highlighting the need for settlement programs to coordinate with other stakeholders and services such as childcare, health, and health services (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024; Deol & Johnson, 2023). Understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by young Muslim women in PA can help these programs provide more culturally relevant and effective support, potentially enhancing this demographic's physical and social well-being.

1.7 Merits

1.7.1 Academic Merit

Islamic culture has been a topic of academic interest for scholars from different fields, such as anthropology, sociology, and religious studies. This study provides new insights into the perceptions of Iranian Muslim women students regarding their participation in PA, contributing to the literature on the intersection of culture, religion, and PA.

1.7.2 Social Merit

Muslim women often find themselves in a subordinate position within both family and society and are commonly perceived as being disadvantaged relative to men (Walseth & Fasting,

2003). This is often attributed to prevailing patriarchal norms and religious interpretations within their local cultures (Aziz et al, 2020). This study examines how the lack of family control may affect Muslim women's access to PA. The study also highlights the role of cultural contexts and family values in shaping Muslim women's participation in PA, potentially informing interventions to promote PA among Muslim women. In addition, this study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of the factors hindering Muslim women's participation in PA in both Islamic and non-Islamic societies. The findings could be used to inform policies and interventions aimed at increasing Muslim women's participation in PA.

1.7.3 Practical Merit

The results of this study could inform policies that promote PA among Muslim women immigrants in non-Islamic societies. The findings could also be used to design culturally appropriate interventions that aim to increase Muslim women's participation in PA at both the individual and societal levels.

In summary, this study explores the academic, social, and practical aspects of Muslim women's participation in PA, focusing on the influence of cultural and familial factors. By examining the intersection of Islamic teachings, cultural identity, and the experiences of Iranian Muslim women in non-Islamic societies, this research aims to contribute to both academic knowledge and policy development. The next chapter will review existing literature to contextualize these concepts within the broader discussions on PA, gender equity, and cultural adaptation.

Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1 Sources Consulted

This literature review aims to summarize, analyze, and evaluate existing scholarly research on three main areas: (1) Islamic teachings regarding PA and gender equity, (2) the influence of Muslim families and Islamic culture on PA and gender roles, and (3) the phenomenon of cultural identity formation following migration.

An electronic database search was conducted to identify relevant articles published from January 1970 to March 2024 in the following databases: subject-specific databases (Sport Discus, PubMed, Taylor & Francis Group, and PsycINFO) and the Web using search engines (Google Scholar, the University of Manitoba Library).

Search terms used to capture relevant scholarly sources were developed based on research questions. Terms used for this current research were: ‘physical activity’ OR ‘Muslim women’ OR ‘Islamic rules’ OR ‘lived experience’ OR ‘immigrant’ OR ‘Islamic teachings on PA’ OR ‘cultural capital’ OR ‘International Muslim students’ OR ‘cultural diversity’ OR ‘gender equity’ OR ‘Muslim families’ values’ OR ‘patriarchal hegemony’ OR ‘recreate identity’ OR ‘cross-cultural adaptation’ OR ‘social integration.’

This chapter can be divided into four different categories. First, Muslim Women's participation in PA. Second, Islamic doctrines and intersectional impacts on PA. Third, examination of patriarchal hegemony through a historical and sociological lens. Finally, acculturation and identity transformation after immigration.

2.2 Key Insights from the Literature Review

2.2.1 A Review of Literature on Muslim Women's Participation in PA

Within the literature on Muslim women and PA, it is apparent that this topic has mostly been explored by Western researchers (Amara & Henry, 2010). Muslim girls and women's participation has been shown to be frequently limited by cultural and religious factors, as seen in the literature on PE and PA (Knez et al., 2012). However, recent years have witnessed an increase in scholarly attention on racialized students' experiences in PE classes. Among these works are studies that have been conducted on the experiences of Muslim girls in PE classes (Benn & Pfister, 2013; Dagkas et al., 2011; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Walseth, 2015). Dagkas et al. (2011) highlight that, for some Muslim girls, school is the only place where they can experience formal PA. However, based on literature from various countries such as Australia (Alamri, 2015), Greece and Britain (Dagkas & Benn, 2006), and Denmark and England (Dagkas et al., 2011), it has been documented that Muslim girls have negative attitudes (such as a lack of motivation) and negative experiences (such as restriction, exclusion, and rejection) about participating in PE classes in school.

According to studies generated predominantly in England and Australia, the lack of interest in PE and PA activities among Muslim women may result from the "actual or perceived restrictions placed on them by their culture, sex, religion, and ethnicity" (Dagkas & Benn, 2006, p. 21). The increasing withdrawal of Muslim girls from PE throughout the world has led researchers to collaborate and conduct larger studies, such as the Birmingham Advisory Support Service (BASS) Project (2008), which have captured the voices and lived realities of 19 head teachers and teachers, 109 young Muslim people, and 32 of their parents in eight schools in England (Dagkas et al., 2011). The book, *Muslim Women and Sport*, which features

contributions from authors in 14 different countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, also provides significant information on issues, concerns, and solutions related to Muslim girls and women who experience and manage tensions between religious identity and participation in PA (Benn et al., 2010). Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on the position of women and PA in sequential United Nations policy documents and the proceedings of the 16th Quadrennial International Association of PE and the Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) World Congresses (Benn et al., 2010), the latter of which tracks increased global attention to women's rights and has helped facilitate greater interest and participation in women's PA.

2.2.2 Islamic Doctrines and Intersectional Impacts on PA

Several scholars have asserted that Islam supports the participation of girls and women in PA, albeit within religious requirements for body modesty (Sfeir, 1985). For example, Kay (2006) and Walseth and Fasting (2003) all found evidence of alignment between Islamic values and PA for young women. In the past, literature reviews have mostly highlighted religious requirements as a barrier to participation in PA for Muslim women. Many researchers have asserted that these requirements have led Muslim women to believe in the taken-for-granted notion that they do not have equal rights to engage with PA when compared to Muslim boys and non-Muslim children (Agergaard, 2016; Amara & Henry, 2010; De Knop et al., 1996). These factors include maintaining modesty, gender-segregated activities, and attention to religious practices such as dress codes, which often include covering their hair with a hijab (headscarf), wearing long, loose-fitting clothing, and fasting during Ramadan (Benn, 2002; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Kay, 2006; Nakamura, 2002). In Dagkas and Benn's research (2006), there was consensus among young Muslim women participants that the responsibility to adhere to religious and cultural expectations increased post-puberty. They concluded that this socialization process will

continue into adulthood to shape women's body habits and will influence changing demands on values, attitudes, and behaviour. Such findings support earlier research that showed the significance of religiosity, its acceleration post-puberty, and its effects on PE participation (Agergaard, 2016; Amara & Henry, 2010; De Knop et al., 1996). All these factors seem to be powerful forces that restrict Muslim women's participation rates in PA (Benn, 2002).

In Islamic societies, the concept of modesty plays a central role in shaping body image and self-acceptance. Women's choices in clothing, particularly the wearing of the hijab, reflect not only religious devotion but also personal and cultural identity. Ruby (2006) explores how Muslim women negotiate their sense of self-acceptance and empowerment through their decision to wear the hijab, highlighting that many view it as a form of protection against societal pressures to conform to Western ideals of beauty. The hijab, in this sense, can be seen as a symbol of empowerment, allowing women to focus on their inner selves rather than external appearances.

However, this relationship between modesty, body image, and self-acceptance is not always uniform across Islamic societies. Muslim women in more globalized contexts, may face conflicting pressures. Kaplan (2006) highlights how Muslim women navigate the tension between local religious norms of modesty and global beauty standards, illustrating the challenges they face in balancing personal religious convictions with the societal push toward Western ideals. These studies suggest that while Islamic values can promote self-acceptance, Muslim women in increasingly globalized contexts must continuously navigate a complex landscape of cultural and religious expectations surrounding body image.

Whilst these are certainly important factors negotiated by many young Muslim women that have influenced the ways in which they understand and participate in PA, such findings may

have misled some researchers through the assumption that religious contexts are the only major and serious reason for Muslim women choosing sedentary behaviour. In contrast, other researchers have found that many Muslim women view PA as something positive and in keeping with Islamic norms (Benn, 2002; Benn et al., 2010).

The literature on Islam's positive view of PA is one category of research about Muslim women's attitudes toward PA that has been studied previously (Agergaard, 2016; Benn et al., 2010; Dagkas et al., 2011; Marwat et al., 2014; Walseth, 2015; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). These scholarly sources demonstrate how the Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to participate in PA. This was exemplified by the Hadith 19742 (mentioned in the last chapter) where Islam explicitly encourages Muslim families to teach their children different sports in an attempt to make them strong and physically active. As the Hadith says, "Teach your children to swim, throw arrows and ride horses" (Ali, 2013, Hadith no 19742). Thus, Islam can be argued to promote good health and fitness and both men and women are encouraged to engage in PA to maintain healthy lifestyles (Benn et al., 2010). However, it has been suggested that religious requirements cannot be the only cause for the reluctance of Muslim girls and women to engage in PA since even though Islam encourages all Muslims to practice PA, there are low participation rates among Muslim women in Muslim countries (Benn et al., 2010; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Kay, 2006; Walseth, 2015).

Instead of solely focusing on religious barriers, several authors have recently highlighted the sociocultural and intersectional restrictions that have limited Muslim women's participation in PA. These restrictions include the influence of family, sociocultural expectations of Muslim women, patriarchy, and ethnic identity (Benn et al., 2011; Testa & Amara, 2015; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). For instance, a majority of Muslim women in Jiwani and Rail's (2010) research

felt that neither the Islamic religion nor wearing the Hijab, were barriers to participating in PA. In fact, some felt that participating in PA made them better Muslims. Similarly, the British respondents in Dagkas and Benn's 2006 study mentioned cultural barriers such as familial expectations, rather than religious, barriers to their participation, particularly in relation to their gender. Benn et al. (2010) mention that Islamic feminism, through its reinterpretation of Islamic texts from women's perspective, has helped Muslim women "to distinguish religious from cultural barriers through understanding that nothing in Islam precludes participation in PA" (p. 4).

While the idea that unwillingness to engage in PA is more related to cultural restrictions than religious restrictions is not new (Benn & Pfister, 2013), only recently has research begun to explore issues of discrimination, marginalization and Islamophobia related to PA participation experienced by Muslim women (Benn et al., 2010; Kay, 2006). Despite increased global advocacy for the importance of PE and PA in recent years, the literature on Muslim women and PA indicates that they are still lagging behind boys and men regarding PA opportunities. (Agergaard, 2016; Dagkas et al., 2011; Knez et al., 2012; Nakamura, 2002). These researchers believe that this problem stems from Islamic culture, which is dictated by Muslim families and contains strict codes controlling the behaviour of Muslim women, thereby restricting access to PA.

2.2.3 Examination of Patriarchal Hegemony through a Historical and Sociological Lens

In order to address the negative consequences of Muslim parental customs, cultural norms, and women's participation in PA, it is crucial to understand the essence of gender equity within Islamic cultural contexts. The issue of gender equity and Islam has drawn the attention of numerous scholars within the Muslim world for decades (Engineer, 2001; Darakchi, 2018;

Mernissi, 1991). If one examines the Qur'an, the primary source of Islamic thinking and practices, one will find multiple verses that mention gender and discuss the equal positions of women and men, such as “whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do” (Surah³ An-Nahl, verse 97). Surah Ali 'Imran, Verse 195, also states "So their Lord accepted their prayer: That I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another”, while Surah An-Nisa, Verse 32, states "And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned." There are more examples in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 187; Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 47; and Surah Ar-Rum, verse 21. Although gender equity is mentioned in these verses, some researchers have indicated that the position of women in the Qur'an has still been interpreted in diverse ways (Engineer, 2001). There is, for example, a great difference in the nature of the interpretations carried out by Muslim feminists and interpreters compared to Muslim men about gender issues in Islam (Benn, 2002; Darakchi, 2018; Mernissi, 1991).

In global discourses regarding gender equity in Islam, women have been understood as being subordinate to men, and as such, have more limited space in social, economic, and political life (Prihatini, 2019). Sfeir (1985) states that the Islamic rules concerning women’s bodies, purity and decency were interpreted by men in order to control women and maintain men’s position of power. They asserted that if Islamic rules are strictly followed, there is no male superiority, but a perfect balance between men's and women's rights and responsibilities. Aziz et al. (2020) state that “Qur'anic verses and Hadiths have been cherry-picked as part of a process through which

³ Surah is a term used in Islam to refer to the chapters or sections of the Qur'an.

gender inequalities are reproduced by actors and agents with a vested interest in women's subordination” (p. 243).

In fact, verses that emphasize equity, as well as Hadiths that honour women, appear to have been ignored by some Muslim men throughout history. For instance, today’s dominant interpretation of Islam in Egyptian Muslim society says that men should have a dominating position over women (Welsh & Fasting, 2003). Furthermore, a study by Aziz et al. (2020) that examined gender discourse and its practices highlighted the vulnerable position of women in Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country globally. These discourses include patriarchal interpretations of religious texts that reinforce male dominance, cultural norms that prioritize traditional gender roles, and legal barriers that restrict women's rights. Women are frequently perceived as unequal to men as a result of local patriarchal cultures and religious understandings. Specifically, “women are portrayed as their husbands’ companions, or as complementary to a male-centred system” (Aziz et al., 2020, p. 235).

The term *patriarchy*, derived from the Greek phrase “rule of the father”, is a social system in which men have advantages over women in property, moral authority, and status (Benstead, 2021). Classic patriarchy, as described by Kandiyoti (1988), is characterized by subservience and manipulation and is common in agrarian societies with patrilocally extended households, especially in the Middle East, North Africa, and South and East Asia. Benstead (2021) explained:

Patriarchy is a system in which women and girls must obey the male head, as well as brothers, uncles, and male cousins, fulfill roles as wives and mothers, and preserve the interests and honour of the family. Under a system of patriarchy, men control women and younger members of the family, including younger males. (p. 235)

Additionally, studies on the labour market participation of Muslim women in various regions and countries in the world have found that the participation rate among these women is notoriously low, especially when compared to other religious groups (Spierings, 2016). Many of these studies have attributed the low participation rate to religious and cultural reasons. More specifically, Islam, including the different interpretations of it within particular local contexts, has been argued to place women within the private sphere in the roles of wives and mothers whose activity should be restricted to domestic roles (e.g., Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Spierings, 2016).

In a study of the employment of Muslim women in Muslim countries, Spierings (2016) found that in many cases, “Islamic law was associated with lower employment rates” (p. 190). In another study on American-Arab women, Qahoush et al. (2010) argue, that

The labour force participation (or lack of it) among Arab-American women can be attributed to traditional cultural norms that prioritize women’s family obligations over their economic activity, and to ethnic and religious social networks that encourage the maintenance of traditional gender roles. (p. 52)

The Frankfurt School theory (Horkheimer et al., 2007) highlights one of the most potent ways to dominate the masses: force people to accept a dominant culture as the social norm and consider any deviation in behaviour as a path to losing their cultural capital. Horkheimer et al. (2007) believe that all mass culture has the same monopoly and that this unity in the culture indicates unity in politics. According to Horkheimer et al. (2007), authorities attempt to eliminate all forms of disorder and difference by promoting a homogenized way of thinking among the

masses. They argue that when societal differences and opinions are eradicated, people become increasingly uniform in their appearance and thoughts.

In Islamic societies, the effort to maintain a sense of "sameness" is evident in various aspects of life, particularly in the mandatory clothing worn by women and the overarching supervision exerted by men. As Mir-Hosseini (2006), a prominent Muslim feminist, questions: "Why do Islamic jurisprudential texts treat women as second-class citizens and place them under men's domination?" (p. 633). She argues that these texts, deeply rooted in patriarchy, limit the ability to achieve justice and equity. Key examples of such restrictions include the seclusion of women, strict gender segregation, dress codes, and the enforced obedience and economic dependency of women on men (De Knop, 1996).

This form of control is visible in extreme examples, such as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, where women are often seen wearing veils and long burkas, a reflection of the concept of compulsive sameness. Such clothing not only restricts women's physical movements but also creates the perception that they are indistinguishable from one another in society, as their choices in attire are limited to a single, compulsory option. In this way, controlling half of the population (women) becomes easier when their behaviour and appearance are confined to one rigid standard.

This societal control also extends to PA, where gendered expectations further restrict women's participation. Research has shown that women are less likely to engage in PA due to the belief that such activities may lead them to adopt masculine traits, such as physical strength (Sfeir, 1985). This notion reflects the internalization of patriarchal values, which can lead to an unequal perception of opportunities between Muslim girls and their non-Muslim peers (Abraham, 2019). In many Islamic countries, religious interpretations emphasize modesty and

discourage girls from participating in public sports due to concerns over attire, mixed-gender environments, and the fear that PA may be seen as inappropriate or compromising their sanctity (Benn et al., 2010). As a result, Muslim women are often bound by social restrictions and taboos that limit their public presence, making participation in PA seem contrary to traditional values.

Adult physical inactivity rates are high in Muslim-majority countries, especially for Arab Muslims and Muslim women, irrespective of ethnicity (Abichahine & Veenstra, 2017). PA rates differ between genders, especially visible minority women, who report lower levels of PA compared to men (Abichahine & Veenstra, 2017). This persistent gender disparity in PA has fueled the growth of intersectional research focusing on the interplay between Islam, gender, and the PA experiences of racialized groups. Barriers to Muslim women participating in leisure PA, for example, have been shown to include gendered norms of behaviour, religious interpretations of women's participation in PA, lack of access to gender-segregated spaces, lack of social support, lack of education on PA, and competing social obligations (Jiwani & Rail, 2010; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). These factors were found to be related to the use of the veil, gender segregation, and the power relationship between women and men. Walseth and Fasting's (2003) study, which examined barriers to Egyptian women's participation in PA, revealed that varying interpretations of Islam can create distinct barriers. For instance, some interpretations may emphasize modesty and restrict women from engaging in PA in mixed-gender settings, while other interpretations may support women's participation but highlight the need for gender-segregated spaces and appropriate attire. This variation in religious interpretations underscores the complexity and diversity of barriers faced by Muslim women in different cultural contexts (Walseth & Fasting, 2003).

In 1987, Carrington et al., for the first time, suggested that Muslim girl students face more problems than boys. According to their study, these problems are due to religious and cultural traditions which assign particular roles to men and women and contain strict codes controlling behaviour and conduct, thereby restricting access to PE (as cited in Amara & Henry, 2010). Fischbacher et al.'s (2004) study of Asian Muslim youth mentions the low value placed on PA and PE. This was supported by De Knop et al.'s (1996) research into the implications of Islam on Muslim girls' PA participation in Western Europe.

2.2.4 Muslim Families' Impacts

While Islam was considered a facilitating factor for Muslim women engaging in PA, many research participants have also emphasized the contradiction of their Muslim familial values about PA (Alamri, 2015; Dagkas et al., 2011; Kay, 2006). According to Aljayyousi et al. (2019), "Family values are usually multidimensional and are shaped by sociocultural and ecological factors, so, to understand the influence of families on adolescents' health behaviour, addressing these values seems required" (p. 12). In Islamic societies, religion and culture have deep roots and a substantial role in parental customs. Elliott (1996) argues that the family plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining cultural identity by introducing and reinforcing cultural values, traditions, and norms, thereby forming the foundation of an individual's cultural identity. Along similar lines, Kay (2006) notes, "A key feature of studies related to Islamic societies is that the nature of 'family' in Islamic communities draws on a complex legacy of values in which culture and religion are closely intertwined" (p. 360).

Of particular note is the importance of Muslim families as a primary access point for Muslim girls to PA (Knez et al., 2012). Several researchers report that family culture and values are a major driver of Muslim girl students' participation in school sporting activities. For

instance, Dagkas et al. (2011) point to the strong influence exerted by parents on young Muslims regarding the practice of PE. They assert that parental attitudes were strong across the age phases in the lives of Muslim girls and women. In addition, Kay (2006) and Walseth and Fasting (2003), encountered strongly negative parental attitudes toward Muslim girls' participation in PE. They found teachers in their research were unsure of the boundaries between Islamic and cultural practices. In a later article, Benn and Pfister (2013) suggested the importance of communication with PE students' families both to increase mutual acceptance of cultural diversity and to find ways to improve their children's participation in PE classes.

In a literature review about barriers and facilitators influencing PA of Arabic adults, Benjamin and Donnelly (2013) report that a lack of social support provided by families can be a barrier to PA. It shows that family would likely have a strong influence on children's attitudes, decision-making, and behaviours. Kay's (2006) study delved into the factors influencing young Muslim women's participation in PA within the UK context. Their research specifically focused on how cultural and religious considerations shaped these women's engagement with PA. Kay found that familial approval was crucial for these young women, as their families needed assurance that their participation in PA would not violate religious or cultural norms. In instances where families were not convinced of the appropriateness of the PA settings, they often restricted their daughters' involvement. According to Kay (2006) "it was therefore evident that family influence was a key component in mediating potential constraints surrounding the young women's participation [in PA]" (p. 3).

Although most research has shown that family expectations often have a negative impact on Muslim girls' engagement in physical activity, some studies highlight the positive role that Muslim parents can play in encouraging their daughters to participate in sports. For instance,

Kay (2006) found that when physical activity is valued within the family, Muslim women are more likely to feel supported and motivated to engage in sports. Similarly, Walseth (2006) noted that in families where parents encourage and support their daughters' participation, Muslim women are more likely to overcome cultural and societal barriers, leading to higher involvement in physical activity. These findings suggest that the family's role is not always restrictive and can sometimes serve as an empowering factor in Muslim women's participation in physical activity.

In Islamic culture, a woman holds special dignity and honour which she is always required to take care of. Muslim women are permitted to engage in PA, but they must be conscious of securing their dignity and deterring admiration (Marwat, 2014). In addition, in Islamic society, a woman's behaviour is strongly determined by the preservation of her own honour, as well as that of her family (De Knop et al., 1996). For example, the honour of the family can be kept intact through the sexual purity of all children. As a result, girls have to keep their virginity until the wedding night and therefore have to limit their contact with the opposite sex as much as possible (De Knop et al., 1996). Married Muslim women are also expected to avoid contact with other men in order to uphold sexual morality. Therefore, when Muslim women leave the house, they cover their bodies and hair in long clothes (e.g., head shawl and veil). When they are outside, they are also expected to behave in a modest and shamefaced manner. Previous research has shown that Muslim women's attempts to maintain their modesty may result in them exercising at odd hours so that they will not be noticed by neighbours (Shuval et al., 2008). This same study found young Muslim women rarely reported using outdoor public spaces for leisure activities, preferring instead to use women-only indoor spaces. Other research has expressed the importance of women-only spaces because they are essential to maximizing participation for many Muslim girls and women in PA (Amara & Henry, 2010; Dagkas et al.,

2011). Women participants in Benjamin and Donnelly's (2013) study conducted in Qatar recommend that women should do more housework with less dependency on housemaids as a means of engaging in more PA at home since participating in PA outside was not culturally acceptable. Also, Agergaard (2016) notes that several Muslim parents in their study do not allow their girls to be out playing football after dark, nor to be alone together with men.

In Benn et al.'s (2010) research addressing how gendered norms and religious practices, (including the wearing of veils) impact Muslim women's involvement in PA, the participants who do not wear veils or hijab (considered as religious restrictions) identified patriarchy as a significant barrier to engaging in PA. Muslim women participants in the study asserted that the men in their families often decided whether they were allowed to participate in PA. This patriarchal control has been suggested to be part of a broader imposition of religious extremist principles on existing behavioural codes, which further reinforces gender inequity in various fields, including PA participation (Wadud, 2013).

2.2.5 Conflict of Islamic Culture and Familial Values After Immigration to Western Countries

Current sociological research which has explored young Muslim women and PA has typically focussed on PA or school-based PE with little consideration of how the familial factors intersect with young Muslim women's participation in PA. Important departures from this, however, are the works conducted by Kay (2006) and Walseth (2006). Kay (2006) identified the various ways that young Muslim women in Britain negotiate the juxtaposition of family identity with the Western experiences encountered on a daily basis, placing a particular focus on PA. Walseth (2006) highlighted how previous literature has focussed on the role of immigrant parents (not necessarily Muslim) as "agents that constrain" participation (p. 87). These studies

both reported that racialized girls and women are less involved in PA when compared with their European counterparts and with racialized men (Agergaard, 2016).

Scholars have shown how Muslim family life and values are still highly respected even after immigrating to other countries (Kay, 2006). While Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018) have argued that girls are less interested in PE and PA in general, Lleixà and Nieva (2018) demonstrate that Muslim immigrant girls are less likely to participate in leisure activities than other non-immigrant girls, potentially due to their objection to participating in mixed-class activities at school. One of the first studies of immigrant Muslim youth and PA in Europe was conducted in Belgium by De Knop et al. (1996). Their survey findings revealed that Muslim immigrant girls were interested in PA but were prohibited from taking part due to religious and cultural restrictions. De Knop found that “[Muslim] girls are very restricted in their behaviour, mainly because parents fear their daughters will be badly influenced through the Western way of life” (1996, p. 151) which can endanger their honour. In particular, girls’ interactions with boys in the public sphere were considered a threat to the sexual purity of the girls. This fear of losing familial honour was found to result in girls experiencing constant social control from other family members (De Knop et al., 1996).

Similarly, Dagkas and Benn’s (2006) research suggests that Greek and British immigrant Muslim women hold positive views toward PA, but family expectations seem to impact young women’s choice of PA. For example, they found that many young women were discouraged from participating in mixed-gender sports activities, as their families believed such involvement could compromise their reputations and honour.

Muslim parents in Lane et al.’s (2021) study requested the ability to exempt their children from certain sport classes such as dancing and swimming. They suggest that the physical contact

between men and women involved in dancing could be one explanation for these exemptions, mainly because such mixed-gender contact is only allowed between Muslim girls and close family members. Still, they described that prescriptions/restrictions for young Muslim girls seem to be the result of parents' concerns, rather than religious values. More particularly, there seems to be a gendered concern among parents about monitoring the activities and whereabouts of their girls (Agergaard, 2016).

In addition, Walseth (2006) has shown that girls' involvement in PA for immigrant Muslim parents means that they will potentially mingle with youth from a majority background. Some parents in Walseth's study were afraid of the consequences of these friendships, including the possibility that their daughters could start drinking or smoking. This study suggests that "Young women should ideally be family-oriented and spend a lot of time at home helping their mothers cook, looking after younger siblings or studying" (p. 91).

Concerns about PA for Muslim women may extend beyond the need for modesty. By interviewing 21 Muslim women with immigrant backgrounds living in Norway, Walseth (2006) concluded that many were not interested in PA because they believed engaging in PA is not seen as respectable for women and others might disapprove. Perhaps because of this, PA and other recreational forms of PA have not been a part of the cultural history for many of Muslim women (Benn et al., 2010). It has been argued that, at least for some Muslim women, their feelings about themselves and their identities as Muslims may be reflected in their participation, or non-participation, in PA (Kay, 2006). Participation in PA can be seen as a way for some Muslim women to challenge traditional roles and assert their identities in new cultural contexts. Conversely, non-participation could be a means to preserving their cultural and religious identities, through the avoidance of activities perceived as incompatible with their values

(Walseth, 2006). Indeed, immigrant Muslim women often navigate between their cultural heritage and the new cultural environment. PA participation can reflect their negotiation of identity through the balancing of their desire to integrate into a new culture while maintaining their religious and cultural principles (Benn et al., 2010).

Examples of PA and PE barriers were described by Kay (2006) who found that women are seen as having more responsibility than men for their families. As a result, they may prioritize domestic duties and prefer to stay at home, thereby upholding traditional gender norms and avoiding social interactions that may be perceived as compromising their moral values or reputation. Likewise, limitations related to the use of the veil and gender-segregated space have sometimes resulted in women being kept indoors or being forced to wear traditional veils while engaging in PA (Kay, 2006). In an Australian study (Benjamin & Donnelly, 2013), Arabic women reported that they had less time for PA because they are responsible for all the household tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning), even if they are employed outside of the home (Caperchione et al., 2009). For women, family obligations (for example, caring for children and husband) took precedence over engagement in PA (Lane et al., 2021). Consequently, Arab immigrant women have reported having little time for leisure-related PA or to look after their own health, a finding that appears consistent among Arab populations in their country of origin (El Masri et al., 2021). Further, a recent study among Arab-American mothers reported that familial responsibilities are associated with lower levels of PA (Eldoumi & Gates, 2019). For Arab immigrants, acceptable PA is viewed to exist only in household tasks of daily living (Tailakh et al, 2016) as opposed to leisure-time PA, as highlighted above.

In a qualitative study on Muslim Turkish girls in the Netherlands, entitled “Eyes in Your Back,” De Vries (1995,) provides evidence for the existence of social control of Muslim girls by

their parents. This situation is very different for Muslim boys, who do not appear to experience this same control. In explaining levels of PA, Halpern (2003) also highlights gender-associated constraints, such as social pressures and lack of parental encouragement, that girls may face more compared to boys. Muslim parents have different expectations for their sons and daughters when it comes to PA. Girls usually receive less encouragement and fewer opportunities to engage in PA due to concerns about safety, modesty, or the appropriateness of certain activities for their gender (Halpern, 2003).

Moreover, research has demonstrated that the absence of visible female role models in PA can significantly impact young girls' perceptions of their potential to succeed in sports. Andersson (2002) explored how young girls from ethnic minority backgrounds in Norway, specifically those of Pakistani or Moroccan descent, often did not see women like themselves excelling in sports. As a result, these girls were less likely to view sports as a domain where they could succeed. Andersson's study revealed that, in the absence of female role models, these girls instead looked to male athletes as their sources of inspiration, striving to emulate what they perceived as typically male traits of activity and achievement. However, this emulation also led to tensions within their communities, as their participation in sports was often seen as breaking the norms of proper female behaviour. Despite these challenges, these young women aimed to redefine what it meant to be an active Pakistani or Moroccan woman in Norwegian society, aspiring to become positive role models for other minority girls.

2.2.6 Acculturation and Identity Transformation After Immigration

Anthropological and sociological studies of PA have long recognized the central role culture plays in influencing adolescents' perceptions and participation in PA (Bauman et al., 2012). Culture can be defined as:

A set of characteristics, behaviours, rituals, and beliefs that are used to describe a group of people who: (a) live within (or originated from) a specific country or geographical region; (b) share a religious affiliation; (c) claim common ancestry and heritage; or (d) are grouped together for other reasons (Aljayyousi et al., 2019, p. 3).

There is little doubt that, over the past 50 years, the world has experienced a rapid increase in the flow and movement of people across national borders. This has resulted in an increase in cultural diversity in certain countries, particularly in Western Europe and former colonial states such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Many of these immigrants could be termed culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), as they live in a country where the dominant culture and language are different from their country of origin (O’Driscoll et al., 2014).

CALD immigrants will encounter cultural and psychological change due to discrepancies and differences between their own cultures and the host country's cultures; a concept termed acculturation (Schwarz et al., 2005). The definition of acculturation widely cited by researchers is that of anthropologist Redfield et al. (1936) who stated that acculturation “comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). The term is now used primarily in discussions relating to individuals settling and living in regions other than the ones they were born in. This includes refugees, immigrants, and international students.

In migration studies, Prieur et al. (2023) note that the relationship between individuals and culture is often viewed in two ways: (1) individuals being influenced and restricted by their cultural background, or (2) individuals actively shaping and creating their culture. Research on

second-generation immigrants reflects both perspectives (Walseth, 2006). In the first view, scholars like Schwartz et al. (2010) argued that a new culture imposes constraints on young women from immigrant backgrounds, highlighting the continuity of previous cultural practices. In the second view, there is a growing recognition that individuals contribute to cultural evolution, emphasizing the dynamic nature of cultural change. This idea is gaining more traction today and the aspect of cultural change is emphasized.

In addition, in many countries, CALD immigrant increases have sparked political and public concern over how well immigrants are integrating into their destination country. Integration is a government objective in many Western countries (Castles et al. 2014), but it is a controversial concept due to varying interpretations about the importance of balancing cultural diversity with social cohesion, as well as the significant economic and social barriers immigrants may face (Castles et al. 2014). Integration can be viewed as a long-term, intergenerational process that encompasses economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions (Castles et al., 2014; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024). In practice, however, constructions of integration can be closely aligned to those of assimilation (Berry, 2005). For example, integration initiatives often prioritize aspects of cultural diversity that are perceived as compatible with the dominant culture (e.g., cuisine, language, and attire), while marginalizing expressions of religious and cultural identities that challenge existing power dynamics (Tailakh et al., 2016). This selective acceptance can suppress racialized people's cultural practices and reinforce inequities within society, hindering genuine inclusivity and social cohesion. Integration efforts can selectively embrace aspects of diversity while marginalizing others, perpetuating unbalanced power dynamics within the community (Tailakh et al., 2016). An example of this selective embrace can be seen in the treatment of religious attire, such as the hijab, in some

Western countries. While multicultural festivals might celebrate ethnic foods, music, and dance, the hijab can be stigmatized or even banned in public institutions like schools and government offices (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). This distinction highlights how certain cultural expressions are welcomed as long as they conform to the dominant culture's comfort zones. Others, who challenge prevailing norms are marginalized, which can result in unbalanced power dynamics within the community (Tailakh et al., 2016).

Castles et al. (2014) discuss that immigrant integration outcomes are heavily impacted by 'modes of incorporation', or factors that vary between specific CALD groups. These can include the context of reception, race/ethnicity, parental human capital, and the relationship between source and destination country. Indeed, CALD immigrants are not a homogenous group and the factors listed above can have implications for the facilitation, denial, and transformation of immigrant cultural capital, both in PA contexts and other life domains (Castles et al. 2014). Although more time spent in the host country appears to advance the process of acculturation and settlement for many people, it is important to recognize that the number of years one has lived in a host country does not necessarily translate into higher levels of integration for the immigrant population (Dossa, 2002). Thus, it is essential to create inclusive, intercultural policies to maximize the effectiveness of programs designed to promote health in the multicultural society such as Canada (Frisby, 2014).

Ramadan (2004) argues that while the first generation of Muslim immigrants living in a European country maintained their Pakistani, Turkish, or Moroccan identities, the second and third generations do not necessarily adopt their parents' culture automatically. The identity work of the second generation seems to be highly influenced by self-reflection and negotiation, as they navigate between the cultural values and norms of their parents and those of the host society

from childhood (Ramadan, 2004). This constant balancing act requires them to critically assess their identities and make conscious decisions about which cultural elements to adopt or reject (Berry, 2005).

The term, *identity work* is used to emphasize the fact that identities are under constant challenge (Walseth, 2006). According to Walseth (2006), identity work characterizes our everyday practices and reflections on belonging and non-belonging. Identities are often seen as a hybrid manifestation of how young people with immigrant backgrounds combine different cultural impulses in their identity work (Walseth, 2006). The concept of identity used here “is based on an understanding of identity that is not essentialist, but dynamic, contextualized, and constructed through difference” (Walseth, 2006, p.77). Immigrant people may try to break free of colonialist ideas within their homelands or confront them as immigrants who now reside in Western countries (Handa, 2003). According to Jiwani and Rail (2010), through the course of dislocation, migration, and integration into the West, Asian Muslims have been compelled to redefine their identity within the host society.

2.2.7 PA is Seen as a Means of Acculturation

Despite the numerous health benefits of regular PA participation, which is perceived in the West as a preventative measure of lifestyle diseases, CALD communities are less likely to engage in such behaviours (O’Driscoll et al., 2014). Given that PA levels are generally inadequate in the Muslim population (Colley et al., 2011), Muslim immigrants within CALD communities may also face even higher risks of inactivity and sedentary behaviour (Fischbacher et al., 2004). PA in immigrants has been suggested to be influenced by migration-related factors such as acculturation, stressors with settling in a new country, physical environments, and availability of resources (Fischbacher et al., 2004; O’Driscoll et al., 2014).

The intersections of integration, sport, and PA are brought into sharp view by Western policy agendas which position sport and PA as a means to enhance social cohesion (Jadalla et al., 2015), and to assist CALD immigrants in settling into life in a new country (Walseth, 2006). Sport and PA serve as sites for socialization into dominant norms, practices, and ideologies, promoting the values and behaviours of the host society and functioning as a means for immigrants to learn and adopt cultural practices (Tailakh et al., 2016). As Walseth (2006) argued, sport can act as a socializing agent, where participants are introduced to the rules, values, and expectations that govern societal interactions, thereby facilitating integration.

Although measures of acculturation varied, a review study conducted by O'Driscoll et al. (2014) suggests that greater acculturation is associated with increased participation in PA. In addition, studies among Arab Americans have reported that higher levels of acculturation are associated with higher levels of PA (Jadalla et al., 2015). PA is a particularly interesting aspect of this discussion because it has been argued that there is a distinct difference in how Islamic and non-Islamic cultures view the body (Nakamura, 2002). Nakamura (2002) notes that many Westerners consider the practice of covering one's body to be oppressive and believe that Muslim women are ashamed of their bodies. However, for many Muslim women, the hijab does not hide but rather protects their bodies and their moral safety (Zain, 1999). Many Muslim women feel that their physical beauty is a treasure and, thus, should not be exposed for all to see. If how the PA is defined and structured in Western societies and Islamic societies differs, Muslims who immigrate to Western countries could experience a cultural conflict with PA (Brah, 2005). Immigrant Muslim women in North America, particularly school-aged girls, face significant challenges due to differing perspectives on the female body and its role in self-

expression, as they are required to participate in a physical education system that is based on Western norms (Nakamura, 2002).

Several studies indicate that many young immigrant Muslims re-interpret and re-negotiate their religious and cultural practices (Agergaard, 2016). This perspective aids in understanding the diversity of cultural interpretations of religious values and practices that are negotiated not merely by the individual alone, but also in social relations. In a non-Islamic society, new experiences may emerge that challenge, alter, or contradict the girls' own perceptions of dominant views or the ingrained attitudes influencing Muslim girls' involvement in sports and PA (Agergaard, 2016).

Among the relatively few empirical studies of sport and multiple Muslim identities in the West, Walseth's (2006) research is notable. Data from Walseth's interviews illustrate how the PA needs of young Muslim women who express an overt attachment to the values of the Islamic community might be different from those groups which are more attached to the values of their host society. Thus, Walseth's approach takes into account the hybrid position adopted by many Muslim Norwegian women (particularly from second and third generations of immigrants) that integrates the values of their cultural community with that of the host society. This is commonly interpreted in the literature as a position between tradition and modernity (Parry, 2004).

Studies in Australia (El Masri et al., 2021) and the United States (Qahoush et al., 2010) show that being born outside the host country is a predictor of lower levels of PA among Arab immigrant populations. Many factors influence the PA levels of CALD populations. While many of these factors are shared with the general population (e.g., time and motivation), there are other factors that are more specific to CALD populations. Common intersecting factors that have been reported to influence PA levels among CALD populations include a lack of culturally tailored

health promotion initiatives, limited knowledge of preventative health benefits of PA, the migratory experience, language, culture and religion, and socioeconomic status (Caperchione et al., 2009).

Recent studies illustrate the complex orientation of women Muslims in Western societies (Agergaard, 2016). The relationship between religious identity, gender roles, and PA is complex, as a Canadian study found Muslim girls simultaneously navigating multiple aspects of their identity by adhering to religious traditions, wearing the hijab, and embracing fitness and appearance norms similar to their Canadian-born peers (Jiwani & Rail, 2010). A Norwegian study among Egyptian women showed several participants expressing a wish to participate in PA focused on taking care of their body; something several individuals rationalized as a requirement for being a good Muslim (Walseth & Fasting, 2003). It is important to note, however, that PA experiences can differ among CALD groups and can be influenced by a range of intersecting factors such as the reasons for migration, time spent in the host country, and cultural and religious practices. Exploring the factors that influence PA participation in specific CALD groups is essential to ensure that culturally tailored PA programs meet the needs and preferences of the target population (El Masri et al., 2021).

2.2.8 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the non-economic resources (such as education, intellect, style of speech, and cultural knowledge) that individuals possess, which can be leveraged to gain social advantage and navigate social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 2011). It includes the tastes, habits, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their upbringing and education, influencing their social mobility and status (Bourdieu, 2011). The concept of cultural capital holds considerable promise as an analytical tool to critically examine

the relationship between immigrant integration and participation in PA (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) first developed the concept of cultural capital, which has subsequently been applied and refined within various fields, most notably education (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu and Passeron's (1979) notion of embodied cultural capital, comprised of dispositions of mind and body, has proven particularly relevant to PA where it has been variably operationalized in terms of access to high-status cultural resources, educational attainment, cultural competence, and cultural norms and attitudes (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). The concept has been used to explain stratification patterns in PA, such as how individuals from higher social classes are more likely to engage in leisure sports and fitness activities due to their greater access to resources and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1978), as well as opportunities for social development through PA (Eitle & Eitle, 2002).

Different facets of cultural capital are not equally transferable across countries. For example, when immigrants arrive in a new country, they may face barriers to leveraging their existing cultural capital (Erel, 2010). To 'fit in,' immigrants are often expected to develop new forms of cultural capital such as language, customs, and norms that are valued in the destination country. Erel (2010) argues that migration results in new modes of cultural capital production, and that immigrants have the ability to validate their cultural capital through negotiation with the ethnic majority.

Smith et al. (2019) have suggested that developing new forms of cultural capital may help CALD immigrants to either assimilate or integrate into the destination country. While some studies draw on elements of cultural capital, only a few have explicitly discussed the link among cultural capital, CALD populations, and PA (McDonald & Rodriguez, 2014). This is remarkable given the influence the concept of cultural capital has had in migration studies (Erel, 2010). PA

has been suggested to provide a potential space to facilitate new forms of cultural capital, while also strengthening an immigrant-specific cultural capital identity and helping mitigate social exclusion (McDonald & Rodriguez, 2014).

When a CALD immigrant's PA participation takes place within mainstream PA settings, this can assist the settlement process by developing facets of cultural capital that are recognized by the dominant culture (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). In Doherty and Taylor's (2007) study, the PA participation of immigrant children in Canada was investigated within a mixed-ethnicity context:

The participants reported that their participation in PA helped them to develop facets of cultural capital that were valued in the dominant culture, such as enhanced English language proficiency, increased knowledge of the Canadian culture, and greater awareness of cultural sporting practices (e.g., changing room rituals, appropriate clothing). (Smith et al., 2019, p. 859)

Barker-Ruchti et al. (2013) add another dimension to this theme and explore how young women from immigrant backgrounds navigate their cultural expectations related to PA. They explained that these women learned to embody a form of cultural capital that is highly valued in Western society, namely the dominant ideology that PA is important for health and appearance. The participants associated this healthism discourse with academic, career, and overall integration success, and believed that only *foreigners* did not participate in PA and saw this as a sign of their otherness. The participants desired to be fully integrated into the destination country and often distanced themselves from their parents' cultural heritage (Smith et al., 2019). Taylor (2004) further supports this perspective by finding that "female participants were more likely to take part in netball because they believed it to be an expected part of Australian culture and

wanted to ‘adhere to the Australian norms’” (p. 463). This suggests that the choice to participate in certain activities can reflect a desire to acculturate or assimilate into the dominant culture. CALD students who participated in O’Driscoll et al.’s (2014) study also appeared to prioritize adaptation to the dominant culture over maintaining their own cultural heritage.

Stodolska (1998) investigated Polish and Korean immigrants in the USA and found social class to be one of the largest influences on sport participation. Within the study, middle-class participants were more likely to use sport as a means to acculturate to the white American middle class, in part because they believed that sport was associated with higher social status in the USA and part of living normal lives (Stodolska, 1998). In addition, participants believed that being involved in sports provided a platform for developing their knowledge about ways of life in the destination country, as well as for interacting with people from the dominant group.

Integration outcomes may be enhanced when an immigrant develops facets of cultural capital valued by both the immigrant and the destination country (Smith et al., 2019). One paper which systematically examined the cultural capital of CALD immigrants (in the context of participation in sport and PA) searched for papers published in peer-reviewed journals between 1990 and 2016 (Agergaard, 2016). It found that immigrants’ cultural capital can be both an asset to, and a source of exclusion from, sport participation. In other words, immigrants’ cultural capital can be an asset when their skills, knowledge, and cultural expressions are appreciated and integrated into the sports context, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect (Smith et al., 2019). Conversely, cultural capital can be a source of exclusion when cultural differences are not acknowledged or valued, leading to marginalization or discrimination. Sport and PA are sites where immigrant-specific cultural capital is (re)produced, where new forms of cultural capital that are valued in the destination society are generated, and where cultural capital is negotiated in

relation to the dominant culture. The authors of the above-mentioned study concluded that the analytical lens of cultural capital enables an in-depth understanding of the interplay between immigrant agency and structural constraints, and of integration as a two-way process of change and adaptation, in the context of sport and PA (Smith et al., 2019).

Walseth's (2006) study examines the participation of Muslim women in Norwegian PA and how this participation promotes the integration process. Walseth outlines two main patterns that link the identity formation of young Muslim women to their participation in PA. First, being a young Muslim woman and active in PA may challenge the boundaries of her ethnic identity. It turns out that young Muslim women who place themselves securely within the boundaries of their ethnic identity are not very interested in PA. Another group in Walseth's research consisted of girls who regarded Islam as a more important source of identity formation than ethnicity. Because of the perceived positive attitude towards PA within Islam, it was important for these girls to take part in PA and challenge the boundaries of their ethnic identity that discouraged participating in PA. Walseth explained that sport for CALD women may result in forms of cultural capital that are transformative; that is, they do not directly resonate with modes of cultural capital as either 'here' or 'there'. This means PA produces cultural capital that neither aligns with their non-sporting habitus nor with the expectations of the field (i.e., that Muslim women do not play sport). The researcher concluded that sport may, in this case, generate new forms of cultural capital valued by a diasporic field (Walseth, 2006).

Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) conclude that although the concept of cultural capital is not frequently applied to the study of sport and immigrant integration, many studies address key aspects of cultural capital, even if they don't explicitly use the term.

Smith et al. (2019) noted that the cultural assets immigrants bring with them often do not match the cultural values and norms dominant in Western sport and PA contexts, resulting in participation barriers and negative outcomes. However, there is evidence that CALD immigrants also develop aspects of cultural capital in sports and PA that are recognized and appreciated within the dominant culture.

Gemar's (2020) research aimed to assess the role of sports participation within the cultural lifestyles of Canadians. Gemar concluded specifically about sports in Canada, finding that attendance at sporting events showed pronounced class-based dynamics. Individuals with higher economic and cultural capital were more likely to attend these events. Of the 34 sports studied, 21 showed a statistically significant association with education, income or both and 16 sports showed an association with educational attainment. Additionally, 18 sports showed an association with household income, 10 showed a stronger association with education over income, while the other 11 sports showed a stronger association with income over education. These measures showed that the influence of cultural and economic capital is more similar for sports.

2.2.9 Iranian Immigrants in Canada

Iranian women in traditional, religious cities in Iran reported several obstacles to being physically active (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007). These factors included prioritizing family needs, experiencing low energy levels, the absence of a workout companion, and facing challenges with accessing sports facilities (Dashti et al., 2014). In a study of 570 women between the ages of 25 to 40 years, women reported the government's lack of concern and lack of support for leisure opportunities for women as the principal limitations of leisure engagement for Iranian women living in Iran (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007). The authors mentioned that the lack of

attention the government paid to the matter is likely associated with existing gender-segregation policies and the government's tendency to domesticize women's role in society. Perceptions that leisure time is mostly for men, coupled with concerns for women's security related to overcrowding, environmental pollution, and harassment were raised as additional challenges that Iranian women may face in participating in leisure activities, especially outdoors (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007).

Some commonalities in cultural values also appear to affect the daily lives of Iranians regardless of whether they live in Iran or Canada. Family relations rooted in Iranian collectivistic cultural norms, as well as patriarchal cultural beliefs and practices, have been argued to have moulded the totality of living arrangements for Iranian families (Lee et al., 2005). Correspondingly, child rearing, both emotionally and financially, continues until long after the children have families of their own as adults. In return, children are required to be obedient, respectful, and caring towards their parents and other older members of the family. In patriarchal Iranian culture, women are expected to take care of the home and children while men are expected to be the responsible breadwinner of the family (Dashti et al., 2014).

The ongoing socio-political movement in Iran has significantly influenced cultural trends, particularly concerning women's participation in PA (Iran Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2024). While cultural practices rooted in patriarchy have evolved over the last century, leading to a degree of egalitarianism in modern and educated family classes, these changes are not consistently supported by legal frameworks and societal norms (Dashti et al., 2014). In many traditional families, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, patriarchal practices continue to dominate, reinforcing the subordination of women and emphasizing their domestic roles (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007). The recent push for greater women's rights and

visibility in the public sphere has begun to challenge these norms (Iran Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2024). However, this movement's impact on PA participation among women is mixed. On one hand, there is a growing awareness and acceptance of women's involvement in sports and PA, driven by increased advocacy and the visibility of female athletes (Iran Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2024). On the other hand, traditional expectations and societal pressures may still hinder many women from fully engaging in PA, especially in more conservative regions. These dynamics highlight the intricate relationship between evolving cultural trends and entrenched societal practices, which continue to shape the opportunities and barriers faced by Iranian women in the realm of PA (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007).

It needs to be stated that Muslim girls and women are not a homogeneous group and that there are differences in how they choose to resolve religious and other cultural demands. For example, some choose to adopt the hijab (head scarf) and Islamic dress, while others do not. The preference of some Muslim women to adopt hijab when practising PA illustrates a public manifestation of belief. Others prefer not to cover, claiming to have internalized faith that does not need visible reinforcement (Benn et al., 2010). This private/public distinction is important in understanding different preferences among Muslim women.

Although Iranians come to Canada from an Islamic country, studies highlight a significant decline in religious adherence among Iranian citizens (Dossa, 2002). According to a 2024 study by Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, about 85% of Iranians have become less religious compared to five years ago. This shift is also evident in attitudes toward the hijab, with a growing number of Iranians expressing tolerance towards women who defy the compulsory hijab mandate (Iran Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2024). Therefore,

wearing hijab in non-Muslim countries is not considered a value by some Iranian Muslim women.

2.3 Gaps in Current Literature

While previous studies have explored the intersection of culture, religion, and physical activity, there remain several areas that are under-researched or overlooked. Identifying these gaps is crucial for advancing our understanding of the unique experiences and challenges faced by specific groups, such as Muslim women, in their participation in physical activity.

2.3.1 PA Levels Among Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Populations

Although PA in the general population is inadequate (Colley et al., 2011), and subpopulations such as immigrants are known to be at higher risk for inactivity and sedentary behaviours (Fischbacher et al., 2004). Studies indicate that some ethnic minority groups are less active and more sedentary than the majority population and that factors influencing these behaviours may differ (Colley et al., 2011). In Europe, reviews have been undertaken on obesity and PA among a limited number of ethnic minorities or immigrant groups. These include reviews of PA in North African immigrants and South Asian women in different Western countries (Fischbacher et al., 2004). Reviews in Canada are fewer and mainly focused on levels of PA, as opposed to information on barriers and facilitators that might hinder or support an individual's engagement in PA.

According to Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018), the largest amount of research on ethnic minorities and PA is devoted to racism, with a focus on the experiences of black football players who identify as men. Until 2001, there were no published studies focused on ethnic minority women and PA, and in the intervening 23 years there has only been a limited amount of research conducted on the topic.

2.3.2 Intersectional and Systemic Challenges and Barriers to PA for Racialized Women

Various approaches and theories have been used to capture and understand girls' culturally diverse experiences with PA; however, many of these approaches have neglected to take into account the intersectionality of immigrant girls' identities (Deol & Johnson, 2023). While it is understood that new immigrants face the burden and consequences of health declines, it must also be acknowledged that the health of new arrivals exists in complex, multidimensional states, and multiple systems of oppression may serve as influences (Deol & Johnson, 2023), such as being both a girl/woman and an immigrant.

While much has been written in mainstream media about hijab-wearing women and PA, there is less research into perspectives, lived experiences, and realities of Muslim immigrant women in PA, which strengthens the need for the current study. The limited amount of research which has focused on ethnic minority women and PA has primarily concentrated on their low level of participation in PA and the reasons for this issue (De Knop et al., 1996; Fischbacher et al., 2004). At first glance, young Muslim Canadian women interested in PA seem to confront a multifaceted, intersecting problem. For many of them and especially those who “wear the religious headgear, the constant (re)negotiations of a ‘safe’ space to practice PA coupled with the experiences associated with being a Muslim woman in Canada seem difficult to juggle” (Jiwani & Rail, 2010, p. 251). To date, however, little is known about such negotiations and experiences.

The focus on graduate students in this research is closely related to the cultural and legal frameworks prevalent in many Islamic societies, where women's immigration to other countries often hinges on reaching adulthood, typically defined as 20 years or older (Dossa, 2002). This restriction reflects societal norms that prioritize men's guardianship and control over girls and women's mobility (Benn et al., 2010). Consequently, Muslim girls under 20 years old may face

significant barriers to living alone in another country without their parents due to these patriarchal norms. Furthermore, in Muslim countries, as girls transition into adulthood, they often experience increased freedom and autonomy, which may contribute to the higher rate of immigration among women pursuing graduate degrees compared to those pursuing undergraduate degrees (Dossa, 2002). In addition, graduate students are a more educated group taking part in studies likely to require them to explore and challenge dominant ideas that have been held for a long time. This level of education and critical thinking fosters an environment where these women are more equipped and possibly more inclined to question and push against established societal norms and expectations, both in their home and host countries.

By focusing on graduate international Muslim women students, this research aims to fill important gaps in understanding their experiences, challenges, and needs, thereby contributing to more inclusive educational and health practices for graduate institutions. Given that most of the academic sources found have focused on high school students in various countries (Benn & Pfister, 2013; Dagkas et al., 2011; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Walseth, 2015), Muslim women in graduate levels of education are arguably underrepresented in research. By studying this group, this study aims to address this gap in the literature while potentially providing a deeper understanding of their unique experiences and challenges.

2.3.3 The Role of Acculturation in PA Participation among Immigrants

In previous studies and reviews, in particular Caperchione et al. (2009), the acculturation process was deemed an important component of immigrants' health. Whilst regular participation in PA is vital for many health outcomes, there is little known about how acculturation affects participation in PA and, thus, impacts the health and well-being of CALD immigrants. The sheer nature of diversity among cultures and individual experiences and measures of acculturation or

cultural impacts make research on this topic difficult. Indeed, the context of each individual case can vary considerably.

O’Driscoll et al. (2014) highlight that “even in similar contexts, there are still variations in processes of acculturation as specific differences in religion, geographic location, reasons for migration and family situation make almost every migration case unique” (p. 516).

Consequently, the literature on PA behaviour in CALD immigrant communities is equivocal. Given the specific health risks that CALD immigrants are confronted with and the varied circumstances of migration, the role of acculturation in PA participation must be better understood.

To gain a comprehensive understanding, it is also essential to consider the diversity within the ethnic minority groups in Europe and Canada. These groups vary significantly in terms of size, country of origin, and migration patterns, with substantial differences existing between countries (Eurostat, 2017). In recent years, the number of asylum seekers has increased in Canada, and the three largest groups have been from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq—all Muslim societies (Eurostat, 2017).

Refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants seem to be at risk for worse health outcomes including non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2017). As the immigrant composition is changing and growing, gathering knowledge on factors influencing PA and the sedentary behaviours of immigrants and identifying gaps in the literature is crucial for assessing the needs of these populations and planning interventions.

2.3.4 Immigration Trends and PA Patterns Among West Asian Women in Canada

Canada currently leads the world in per-capita immigration, welcoming approximately 300,000 newcomers each year. As of 2023, there were more than eight million immigrants with

permanent residence living in Canada, roughly 20 percent of the total Canadian population (Statista Research Department, 2024). According to the 2022 census, there were over 19,680 Iranians admitted to Canada in 2022, with most living in major metropolitan centres such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2022). The immigration landscape of Canada has been dynamically evolving, and the Iranian community has been a significant part of this change. According to Statistics Canada, the number of Iranian immigrants in Canada increased from 154,425 to 182,095 between 2016 and 2021. This growth reflects a percentage increase from 2.0% to 2.2%, indicating a steady rise in the Iranian population within Canadian society. Based on Statistics Canada projections, approximately 30% of the Canadian population will be foreign-born by 2031, with Arabs and West Asians (e.g., Iranians, Afghans, etc.) having the fastest growth between 2006 and 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2022).

There is a lack of information regarding the PA behaviours of the Canadian immigrant population in general and of West Asian women, such as Iranians (Persians), in particular. Given that this group is characterized by increasing population growth and lower rates of PA, it is critical to understand how best to address PA promotion in this population. Furthermore, Statistics Canada estimates that 16,900 Iranian students came to Canada in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2022). By learning more about the obstacles that Iranian Muslim students face in PA, institutions and communities in immigrant societies will have improved chances of enhancing Muslim women's PA experiences and increasing social health.

As the number of immigrants to Canada continues to increase, it has been demonstrated that sport and active leisure can assist in building positive experiences for new immigrants to Canada, particularly in enhancing a sense of belonging, promoting social inclusion, and promoting physically active lifestyles (Deol & Johnson, 2023). Among Canadian ethnic

subgroups, South Asian and West Asian immigrants, especially women, have been shown to have the lowest levels of PA (Dogra et al., 2010). Despite these differing patterns of PA between immigrant and non-immigrant populations in Canada, scholars have not commonly considered how ethnicity, immigration status, and years one has lived in Canada intersectionally impact immigrants' health behaviours (Eldoumi & Gates, 2019). In fact, within the existing health literature, many scholars do not distinguish between the ethnic heritage and immigration status of different ethnic groups (Khan et al., 2015). This can lead to uncertainty regarding whether health outcomes are attributed to immigration characteristics, related changes in life circumstances, and/or the acculturation process. To address insufficient levels of PA among immigrants in Canada, it is crucial to understand why PA practices are less common in this population segment and to determine whether these patterns reflect broader aspects of the immigration experience.

Researchers have hypothesized that prolonged time since immigration and more favourable acculturation/integration potentials (such as being younger upon arriving in the host country, and proficiency in the country's official language) may positively influence PA behaviours (Tailakh et al., 2016; O'Driscoll et al., 2014). This would seem to suggest that in addition to known psychosocial, demographic, interpersonal, organizational and political factors influencing individuals' PA behaviours (Bauman et al., 2012), factors specifically related to the immigration experience should also be considered (Berry, 2005). For instance, many new immigrants may have disparate social norms regarding PA compared to the mainstream population due to their heritage and sociocultural influences (Tailakh et al., 2016).

Few studies in the Canadian context have examined the factors influencing PA behaviour among specific immigrant subgroups. Existing research often treats immigrants as a homogeneous group labeled "ethnic minorities," overlooking the diversity within this population

and the unique effects of acculturation on PA (O'Driscoll et al., 2014). To gain a comprehensive understanding of immigrant women's PA involvement, it is crucial to consider the full spectrum of influences on their lives, recognizing that their experiences are shaped by both pre-and post-immigration factors (Dossa, 2002).

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this research to explore the lived experiences of PA participation among Iranian International Muslim women graduate students in Canada. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative research paradigm, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how cultural and familial influences have shaped these women's perceptions and practices related to PA. By engaging directly with participants and emphasizing their voices, this methodology provided a framework for uncovering the nuanced and multifaceted experiences of Muslim women in a Western context.

3.1 Interpretive Qualitative Research Paradigm

The study was situated within the qualitative research paradigm, which emphasizes understanding the emotions and perceptions of individuals or groups through verbal and visual expressions rather than quantitative data (Bassil & Zabkiewicz, 2014). Because society is constituted of multiple perspectives, qualitative research allows for the emergence of multiple voices from research texts. Qualitative methodologies centre on observation, participation, texts, conversation, interpretation, narrative, and small-scale and local interactions that provide approaches for gathering knowledge from multiple individual experiences (Markula & Silk, 2011).

Employing an interpretive qualitative research paradigm, this research explored the lived experiences of PA participation among Iranian Muslim women students in Canada. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) believe that "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 10). Indeed, qualitative research allows for a deep understanding of social phenomena as viewed from the participants' perspective (Bloomberg, 2022). As this research aimed to explore

the influence of cultural impacts and familial systems on Muslim women's PA experiences, interpretive qualitative methodology appears suitable. Specifically, it provides a means to address questions concerning how the meaning of social experiences is shaped by individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest that an interpretive qualitative research paradigm involves making sense of phenomena comprehensively through direct conversations with research participants through the sharing of stories. hooks (1994) has emphasized hearing women's experiences as a crucial task of deconstruction and the belief that sharing and talking about experiences can be an approach to inform how we know what we know about them. In this thesis, Muslim women's perceptions of PA participation in their religious and social contexts were explored through mutual conversations between the interviewer and the interviewees. This study was carried out in Canada, a country with different cultural norms compared to Islamic countries, where Muslim women have equal rights and freedoms constitutionally and are encouraged to participate in PA (Abichahine & Veenstra, 2017).

This study did not test a specific hypothesis, such as "Can Muslim women in a non-Islamic country overcome the fear of patriarchal hegemony and participate in PA freely?" Instead, participants have been encouraged to share their lived experiences through stories, providing an opportunity for future research and societal change. Therefore, the approach must centre on understanding the words, opinions, and experiences of the participants' lived experience (Markula & Silk, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2016) note that interpretive qualitative researchers present the opinions and feelings of participants, self-reflections of researchers, interpretations and explanations about research questions, the significance and contributions of the study, and the implications of the study in the final report. The research participants in this

study were asked about their PA experiences in various contexts, ranging from their attitudes toward PA in their home countries and Canada, including systems and norms that affected their PA experiences and perspectives, and their future visions related to their PA identities.

An interpretive qualitative research paradigm aims to understand situations through the eyes of participants, focusing on social facts in their cultural locations, as it believes that the world is socially constructed in terms of the meanings we attribute to events (Suri, 2017). This paradigm is based on the premise that the social world is complex and that people, including researchers and their research participants, define their own meanings (Suri, 2017). According to Burrell and Morgan (2017), a thorough analysis of human consciousness and subjectivity is essential to uncover the fundamental meanings that underlie social life in order to reveal the implicit social reality. An interpretive qualitative research project aims to understand individuals' behaviours, meanings, and experiences within specific social settings (Suri, 2017).

Interpretive qualitative researchers hold that all knowledge is fundamentally subjective. Thus, the research process is also subjective and interactive, and humans are acknowledged to create knowledge through a subjective meaning-making process (Markula & Silk, 2011). To understand the world, interpretivists believe that one should be aware of the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. Although knowledge making is considered to be a subjective process, the main research aim is still to map the reality of the participants' multiple experiences (Suri, 2017). Interpretive qualitative researchers are interested in how multiple individual experiences can collectively reveal reality (Markula & Silk, 2011). While participants make different meanings, they share the reality in which their lived experiences take place. By tapping into such 'real' authentic experiences, researchers aim to

reach the essence of phenomena in general; thus, credible research represents the ‘real’ experiences of the participants (Tracy, 2010).

Regarding positionality, interpretivists use the catchphrase researcher as the primary research tool (Markula & Silk, 2011). The main purpose of an interpretive qualitative research paradigm is to understand the meaning participants’ attach to life situations. These researchers use methods, such as interviews, analysis of symbols in observations, or textual analysis (Manning, 1997), allowing for interactive engagement between the researcher and the participants. The result is a multi-voiced reflection of meanings and experiences. In the interpretive qualitative research paradigm, the researcher and participants engage in an intersubjective and circumstantial dialogue, acknowledging that the participants affect the researcher and vice versa. Manning (1997) explains that the relationship between the participants and the researcher "is interactive in the way the researcher’s questions, observations, and comments shape the respondents’ actions, whereby the respondents’ answers and explorations influence the meaning ascribed and interpretation negotiated by the researcher" (p. 96). This study investigated the experiences of Iranian Muslim women students in PA. Therefore, the focus group questions shaped the participants’ responses, and the interpretation of the participants’ meanings was shaped by the answers to the research questions.

3.2 The Researcher

I lived in Iran, an Islamic country, for 30 years and worked as a PE teacher there for eight years. Throughout those years, I worked with Muslim girl students who were hesitant to participate in PA and observed how they considered themselves to be inactive individuals. From my viewpoint, these girls, influenced by their families' values, Iranian culture, and Islamic

religion, internalized the idea that they did not have the same right to enjoy an active lifestyle as Muslim boys.

Given my background, I may share similar experiences with the research participants regarding participation in PA, as we all grew up in a Muslim country and encountered the same cultural and religious context. This shared experience allows me to adopt an insider's perspective, which is crucial for understanding the meaning of these girls' experiences. Bloomberg (2022) explains that the interpretive qualitative researcher may adopt an insider's point of view and "seeks to discover and understand the meaning of experience" (p. 37).

Recognizing my positionality as a researcher is essential for enhancing the trustworthiness of the data. Acknowledging my background and potential biases allows for a more reflective and transparent research process, which Creswell and Creswell (2017) argue is vital for mitigating researcher bias and enhancing the credibility of interpretive qualitative research.

Interpretivists generally rely on the perspective of the 'native' in their interpretation. They believe that the closer the researcher is to the research subjects, the more credibility the research gains. Some researchers argue that studying one's own culture merits attention because the researcher shares cultural codes and understandings with the people being studied (Holian & Coghlan, 2013).

To further ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of my findings, I employed various practices to minimize my impact on the research process. Methodological triangulation, for example, involves using different methods (e.g., interviews, observations, and follow-up emails) to capture the same phenomena from multiple perspectives. Analytical triangulation, such as member checking and peer debriefing, also helped to verify and validate the data. Despite

acknowledging my influence as a researcher, these efforts aimed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study.

3.3 Participants and Recruitment

Regarding participant recruitment, the interpretive qualitative research paradigm typically focuses on gathering detailed and in-depth information from a smaller (when compared to many quantitative studies) number of participants (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Therefore, this study aimed to recruit ten graduate student participants from two major universities, referred to as University A and University B, located in the central region of Canada. See Table 1 for more details. This study strategically recruited 10 international Muslim students from these two universities, since they had moved to Canada alone and lived far from their families.

Additionally, the selected participants had memberships to the universities' exercise and recreation facilities, which provided them with access to PA on campus. However, it is crucial to note that having access does not necessarily mean the facilities were appropriate for all participants, particularly regarding cultural and religious considerations such as the availability of women-only spaces. Despite potential limitations in facility appropriateness, these participants at least had access to venues for active living. The chosen approach involved conducting a focus group to gather in-depth information about their experiences and perspectives. Despite having a smaller number of participants and limited observation sites, this approach was ideal to help ensure a thorough understanding of the data, as recommended by scholars such as Creswell and Poth (2016) and Patton (2015).

The focus group method holds significant value within the interpretive qualitative research paradigm (Morgan, 2002). It serves as a valuable tool for gathering comprehensive insights and understandings from participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). By bringing

together a small group of individuals, the focus group method enables the exploration of diverse perspectives, leading to the emergence of nuanced insights and collective understandings (Rabiee, 2004). These group dynamics facilitate interactive discussions and foster a social context in which participants can build upon each other's responses, generating rich qualitative data (Rabiee, 2004). The method's effectiveness lies in its ability to elicit in-depth information, allowing researchers to delve into participants' shared meanings, social constructions, and interpretations (Morgan, 2002). Thus, within the context of interpretive qualitative research, the focus group method is a useful tool for capturing the complexity of human experiences and perspectives (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

Purposeful sampling, specifically criterion and convenience sampling—two sub-categories adapted from Patton (2003)—were used to enhance the transferability of findings. Purposeful sampling refers to recruiting a specific population that can provide in-depth information about particular issues (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this research, ‘international Muslim women graduate students from two universities in Canada were recruited. To be efficient with time, the researcher used convenience sampling to recruit students from University A where the researcher is currently located. Within this group, the researcher also utilized criterion sampling to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants who met the specific criteria were recruited. These criteria included: (1) identifying as a woman, (2) being Muslim, (3) living in Canada for at least two years, (4) currently attending a graduate program at the university, and (5) being able to speak both English and Persian (Farsi).

The purpose of this study was to explore how living in Canada as a new society and non-Islamic country influences the PA experiences of international Muslim women students. It was

important to recruit participants who had enough time to merge into a new culture which is why the third criterion required participants to have lived in Canada for at least two years.

Additionally, research shows that bilingual speakers frequently report experiencing greater emotional resonance in their first language compared to their second (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009). Furthermore, language has been described as a mirror of culture and since emotional perceptions can be culturally linked, gathering participants' responses in their mother tongue could be considered a more credible data collection strategy, particularly when asking individuals to explain their feelings about some controversial issues (Mavrou & Dewaele, 2020). For these reasons, the focus groups were conducted in the participants' first spoken language, Farsi (Persian), to ensure they could express their thoughts and emotions as clearly and comfortably as possible.

Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board before recruiting participants. The participants were recruited in two different ways. First, eye-catching posters were displayed on both university campuses as advertisements. Appendix A contains this project poster. These posters contained four essential elements, including introductory information about the study aim and instructions, research data collection methods, the importance of maintaining anonymized and confidential participants' information, as well as researcher contact information. The posters were displayed on the screens of the Active Living Centre at University A and included in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management (FKRM)'s weekly newsletter, which is distributed to FKRM's students. This was facilitated by the Communications Office at FKRM. In addition, the poster was shared on the University A Iranian Students' Association social media platform where all members are students. In this platform, the researcher explained the research topic thoroughly in Farsi, including the purpose

of the study, its procedures, participants' roles, the confidentiality of participants' identities, the right to withdraw from the study, and how the researcher will store and utilize the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Afterward, participants were asked to contact the researcher directly. Appendix B

Within focus group, the grouping of participants is typically done with careful consideration to ensure a balanced and productive discussion. One common approach is to divide the participants into smaller groups. In this research study, participants were divided into two groups of five. This grouping strategy allowed for a manageable number of participants in each group, ensuring that everyone has a chance to actively participate and share their perspectives (Morgan, 2002). Dividing participants into smaller groups can also help to facilitate a more intimate and comfortable setting where participants can engage in meaningful interactions. Each group was provided with the opportunity to explore the research topic in-depth, allowing for a deeper exploration of individual experiences, thoughts, and opinions (Rabiee, 2004).

This study involved a total of 10 participants, divided into two focus groups of 5 participants each. Recruitment was stopped once data saturation was reached, which occurred after the second focus group. Data saturation is the point at which additional participants are unlikely to provide new insights beyond those already identified (Guest et al., 2006). Since no new information was emerging, further recruitment was deemed unnecessary, and the researcher ceased the data collection process.

3.4 Participant Backgrounds

The participants in this study showed diverse experiences with PA, despite sharing similar societal backgrounds. The small number of 10 participants, aged between 27 and 38, included individuals with varying levels of engagement in PA. For instance, one participant had a notable background as a professional athlete, having been part of the Iranian youth national

volleyball team, while another participant expressed minimal interest in PA due to a familial emphasis on academic pursuits. This diversity contributed to a range of perspectives and narratives on PA engagement, offering multifaceted insights. Among the participants, eight were enrolled at University A and two at University B, with half of them married and living with their spouses. Financial considerations, including the devaluation of the Iranian currency, compelled many Iranian people to pursue graduate studies in Canada to secure university funding or scholarships. Consequently, the participants' age range reflects this pursuit as many were older students who had completed undergraduate studies. Of the 10 participants, three were pursuing PhD, while seven were enrolled in master's programs. The aggregated demographic information is provided in Table 2. In the subsequent sections, their diverse perspectives are explored through detailed conversations and themes aligned with the research questions.

3.5 Data Collection

The literature suggests that the research venue should be private, comfortable, and convenient for participants (Patton, 2015). One of the focus groups for this study took place in an interview room, a comfortable space on the University A campus. The second focus group was conducted online via Zoom due to difficulty in scheduling an in-person meeting with that group.

Informed consent for the focus group and audio recording was obtained before the interviews commenced. The focus group began with background questions to break the ice and build relationships between the participants and the researcher, as well as among the participants. Patton (2015) suggests that this strategy can help the participants feel comfortable and assist in gathering demographic information. The researcher introduced herself as a Muslim woman and explained her background to establish a trustworthy relationship.

3.5.1 Focus Group Guide and Techniques

The focus groups in this study were conducted in face-to-face and virtual settings to explore the participants' perspectives, experiences, opinions, and ideas regarding PA participation and how cultural systems and familial background influence their experience. A pre-prepared focus group guide (see Appendix C), consisting of appropriate questions under various topics was used (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). These questions helped ensure that certain topics were covered while maintaining flexibility. Open-ended questions were employed to encourage participants to think deeply about their experiences and opinions related to participating in PA. Open-ended questions are particularly effective in qualitative research because they allow participants to express themselves in their own words, providing richer and more nuanced data that can capture the complexity of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This technique also fosters a more participant-driven discussion, enabling the exploration of unexpected themes and insights that may not emerge from closed-ended questions. The focus groups were guided by both the participants and the researcher, with appropriate follow-up questions and probing based on the participants' responses to the open-ended questions. This approach was ideal, as it allowed for responses that were specific to the participants' cultures and family values, ensuring that their unique perspectives were fully captured.

The researcher played a crucial role in facilitating and conducting the focus group, ensuring its success and generating valuable insights. According to Morgan (2002), the researcher acts as a moderator, guiding the discussion, and managing group dynamics. In this study, the researcher tried to create a comfortable and open environment where participants could freely express their thoughts and experiences (Morgan, 2002). This role involved asking open-ended questions, actively listening to participants, and observing non-verbal cues to

facilitate deeper discussions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Additionally, the researcher adapted her approach to accommodate emerging themes by sometimes deviating from the question guide, if necessary (Rabiee, 2004).

During the focus groups, participants responded to the researcher's questions by sharing personal anecdotes, providing examples, expressing their opinions, or discussing their beliefs and attitudes (Morgan, 2002). They also responded to other participants' statements, offering agreement, disagreement, or additional insights (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Through this interactive process, participants could clarify their viewpoints, challenge assumptions, and engage in critical thinking as they responded to the researcher's questions and engaged with fellow participants. The researcher asked follow-up questions to delve deeper into specific points, seek clarification, or explore differing perspectives (Rabiee, 2004). This iterative process allowed participants to provide more comprehensive and nuanced responses, ensuring a rich data-collection experience.

3.5.2 Consent, Privacy, and Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained a signed consent form from all participants before commencing the focus groups, adhering to the University of Manitoba's ethics policy. In the consent form, the researcher explained the ethical considerations inherent in research involving human participants, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. This process aimed to protect participants by allowing them to make voluntary and informed decisions regarding their participation, promoting transparency, and fostering trust between the researchers and participants (Shaw, 2023). Appendix D contains the Consent Form. In addition, the researcher requested that participants sign and complete a personal information form, recognizing its importance in facilitating

participant identification, contact maintenance, and data analysis. This form can aid researchers in conducting thorough and responsible studies, ensuring respect for participants' privacy and upholding the integrity of the research process (Shaw, 2023). Appendix E contains the Personal Information Form.

The researcher explained the importance of participants' opinions and insights to the knowledge generation of this study and emphasized the protection of their privacy and anonymity (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In the context of a focus group, it is essential to address the challenges associated with ensuring privacy and anonymity for the participants. The researcher informed the participants about these concerns through the consent form and stressed the importance of confidentiality within the group setting (Morgan, 2002). It was crucial to emphasize to the participants that the discussions that would take place during the focus group should not be shared with individuals outside of the group, thus helping to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' contributions (Rabiee, 2004).

To mitigate the potential risk of breaching privacy, participants were explicitly asked to refrain from disclosing any specific details or personal information that could compromise their anonymity (Morgan, 2002). Moreover, the researcher informed participants about the availability of one-on-one follow-up interviews, which could provide them with an opportunity to share any additional stories or experiences in a more private setting (Rabiee, 2004). Although the opportunity was provided, no participants opted for the one-on-one follow-up interviews.

Establishing rapport with participants prior to each interview is crucial to ensure they felt comfortable sharing their PA experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To create a comfortable environment, the researcher began with simple questions such as their field of study, place of birth and number of siblings. More challenging questions followed once a comfortable

atmosphere was established, such as their attitudes toward Islamic laws and their fathers' opinions about participating in PA.

3.5.3 Translation and Transcription Processes

As advised by Patton (2015), each focus group was conducted for a maximum of 120 minutes, with the duration of the focus group depending on the participants' experiences and feelings. All focus groups were audio-recorded with the participants' approval and transcribed verbatim (Morgan, 2002). The researcher utilized MS Word to transcribe all the audio recordings, which allowed for close engagement with the data. This hands-on approach not only facilitated a deep familiarity with the content but also enabled the researcher to incorporate reflective journal data by adding notes directly onto the transcribed files. Engaging directly with the transcription process helped the researcher to identify emerging themes and patterns, which informed subsequent stages of data analysis.

The recordings served as the foundation for the written transcription that followed the focus groups. During the focus group sessions, participants responded to questions in their mother tongue (Persian), which is also the researcher's first language. Afterwards, the researcher transcribed the focus groups verbatim and then translated those transcriptions into English. In discussing language and translation challenges and interventions, Kirkpatrick and Teijlingen (2009) emphasized that both researchers and translators must possess a good understanding of the culture they are researching and be aware of culturally competent practices. As a Muslim woman, the researcher is well-versed in the Islamic culture of their participants and spoke the language used, an external translator was not needed. Mill and Ogilvie (2003) noted that challenges may arise to establishing and maintaining rigour if researchers rely on others for collecting, translating, and interpreting various data types. Such challenges are particularly

pronounced when conducting research in a cross-cultural setting. According to Temple and Young (2004), these unique challenges stem from various contextual and cultural factors. Given the complexities of working with different cultures, values, belief systems, and languages, achieving rigour can be significantly more difficult through the use of third parties for translating and interpreting a range of data types.

According to Birbili (2000), when data is collected in one language and subsequently presented in another, translators must make translation-related decisions, which can have a direct impact on research authenticity. Birbili (2000) argues that these decisions are directly related to the autobiography of translators, the linguistic competence of the translators, and their knowledge of the people under study. Translators can play an equally important role with researchers, particularly when they translate conceptual phrases. In fact, the credibility and authenticity of the research can increase if the researcher and translator are the same person, as is the case in my research. However, there are potential negative consequences to researchers playing the role of translator, as a word or phrase spoken or written in one language may have a completely different meaning to different people (Temple & Young, 2004). Birbili (2000) suggests that in cases where lexical equivalence is not possible, conceptual equivalence should be sought.

During participant interactions, preserving the conceptual equivalence of a participant's responses is crucial to mediating translation issues in a study (Temple & Young, 2004). In this study, the researcher's previous sociocultural experiences in an Islamic society were shared with the research participants and their judgment in choosing appropriate conceptual equivalences for translating interviews was shaped by this context.

To prevent interference from the researcher's sociocultural assumptions in the translation of the original interviewees' responses, a Ph.D. student studying Linguistics at University A, whose first language is Persian and who was also one of the participants in the study, was invited to review all transcriptions and translated interviews. After that, the researcher shared these transcribed data with each participant to establish the accuracy of the collected data (i.e., respondents' validation of the translated transcript) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.4 Additional Data Collection Methods

Another approach to collecting data in this research was to take field notes to record observations. Glesne (2016) and Patton (2015) believe during and after interviews, it is essential to take field notes to record observations and describe research contexts such as people, activities, and dialogues. According to Patton (2015), "everything that the observer believes to be worth noting should be recorded" (p. 387). Field notes enabled the researcher to uncover additional information regarding Muslim women's responses that may not have been addressed during the focus group (Glesne, 2016). Hence, the researcher deemed it essential to utilize this method because field notes taken during the focus group offered a comprehensive record of the sessions, capturing participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, these notes uncovered supplementary details beyond the participant dialogues, such as non-verbal cues and contextual factors influencing participants' responses (Patton, 2015).

In addition, a reflexive journal was written throughout the research process and included in the results. Johnson and Parry (2016) suggest that journaling (or bracketing) helps maintain an awareness of researcher assumptions, biases, and relationships with phenomena. Therefore, the researcher wrote self-reflective journals as supplementary data to chart her own "reflective and reflexive thoughts and emotional journey" (Glesne, 2016, p. 78) throughout the research process.

Once a week, the researcher wrote a journal to keep track of her own understanding of the research questions and reflections on participants' answers from focus groups.

3.6 Data Analysis

The main data collection process in this study involved a two-way dialogue between the researcher and focus group participants, which produced data rather than merely collecting them (Walseth, 2015). Once the focus groups were conducted and recorded, they were transcribed into written form to prepare them for subsequent analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This approach involves “segmenting, categorizing, summarizing, and reconstructing qualitative data to capture the important concepts within the dataset” (Ayres, 2008, p. 867). As Braun and Clarke (2012) note, thematic analysis allows researchers to recognize and understand shared meanings and experiences across the data set. By using this approach, relevant themes and patterns related to the research questions can be identified, analyzed, and interpreted (Glesne, 2016). Ayres (2008) suggests that identifying patterns, concepts, and themes within the firsthand experiences of the participants is an overarching goal of thematic analysis. The researcher can then design a system to encompass and integrate these patterns based on the descriptive nature of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Overall, by using thematic analysis, this study aimed to identify and interpret patterns, concepts, and themes within the participants' firsthand experiences.

Thematic analysis was used for the analysis of the focus group transcripts, while the field notes and reflexive journals complemented this analysis. Together, these three sources of data (i.e., thematic analysis, field notes and reflexive journals) provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives on PA in their Islamic culture, both in their home countries and in Canada. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide provides

a useful framework for conducting thematic analysis. The phases include: 1) familiarization, 2) coding, 3) generating themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) preparing a report.

3.6.1 Become Familiar with the Data

The first step in this analysis was reading and re-reading the transcripts to become intimately familiar with the data. This is necessary to identify appropriate information relevant to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) believe it is important to manually transcribe data, noting inflections, breaks, pauses, tones, etc., to help gain a deep immersion into the data. Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest that tone is a key consideration in qualitative data analysis. By considering the language used by participants, the context in which the data were collected, and the emotions and attitudes expressed, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying beliefs and values that inform the data.

3.6.2 Generate Initial Codes

In this phase, the data were organized meaningfully and systematically by generating initial codes. Coding reduces a large amount of data into small chunks of meaning (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Codes are the fundamental building blocks of what will later become theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The process of coding produced succinct, shorthand descriptive or interpretive qualitative research paradigm labels for pieces of information that might be relevant to the research question (Byrne, 2022). Codes should be brief but offer sufficient detail to inform about the underlying commonality among constituent data items in relation to the subject of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For this study, each segment of data relevant to the research question was coded using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. The codes

were based on the topics and objectives of the study and connected responses to previous literature (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

3.6.3 Generating Themes

After all relevant data items had been coded, the focus shifted from interpreting individual data items to interpreting aggregated meaning across the dataset (Byrne, 2022). A theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme; it is characterized by its significance. The coded data were reviewed and analyzed to see how different codes could be combined according to shared meanings to form themes or sub-themes. This often involved collapsing multiple codes that shared a similar underlying concept or feature of the data into one code. Alternatively, one code may be representative of an overarching narrative within the data and be promoted to a sub-theme or even a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Finally, the codes were organized into broader themes that spoke to something specific about the research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3.6.4 Review Themes

This phase required the researcher to conduct a recursive review of potential themes related to the coded data items and the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). To facilitate this review, Braun & Clarke (2012) propose a series of key questions: Is this a theme? If so, what is the quality of this theme? What are the boundaries of this theme? Is there enough meaningful data to support this theme? For this review, the researcher used the cut-and-paste function throughout all information (Bree & Gallagher, 2016), sources, and data in the NVivo software. The researcher was aware that codes and themes may be revised or removed at any stage to

ensure the most meaningful interpretation of the data. Also, it seemed necessary to recode some data items, collapse some codes, remove some codes, or promote some codes as sub-themes or themes (Byrne, 2022).

3.6.5 Define Themes

Step five was the final refinement of the themes. The aim was to “identify the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). According to Patton's (2003) dual criteria, each theme should provide a coherent and internally consistent account of the data that the other themes cannot tell. All themes were integrated to create a coherent narrative that aligned with the dataset and was informed by the research question(s). Themes' names were subject to a final revision at this point.

3.6.6 Writing Up

The endpoint of research is often a report, and it is important to establish the order in which themes are reported. The researcher tried to connect themes logically and meaningfully, creating a coherent narrative of the data. Themes were built upon one another while remaining internally consistent and able to stand alone if separated from other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Since codes and themes changed and evolved during the analysis, documented changes to informal notes, memos, and the research journal seemed essential and were kept by the researcher throughout the study (Byrne, 2022).

3.7 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is inherently subjective in its epistemological assumptions, making it challenging to validate its data (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014). However, qualitative researchers have suggested various ways to ensure reasonable validation and judge the quality of their research. In this study, the researcher considered the six quality criteria proposed by Zitomer and

Goodwin (2014): reflexivity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and coherence.

The researcher ensured the research was reflexive, involving the researcher's self-awareness, honesty, authenticity in relation to research procedures, and genuineness with themselves, the research process, and the readers (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014; Tracy, 2010). It was a process through which the researcher came to understand her integral part in the phenomena being investigated (Horsburgh, 2003). Reflexive researchers acknowledge the influence of their professional and personal backgrounds on the study topic, design, analysis, and relationship with participants (Horsburgh, 2003). As Zitomer and Goodwin (2014) highlight, "reflexivity can also be seen as a strategy in which the researcher keeps a reflective journal of their experiences, assumptions, reactions, or emerging awareness occurring throughout the entire research process" (p. 201). Therefore, in this study, the researcher reflected on focus group experiences through reflexive journaling, allowing her to record decisions, enhance reflexivity about researcher positionality, and reflect on other details discussed in the interactions (Ebert & Goodwin, 2020). By using reflexivity, the credibility and trustworthiness of research findings were better ensured.

While the researcher's background as a Muslim woman who shares many of the participants' experiences could introduce bias, it can also be seen as a strength. This shared cultural context allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' narratives, enhancing the richness and depth of the data. Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process and using triangulation helped to ensure that the researcher's interpretations were balanced and grounded in the participants' lived experiences, while also minimizing potential bias. Reflexivity enabled the

researcher to critically examine her own assumptions, turning potential subjectivity into a valuable tool for interpreting nuanced cultural contexts.

To increase the trustworthiness of the research findings, resonance should be improved. Resonance measures how the study impacts readers to expand their appreciation and understanding of the phenomena investigated, and how it can be applied to their context (Elliott et al., 1999; Tracy, 2010). Resonance involves the researcher actively listening to and engaging with participants and allowing their stories and perspectives to shape the research process and findings. Finlay (2006) suggests that vivid and vicarious research findings can influence audiences by engaging audiences in a reflective process of empathizing with research participants. In order to achieve resonance, Tracy (2010) recommends using aesthetic and evocative descriptions that artistically present research reports. Additionally, detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences and verbatim quotes from the interviews can enhance readers' resonance with research findings, as long as their privacy and anonymity are maintained (Elliott et al., 1999).

Credibility refers to the extent to which other researchers can trust and believe the findings of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Finlay (2006) explains that credibility is determined by the consistency and persuasiveness of the results in relation to the data. It also relates to whether readers can understand what the researcher observed, even if they disagree with the conclusions (Finlay, 2006). To enhance credibility, various methods such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member checking can be used. In this study, the researcher used the triangulation and member-checking methods.

Triangulation is a technique used to reduce researcher bias or influence on the results by using multiple methods, theories, researchers, or data sources (Patton, 2003; Tracy, 2010). A

multiple-methods approach allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive and well-integrated understanding of the situation (Patton, 2003). When two or more sources lead to the same conclusion, the assumption is that the conclusion is more credible (Tracy, 2010). This study used multiple data sources, such as focus groups, field notes, and self-reflexive journals, to cross-check and compare the consistency of the data collected from different methods (Patton, 2015). Member checking was another way to improve credibility in this study. It involved providing participants with collected data and research findings to validate the accuracy of the data, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In this study, member checking was implemented by providing participants with their individual responses to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and the translation of their statements.

Contribution significance refers to a criterion used to evaluate research findings. For instance, it questions the extent to which the research adds to our knowledge of an issue or aspect of human social life, enriches our understanding of the human condition, empowers and enhances growth, challenges taken-for-granted assumptions, offers guidance for future action or societal change, and provides an intriguing basis for future research (Finlay, 2006). Tracy (2010) suggests that “research contribution can be enhanced by bringing clarity to confusion, making visible what is hidden or inappropriately ignored, and generating a sense of insight and deepened understanding” (p. 209). Self-reflexive journals allowed the researcher to continually critique research questions and pathways and challenge the taken-for-granted notions as a Muslim woman researcher.

Ethics relate to the way values and moral principles are integrated into actions taken throughout the research process and the publication of research findings to protect participants from harm (Stige et al., 2009). In Canada, ethical research conduct ensures that dignity and

respect are accorded to all research participants (Markula & Silk, 2011). According to Markula and Silk (2011), human dignity is achieved by adhering to the following principles: respect for dignity, free and informed consent, vulnerable persons, privacy and confidentiality, and justice and inclusiveness. At the outset of the study, the researcher clearly explained the research process, possible harms, and expected outcomes to participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection began. As they were volunteers, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage. Keeping the identities of participants private was a top priority, as some topics were sensitive for them, such as the role of their father's beliefs in the family or the role of men in women's decisions in their societies. To further protect privacy, each participant was given a random pseudonym.

During the focus groups, the researcher mirrored the language used by the participants to show respect and enhance the relationship between the facilitator and participants (Tracy, 2010). Once the focus group was transcribed and translated, the participants were allowed to review it for accuracy and to ensure their anonymity. Participants also were allowed to withdraw any or all their responses at any time up to publication without providing reasons. Reviewing the transcript was important since all transcripts were translated. To protect participants' privacy, the final thesis document did not include any identifiable information. Furthermore, the research design was reviewed by the master's thesis committee members and the University of Manitoba's Human Research Ethics reviewers to ensure the research process follows ethical guidelines.

Chapter IV: Findings

In this chapter, the findings and analysis derived from an interpretive qualitative exploration of PA participation among 10 Iranian international Muslim women graduate students studying in Canada are presented. This study delves into their experiences and perspectives, focusing on how the distance from their Islamic society and familial supervision impacted their views on PA within the Canadian context and contrasting this with their experiences prior to migrating to Canada. The use of focus group has facilitated a nuanced understanding of these women's narratives and allowed for the identification and analysis of thematic patterns that shaped their experiences and perspectives on PA participation.

This chapter presents an examination of the data collected, offering insights into the complex interplay of cultural, social, and personal factors that influenced the participants' engagement with PA in their home country and new environment.

Building on the structured approach to data collection, the researcher organized the gathered data into three distinct themes. The first theme, *Restricted Opportunities* (i.e., past experiences), focused on exploring how participants engaged in PA before immigrating to Canada and how family and cultural values influenced their participation during that time. This theme aimed to uncover the historical context and foundational experiences that shaped participant attitudes toward PA. The second theme, *Exploring New Realities* (i.e., present experiences), delved into the changes observed in participants' engagement with PA since their arrival in Canada, seeking to understand the impact of cultural transitions on their current behaviours and attitudes. Lastly, the theme *Envisioning a Healthier Future* (i.e., strategies for the future) explored participants' evolving approaches to PA in their new cultural and societal contexts, shedding light on the coping strategies and adjustments made to sustain their

engagement. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, these themes and corresponding sub-themes will be further unpacked.

4.1 Restricted Opportunities: The Societal and Familial Constraints that Shape PA Perceptions Among Iranian Muslim Women

In this section, participants answered questions that explored the influence of family and cultural values on their PA engagement in their home country, as well as the challenges and opportunities they encountered. Their responses highlight a range of PA experiences shaped significantly by their cultural backgrounds and familial expectations. Many participants described engaging in activities that were socially acceptable and culturally endorsed in their home countries. For instance, some engaged in gender-segregated sports or activities (that were deemed appropriate for women) such as walking or indoor exercises. Family support varied, with some participants noting encouragement from family members, while others faced restrictions due to conservative cultural norms that limited women's participation in PA.

Participants also addressed the question regarding the challenges or limitations they faced in engaging in PA due to their cultural background and family influences and opportunities within their community or environment that supported their participation in PA. The responses revealed several challenges, including social and familial expectations, cultural restrictions, and lack of access. Societal expectations and norms regarding femininity and modesty often conflicted with the active lifestyle they desired. Some participants faced cultural and familial restrictions that limited their ability to participate in mixed-gender activities or required them to wear specific attire that was not conducive to many forms of PA. Additionally, limited access to appropriate facilities or programs in their home countries also hindered their participation. In the

following sections, these challenges are examined in detail by reviewing the participants' responses on a case-by-case basis.

4.1.1 Varied Journeys: Muslim Iranian Women Navigating Sports and PA

In examining how family values were reflected in their participation in PA, participants shared diverse experiences that underscored the significant influence of familial dynamics.

Mahsa, a 30-year-old single graduate student living in Canada for two years, had a professional sports background and identified herself as an athlete, attributing this to her early engagement in sports and her upbringing within a sports-oriented family. She stated, "Well, since I was born into a sports-oriented family... I mean, the family had a great influence on me starting to play sports in my childhood." This upbringing was further reinforced by her father's passion for sports, enabling her to participate in various athletic environments from a young age.

Similarly, Samira, a 27-year-old single graduate student, has been living in Canada for two and a half years, recalled her family's active involvement in sports, particularly through her brothers' pursuits, stating, "my family is very similar to Mahsa's. I have three brothers, and they all were into one sport or, maybe two or three." She vividly described how her older brother's enthusiasm for wrestling influenced her childhood experiences:

I remember my older brother, he always spread out his wrestling mat when he came back from the club where he practiced, and he made the other two brothers wrestle with him. He was full of energy. I was playing the role of the referee.

Samira's exposure to sports at a young age, facilitated by her family, contributed significantly to her familiarity and comfort with various athletic activities.

Conversely, Hoda, a 32-year-old participant who spent two and a half years studying at University A and living in Canada, tried to work out daily, revealing a contrasting experience marked by limited familial encouragement for sports. She stated, "Well, in my childhood, during high school and middle school, doing exercise was only limited to school sports... and in the family, I can say we didn't have any sports role model at all." Similarly, Sofia, who is the oldest participant (38 years old) and married, had never exercised regularly, either in Canada or in her home country, mentioned, "I had no motivation, no one supported me in my family. There was no role model to inspire me with sports. I did not do sports myself, nor did I have a companion to sport. I always studied." This absence of sports role models within their families led to a lack of active encouragement or support for pursuing sports beyond school activities. Noora, who was studying at University B and was 30 years old, played volleyball professionally. She expressed a similar sentiment involving a sense of missed potential due to her family's oversight in recognizing her athletic abilities, " I could have expected that... as their child, my family could discover my talent. My parents should have noticed it and said, 'Let's motivate her more. Let's make sure she joins a sports class.'"

The participants' reflections on parental influence provide nuanced insights into the shaping of their athletic aspirations and pursuits. Mahsa recounted her determined choice to pursue a PE major at university despite familial objections, stating,

The year I took the entrance exam, my rank was such that I could choose any field. My field was mathematics. But... there, I stood in front of everyone and said I want to go towards what I'm interested in. Let me choose for myself.

Her decision was met with resistance from family members who questioned her desire to study PE, highlighting the contrasting perspectives within her family regarding academic and athletic pursuits.

Sofia stressed a lack of encouragement from her family to pursue activities beyond academics, stating, "And there was never any push from my family that, in addition to school, I should pursue something else as a profession, like sports, other languages, or anything else." This absence of external pressure or support for PA meant that she focused solely on her academic pursuits without being guided towards engaging in sports or other extracurricular activities.

Hoda reflected on the cultural constraints imposed by her family, recalling, "the culture of my family was such that I was always restricted to school, home, school, home." This restriction limited her opportunities for social interactions and extracurricular activities outside of academia. Hoda conveyed that during her high school years, she faced significant restrictions on her social activities due to her mother's concerns. She shared, "I must say that during high school, I really had limitations on hanging out with friends. My mother didn't allow me to go out with my friends or spend time outside without her knowing because we didn't have mobile phones back then." This reflects how parental restrictions influenced her mobility and independence.

The influence of fathers in fostering a love for sports was evident in several participants' narratives. Mahsa attributed her early exposure to sports to her father's influence and support, recalling, "The only one who agreed [to study PE at university] was just my dad, and that was because, since my childhood, he had this idea in his mind that if you really love sports, you should excel in it." Similarly, Noora described her close bond with her father, stating, " But I still

went towards... volleyball. I think it was just because of my dad that I became like him. Because my dad also played volleyball. He was a very sporty person." which motivated her to pursue volleyball and seek her father's approval through her athletic achievements.

Conversely, Sana, a 36-year-old married student, studying at University B and living in Canada for two years, stressed challenges stemming from her father's disapproval of her sports involvement. She recounted a pivotal incident where her father's objections led to the cancellation of a provincial competition: "I remember we were supposed to go to another city to enter the provincial competition [from school], but my father disagreed... after this incident happened a couple of times in a row, I abandoned the sport for good." This quote illustrates the potentially significant impact of parental support or opposition on sustaining engagement in sports during formative years.

Furthermore, mothers played an instrumental role in encouraging PA among some of the participants. Leyla, who was 36 years old single and has been living in Canada for two and a half years, found herself less active since immigrating. She credited her mother for introducing her to gymnastics, stating, "It was my mother who insisted that I attend gymnastics classes. She used to rock climb in her youth," highlighting her mother's passion for athletics and desire to pass it on to her daughter. Leyla also recounted a supportive environment, both in family and at school,

At school, I was a badminton team member, and we used to play sports whenever we got the shot. There was no limit for me to enter a competition from my family. Well, the school always welcomed us even though it was a state school. I had no problems at the university either. My PE teacher even exempted me from the final exam since she knew I had already been an athlete.

Similarly, Sana expressed gratitude for her mother's encouragement, despite challenges, mentioning, "My mother encouraged me a lot [to go swimming], but my father and brother had no insight into swimming and sports."

Yasi, a 35-year-old married PhD candidate, who has been living with her husband in Canada for more than two years, reflects on the gendered perceptions of appropriate sports for women, often driven by concerns about femininity and safety. She stated,

I wasn't pushed towards any specific sports as a youth. My parents feared I might get hurt and always encouraged me to pursue easier sports like badminton. Later, I found an interest in bodybuilding, but my parents hated the idea... I also remember that one of my friends suggested I try Taekwondo, but when I brought it up at home, my parents disagreed and said it was a manly, combat sport. I never objected and always went along with their decisions... My sister even told me that I would look masculine and tried to dissuade me. They had no understanding of this.

The participants' discussions show the intricate relationship between parental influence, educational choices, and familial support in shaping PA journeys. The participants' diverse experiences underscore the critical role of familial dynamics in fostering or hindering enthusiasm for sports, offering valuable insights for understanding the broader socio-cultural context of PA participation among Muslim women.

4.1.2 Beyond the Sidelines: Cultural Expectations and the Invisible Barriers in Women's PA Pursuits

Mahsa's experiences highlight the profound impact of cultural norms and societal expectations on women's engagement in sports. Mahsa's athletic background is notable, and her

family's influence was evident, as her father and brother were also recognized as prominent athletes in Iran. Mahsa's unique experiences included playing soccer with boys and accessing boys' gyms, privileges granted to her due to her father's connections and status within the athletic community. However, despite all the support and freedom Mahsa received from her family, she noticed significant restrictions when she entered society and school. While her family encouraged her athletic pursuits, societal norms and institutional policies-imposed limitations had hindered her participation in sports in Iran. Reflecting on her childhood choices, Mahsa explained,

I chose a particular field in sport from childhood based on the fact that this field was a popular sport for girls in our city, meaning it wasn't like we could choose from several sports. That's why I chose volleyball and pursued it professionally from my teenage years.

The responses from Yasi, Sudeh, and Sofia shed light on the barriers faced by individuals in Iran regarding sports participation within cultural and religious norms. Yasi highlighted the lack of indoor sports facilities at school, particularly during colder seasons, which limited PA options. She reflected, "Our only option was the schoolyard, which would become useless and boring during colder seasons like winter and fall. It may not be good for your health to exercise or sweat in the cold weather." This scarcity of sports infrastructure may have contributed to a decreased emphasis on PA in educational settings.

Yasi suggested that offering alternative activities in schools could encourage girls to pursue their preferred sports and prioritize physical health. She stated:

We used to be limited to certain sports such as badminton, volleyball, and basketball. We had to pick one and stick with that. Maybe if other alternatives were offered [at school], it would act as a reminder for the girls to pursue the sports they wish.

Furthermore, Hoda's experiences revealed barriers that she encountered while engaging in sports within an Islamic cultural context. One significant challenge she faced was limited access to diverse sports activities during her school years. Reflecting on dance classes, Hoda mentions, "Well, at that time, dance classes weren't that common. If there were, it wasn't possible for me to go in those financial conditions." Financial constraints hindered her participation in certain sports, revealing a barrier related to socioeconomic status. Despite these challenges, Nafis, a 34-year-old married Ph.D who had been living with her husband in Canada for more than two years, further recounted how family dynamics and perceptions of female athletes further reinforced societal norms. Specifically, she described her aunt's participation in sports being viewed negatively, despite lacking direct familial restrictions:

Although she was never restricted, neither by my grandfather, nor by my father, or by my uncles... they always told her she could not be good at her profession by continuing sport. They said, "since you had a talent for math, why do you keep yourself busy with all these sports?" She said, "well, these things made me tell myself," and they continued, "don't waste your time anymore. Don't be unruly. Don't be a troublemaker, join the good girls' group, be a good girl."

Nafis's narrative illustrates the complex interplay between family influence and Islamic societal norms, which shaped her perceptions of acceptable behaviour and ultimately guided her

towards conforming to societal expectations of gendered conduct. She mentioned, "there wasn't any pressure from the family to not do sports, and I was always encouraged, but, well, wasn't accepted in society". Noora delved deeper into the psychological impact of societal expectations on her personality and interests. She lamented the societal pressure that discouraged women from pursuing sports and music as standalone careers, stating,

I was engaged with music and sports, but I changed my path to study STEM. In both music and sports, it was like... it seemed like women didn't get anywhere. Neither in art nor in sports. What you want to do in the future, if you want to pursue music or sport... it should be alongside STEM... I mean, sports and music were never seen from this perspective that they could be separate fields and real or prestigious careers. That they could be their own path.

This societal perspective contributed to Noora's sense of missed opportunities and regret. Noora's experience with biking in Tehran highlights the challenges faced by women engaging in PA in public spaces. She acknowledged the scrutiny and judgment she felt from others, remarking, "I saw that men look at me in a certain way. But it didn't matter to me, and biking was important to me." Despite societal scrutiny, Noora's determination to pursue PA reflects a subtle resistance against cultural expectations and gender norms.

Nafis describes how societal views influenced her behaviour, especially in relation to playing sports with boys, which was met with disapproval from more conservative peers: "but the neighbour girls and other girls who were a bit more religious always labeled me as a 'bad girl'." This labelling led Nafis to internalize Islamic societal norms by striving to conform and shed the perception of being rebellious or inappropriate: "I distinctly remember that in the first

year of high school, I repeated with myself to no longer be a bad girl." Nafis's experiences with biking further exemplify the societal constraints placed on girls' PA, as she faced harassment and felt unsafe riding alone:

I stopped riding a bike because in the first year of high school whenever I rode a bike alone in the street, cars honked, people resorted to verbal abuse, and exactly such incidents happened again and again. That moment meant I was in my second year of high school when once I wanted to go alone to a park. And my dad would come with the car alongside the highway, but that feeling was I no longer feel safe with a bike because of men and people gazing. I understood that as a girl I couldn't bike anymore. This society is no longer safe for me to ride on the streets.

Noora further reflected on her unconscious internalization of Islamic societal norms, noting how societal cues can subtly shape individual behaviours and perceptions. She observed, It's like no one explicitly told you that you shouldn't do this from now on. Like, you don't have the right to play soccer outside anymore. It's something that unconsciously transfers to a person. For example, from a certain point onwards, I felt like, well, it's not okay anymore to play with boys. Then, unconsciously, a person feels that they're changing inside. I mean, in sports, I was a much more pleasant person. I always felt like I became a different person in sports. I was laughing, happy, and making others laugh, but not in normal life. In normal life, I am a calm person.

Noora's contrast between her demeanour in sports settings versus daily life highlights the transformative and empowering nature of PA, providing a glimpse into the complexities of navigating cultural expectations and personal identity.

Sana's experiences reflect the challenges faced by many Muslim women in navigating societal perceptions of PA. Sana recalled her childhood engagement in swimming and outdoor activities, noting the lack of acceptance for certain activities deemed inappropriate for girls in her country. She remarked, "It seems like swimming and sunbathing in an outdoor swimming pool is only for indecent girls". Her comment stresses the cultural taboos and societal judgments surrounding women's participation in such activities. Yasi shared a similar sentiment regarding societal limitations on women's PA. She discussed her passion for cycling but also expressed frustration with the social restrictions that confined her cycling practice to the yard. Yasi explained,

The same with my cycling. I couldn't get the most out of my cycling because I was confined to our yard. At that time, it was socially unacceptable for teenage girls to ride bikes on the streets or alleys. My town was small, and I couldn't get along with all those stares, so I gave it up. There were no spaces or parks attributed to women to run. There was a natural pool around which men would run, but not women. We couldn't comfortably run alongside men.

Moreover, for Sudeh, a 28-year-old participant who has been living with her husband in Canada for more than three years and recently graduated from University A, pursuit of running in public spaces faced societal resistance due to traditional and religious norms within her city. She explained the necessity of her father's accompaniment for safety, stressing the social stigma

against women going to parks or engaging in outdoor activities independently. Sudeh articulated, "In other words, it wasn't socially acceptable for girls to go to parks alone, let alone go for a run." This restriction demonstrates the gendered constraints imposed by cultural and religious norms on women's mobility and participation in recreational activities.

In contrast, Leyla recounted her childhood experiences playing soccer with boys in her neighbourhood without encountering significant restrictions. She reminisced,

I used to play soccer with the boys in the alley till I was around 13 or 14. I never had any restrictions, though I was the only girl in that group. I don't know why; I can't remember why but it was acceptable for me without reasons. I knew I had no limit [from my family].

Leyla's experiences stress both the barriers and opportunities she encountered in pursuing sports activities within an Islamic cultural context. Reflecting on an incident during her morning run in Mashhad, Leyla describes a harrowing encounter with a motorcycle that illustrated some of the safety concerns faced by women in public spaces. Leyla recalled, "I had to get past a bridge through which motorcycles and people would cross, and when I was doing that, a motorcycle suddenly came at me." This incident underscores the broader safety concerns that women face when engaging in outdoor activities in conservative settings. Moreover, Leyla's narrative reveals the resilience and adaptability required to navigate societal constraints. Following the motorcycle incident, Leyla adjusted her running routine to busier times and more crowded places for safety. She explained, "From that moment on, I decided to run at busier times or choose more crowded places." This adaptation demonstrated Leyla's determination to continue engaging in PA despite the challenges posed by societal norms

Finally, Samira articulated a pervasive sense of a "glass ceiling" in women's sports, symbolizing the invisible barriers hindering professional advancement. She observed,

Another interesting point for me was that the participants mentioned a contradiction. We were always encouraged to do sports, but it always felt like there was a glass ceiling. There was this glass ceiling that you couldn't break through. It wasn't like someone telling you that it was okay to do sports and that you should do it, but there was always this ceiling that prevented you from going further professionally. Sport always was a sideline alongside other things I did. There was always this glass ceiling, always.

This metaphor encapsulates the enduring challenges faced by Muslim women in accessing equal opportunities within Islamic societies.

4.1.3 The Unseen Hurdle: Prioritizing Academics at the Expense of Sports

Mahsa faced significant challenges due to societal prioritization of academic achievements over sports, as evidenced by her school's reluctance to support her participation in national team camps. Mahsa said,

The major limitation I faced was school. Why? Because I was studying at the best school in our city, and because our volleyball camps were 10 days long and the school never allowed me to go, and they always said to me, "What do you want to do with sport? You're supposed to become an engineer or a doctor. You're not supposed to pursue sports as a profession."

Additionally, Mahsa clarified that she did not hold her school solely responsible for this issue; rather, she believed it was a systemic issue. She recounted, "During the league competitions, the

camps that were held didn't even collaborate to support students who were absent from school to prevent them from falling behind", illustrating the systemic barriers that impeded her athletic aspirations. Moreover, Samira echoed Mahsa's sentiment regarding the prioritization of girls' academic pursuits over sports within society. She acknowledged, "Studying was really important and a priority for my family too... if they reached a point where they had to choose, they would definitely choose to study as the first priority." This stresses the pervasive societal emphasis on education as the primary path for women, often overshadowing athletic aspirations.

Nafis recounted the intense focus on academics she experienced during the preparatory years for university entrance exams, where extracurricular activities like sports were deemed secondary: "Then when it came time for us to become ready for the university entrance exam, I remember you had to put everything aside and they only told you to sit down to study." Sana observed, "Therefore, sports always decrease in value and significance [in comparison to academy achievement]", emphasizing the societal attitudes that prioritized academic pursuits over sports and hindered the development of athletic role models for women.

The emphasis on academic achievement at the expense of PA underscores the challenges faced by young women in maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Sofia recalls,

At that time, our teachers put lessons before sports... There wasn't a gym available, and we didn't do any specific sports. No one would cheer us if we said that we were into basketball. All we were praised for was better grades in math.

This lack of support for sports activities, coupled with academic pressures, contributed to the disengagement of young girls from pursuing sports.

Sudeh echoes Yasi's sentiments, highlighting the challenges of balancing academics with sports during school hours. She noted, "Our school would cancel the PE hour each time and get us to study for the university entrance exam instead." This prioritization of academic studies over PE underscored the systemic barriers that hindered sports engagement among Iranian girls. Moreover, Noora's attempts to pursue volleyball professionally were impeded by conflicting priorities between academics and athletics. She recounted an encounter with a team coach who offered her a place in the second division but required absolute commitment, disregarding her university studies:

That's why my path... I remember that I was in my first or second semester of university, and I really wanted to seriously continue volleyball, so I went to the volleyball federation and asked them to give me the coaches' numbers because I wanted to go try out for them, and there was a lady who had a team in the first and second leagues in Tehran. I went to her and tried out, and she said, "Okay, I can take you to the second division, you haven't been professional until now, but you are talented, I can train you and you can start." But she said to me, "I don't care if you have exams or classes in university. If you're training, you must be present at all practice sessions. There's no such thing as being absent because of university classes, even because of final exams. " Then I realized it wasn't compatible at all because I was studying math, and I couldn't just drop it because of doing practice or because of the idea that sports practically has no future.

This dilemma reflects the systemic challenges faced by woman and girl athletes in balancing education and sports, compounded by societal perceptions that undermine the viability of a sports career for women

4.1.4 PA and the Challenges Faced by Women in Male-Dominated Societies

Mahsa addressed the societal stigma associated with women pursuing sports professionally. She stated, "The Islamic society was a society that didn't really welcome female athletes at a professional level," highlighting the structural and cultural challenges that marginalized women athletes. She further added,

Society didn't allow professional athletes to reach a very high financial income.

Financially, professional athletes didn't receive the support they should have received.

That's why they were rarely drawn to that path. As Muslim women, these conditions were very complicated. For example, in our professional leagues. These days society is changing a bit, but the income that women get from volleyball, handball, futsal, and even those who participate in the Olympics as women from an Islamic country, is really not that much.

Furthermore, Mahsa detailed the isolation experienced by women athletes, emphasizing the limitations placed on training interactions with men. She noted,

In our national team, one of the negatively influential things was that we were not allowed to train with someone who was a man and was physically stronger. And only one male trainer was accepted that would come and not do anything wrong, nothing besides training.

These quotes reveal several systemic barriers that hinder comprehensive athletic development.

Moreover, Mahsa confronted prevailing gender norms that could restrict girls' access to certain sports, such as soccer or futsal. She explained,

Noora made a good point. She said that she used to go out to the neighbourhood to play soccer. At that time, we could play soccer, but soccer wasn't an option for a girl. It seemed very rare for someone to go professionally in futsal or soccer, to be able to choose it as a profession. Because they were only for boys, and there was no need for a girl to go play and learn... it's interesting that all the fields that were done with hands, I was very good at, but in sports that involved using feet, like futsal, which was a male-dominated field in our country, I didn't progress much and faced several challenges.

This gender-based limitation prevented Mahsa's progress in sports she was interested in, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward women.

Samira's reflections on cultural norms revealed significant limitations and challenges faced by women in sports within her societal context. She further discussed the lack of opportunities for mixed-gender sports and recreational activities, and emphasized the gender segregation prevalent in schools and public spaces when she stated,

Another limitation that I talked about was that we didn't do sports with the opposite gender very much. I mean, not in school or even in the gyms that we went to, the gym I went to wasn't mixed. The only opportunity we had to play with boys was when we went to the parks. Nevertheless, we weren't necessarily doing sports there, but we were doing a PA. For example, we were playing splash. Once, I remember that the park police came and took us to their office because of playing [with boys], and it became an issue. which was ingrained in me.

This gendered separation reveals societal restrictions on interactions between genders, which extend to sports and PA.

In addition, Nafis's comments showcase the influence of societal expectations on her sense of identity and behaviour. She further described feeling compelled to conform to culturally accepted gender roles and abandon activities perceived as rebellious or inappropriate,

It's as if the general mindset of society was that a “good girl” should be like that, not someone who's naughty, goes out on the streets to play with boys, exercises a lot, and rides a bike. This societal pressure pushed me to conform to the traditional “good girl” images, ultimately abandoning sports from somewhere else. I don't know what decision I made to become an introverted and calm person... my norms were in contradiction, and I needed to change them.

This internalization of societal expectations appeared to lead some of the women to abandon PA.

Mahsa continued by emphasizing the challenges faced by women in Islamic societies to achieve success in sports, noting,

And even as far as I know, it's not just our country. Because of my background as an athlete, I've met some students who came from the Persian Gulf region to our country. They became my classmates in Ph.D. and even now, some of them hold positions in international volleyball federations. So, it's quite prevalent in the Middle East. But still, their mindset is that because she's a woman, she can't achieve that much success in comparison to men. In their view, as a woman, you can't reach the same level as a man. If there's a position, whether it's for a woman or a man, she has to step aside for man. They

don't consider her abilities. I haven't faced this here yet, but I think it's not as prevalent here. Here, if you have the qualifications, you'll definitely get that position.

4.1.5 The Invisible Champions: The Impact of Absent Role Models in Women's Sports

The participants' responses stress the profound impact of the absence of role models in shaping their perceptions of sports and PA. Mahsa directly attributed this lack of role models to societal intentions, stating, "There was no role model. Why? Because society intentionally didn't want to provide that role model."

Samira's reflections emphasize the impact of external influences, particularly Western media, in shaping perceptions about sports. She recounted her astonishment upon discovering women's soccer teams and the reliance on external role models from movies or TV shows, saying,

The first time I heard about women's soccer teams, I was really surprised. I remember asking my brother, "Do women have soccer teams too?" I thought only men play soccer. So, we really didn't have that role model... Then that role model came from movies or TV shows or things we saw externally, and we wanted to adapt to them, but then it contradicted with our real lives.

Noora emphasized the lack of visibility of women's sports in mainstream media in Iran and the resultant obscurity of successful female athletes, stating,

But the fact that, for example, we never see women's competitions on TV whenever we watch sports competitions. No one ever knew whether a successful professional woman athlete existed or not. Whether a woman athlete was successful financially. Whether she

was successful in terms of personality and fame. We can hardly name any famous female athletes, but we can easily name several male athletes.

Mahsa reflected on the significance of recent developments in broadcasting women's competitions with hijab, emphasizing the impact on young individuals in Islamic societies. She noted,

And this year [2024] was the first year, after all these years, that Islamic competitions with hijab started being broadcasted. And not even on national television, just through the internet, it was on the Antenna Channel I think. Maybe the kids in Islamic societies can find a role model and see that women can work...

These discussions collectively reveal the profound impact the absence of women role models, both within their immediate circles and in broader societal representation, had on the participants' attitudes towards sports and PA. The participants' comments also suggest an urgent need for diverse and visible woman role models in the realm of sports.

4.1.6 Modesty vs. Mobility: The Impact of Dress Code in Women's PA

Mahsa described the restrictive dress codes enforced during league competitions. Despite the modest attire, the competitions were strictly gender-segregated, prohibiting man referees and parental access to the gymnasiums. Mahsa vividly recalled, "It was such that if your headscarf fell off during the match, you had to put it back on during the game, but there was no man in the hall at all." Such stringent rules reflect broader Islamic societal norms that minimize visibility and accessibility for women and girl athletes.

Additionally, Samira revealed the internal conflict she experienced when attempting Western movie-inspired and a sense of feeling constrained by cultural norms requiring modest attire. She remarked,

I wanted to go jogging in the park in the mornings. But where did I get this idea? From the Western movies I had seen, where women go jogging in the mornings wearing just a pair of shorts and a tank top. Then I would say, “well, I can't go like that now. I must wear a long manteau and a scarf.” I couldn't adapt to that atmosphere. The pattern from Western images I had taken didn't match with what I wanted to do, and it ruined things.

This stresses the tension between personal aspirations influenced by external models and internalized constraints imposed by cultural expectations.

In addition, Nafis discussed the impact of mandatory hijab laws on her ability to engage in PA comfortably. The requirement to wear concealing clothing, especially after sweating during exercise, posed a practical challenge and led to discomfort. Nafis lamented,

Well, it was really upsetting for me that in my country if I want to go out, if I want to go to the park, I have to put on a coat or a long shirt and pants, and I can't go without a proper hijab, and they're all difficult for me.

These participant statements showcase how dress codes and societal expectations associated with hijab can inhibit women's participation in sports and outdoor activities, affecting their physical and mental well-being.

4.1.7 Empowered Through Opportunity: The Role of Supportive Environments in Women's PA

Despite the numerous restrictions and cultural barriers they encountered, some participants also recognized and benefited from opportunities that supported their engagement in PA. Hoda highlighted valuable opportunities she encountered during her education years. She describes how her sport activities became more serious and extensive during this time period, facilitated by supportive coaches and accessible facilities. Hoda emphasized,

The sports coach we had in university really encouraged us a lot.... She provided us with a lot of facilities, like, for example, a shuttle service that would pick us up in the dormitory and take us to that gymnasium and bring us back so we wouldn't have problems with transportation.

This support system enabled Hoda to engage in regular exercise and she even led aerobics sessions for fellow students, showcasing the positive impact of dedicated mentors and inclusive sports environments.

Nafis acknowledged the role of supportive educators in promoting sports despite societal challenges. She stated, "While sports blame, from one side, we always had a PE teacher who well encouraged us." This demonstrated an opportunity within the educational system to advocate for women's PA, despite broader societal barriers.

Concurrently, Leyla also acknowledged the opportunities she enjoyed in sports, particularly during her schooling years. She recalled participating in various sports teams and competitions without familial restrictions. Leyla expressed, "There was no limit for me to enter a competition from my family." This openness within her family and school environment provided

Leyla with opportunities to explore and excel in sports, fostering her passion for athletics during her formative years.

4.2 Exploring New Realities: Impact of Acculturation in Canada on PA Participation among Iranian Muslim Women

During the focus groups, the majority of the discussion time was dedicated to exploring the participants' past experiences. The participants were keen to share their stories and engage in friendly conversations with each other. Recognizing the importance of allowing them to freely express themselves, the researcher chose not to interrupt the flow of the discussion. It became evident that the participants had a lot to share about the barriers they faced back in their home countries. Therefore, the researcher deemed it essential to allow them to discuss these experiences thoroughly.

Eventually, the researcher shifted the focus towards the participants' current experiences since moving to Canada. The conversation began with the following question: "Let's delve into your current experiences since moving to Canada. How have these changes impacted your engagement in sports? Specifically, I'm interested in understanding how life in Canadian society has influenced your level of PA. Have you become more active? Are you engaging in exercise more frequently? How does PA play a role in your life now that you're in Canada?" This shift allowed the researcher to explore how their life transition in Canada influenced their PA behaviours and perceptions.

4.2.1 Adapting to New Rhythms: The Dynamics of PA Engagement

The responses from the participants highlighted a range of experiences and challenges related to engagement in PA following migration to a new country. These insights provide

valuable perspectives on how lifestyle changes, access to facilities, time constraints, and personal motivations influence individuals' exercise habits.

Samira expressed enthusiasm for adopting a new PA upon arrival, mentioning, "The difference was that when I came here, I quickly got a bike and learned how to ride it." She also shared her commitment to rock climbing despite academic and work demands, stating, "I was really happy when I found out there was a mountaineering wall here, and I tried to continue." Nafis further discussed the availability of gym facilities in her residence and the ease of exercising outdoors, "my apartment isn't very luxurious, it has basic gym facilities, and you can even go out on the street and exercise comfortably." Hoda also noted initial attempts at gym attendance but highlighted increased life responsibilities post-migration when she explained, "In the beginning, when I first came here, I tried to go to the gym because I had less work and more free time." She also mentioned a decrease in exercise due to increased responsibilities post-migration, such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping, which were previously managed by her mother in Iran, but are now solely her responsibility: "because I have many challenges now due to migration...there are responsibilities that I didn't have in Iran but now I do."

Noora shared her experience of playing volleyball predominantly with male groups, stressing her comfort and acceptance in this setting despite being the only woman among them,

In the early days when we used to play volleyball, there were more girls here. but now there are 11 men and I'm the only one as a lady playing with them. But I don't feel anything special when playing with them, like feeling I'm the odd one out or feeling like the other 11 guys are looking at me in a particular way, and it's a really good feeling.

She indicated a positive shift in feeling included and comfortable during sport activities.

Yasi highlighted the affordability and convenience of cycling in Canada compared to Iran, enabling her to incorporate cycling into her routine even before securing a job,

Since I always liked cycling and it was never easy for me to ride a bicycle back then, the first thing I bought here was a bike, even though I didn't get a job yet and had no idea if I could afford it...I got a bicycle here and when the weather is good in spring and summer, I ride it and enjoy my evening.

Nafis emphasizes the positive impact of Canadian norms: "I don't have to wear hijab here, and I can exercise anywhere, even with a bicycle, easily, wearing any clothes I like, in any colour, and I won't be stared at, and no one will bother me by verbal harassment." This freedom contrasts sharply with the restrictive environments some participants experienced in their home countries.

Mahsa's experience working with older women who view exercise as a lifestyle choice illustrates the positive cultural influence and the potential for intergenerational learning. Mahsa highlights the supportive environment for women in sports: "I have ten clients in my work, and eight of them were ladies, aged 50 or 60, they say exercise is part of our lifestyle and we love to work out. We (immigrants) are learning good things from them."

Sudeh mentioned integrating exercise into daily routines without putting extra effort, explaining, "I usually bike or walk to work... all this makes me exercise all the time without me noticing. It has become a life routine, and it's not like I devote time to it."

In contrast, Leyla faced challenges with engaging in exercise post-migration, reflecting on the adjustments required in her exercise routine. She stated,

[Due to the academic burden in Canada] I did not even see the sight of the university gymnasium... I visited there once or twice, but I stopped going there when I saw how small the pool was. It was more of a puddle than a pool which was unacceptable for someone like me who used to swim in the sea.

These quotations collectively illustrate the multifaceted factors influencing post-migration engagement in PA. The availability of resources, personal interests, time constraints, transitioning experiences, new life priorities, cultural adaptations, and facility appropriateness all contribute to individuals' exercise behaviours and experiences. The responses showed the importance of tailored support and accessible options to promote PA and well-being among them facing diverse challenges and adjustments in a new environment.

4.2.2 Embracing Diversity: Inclusivity that Fuels Motivation and Daily Practice

The participants' discussions shed light on their perceptions of cultural norms in Canada, emphasizing the freedom and inclusivity they currently experience compared to their home countries. These direct quotations underscore the participants' positive experiences with cultural norms in Canada, particularly in the areas of gender equity, inclusivity, and acceptance of diversity, which have influenced their engagement in PA and perceptions of societal values. The contrast with their previous experiences demonstrates the impact of cultural atmospheres on individual behaviour and well-being.

Mahsa further observed how societal openness influences participation in sports, particularly among university students who are encouraged to engage in exercise with their partners:

The number of students who participate in sports and go to the gym is very high compared to my country. Because you see both men and women here, freedom seems to

have a significant impact. Why? Because students come here with their partners and boyfriends. This freedom and openness strongly encourage them to engage in exercise.

Mahsa also appreciated the emphasis on gender inclusivity in sports participation in co-ed settings, where teams must include women players for games to proceed:

One of the good things here is, for example, in university competitions, if there are six volleyball players, at least two of them must be female. I mean, if two of those players aren't female, the team can't participate. Well, this shows that society values women and encourages them to participate. And if you're not there, the game won't even be held.

Furthermore, Mahsa highlighted how job opportunities in sports prioritize qualifications over gender: "Some job positions say they only hire females because they want to have female personal trainers... You apply for the job, and whoever is more qualified gets chosen for that job position." Mahsa's experience reflects the significant shift in job opportunities and cultural acceptance she encountered in Canada. When she applied to be a volleyball coach, she received encouraging feedback from a Canadian man coach who recognized her qualifications. This acknowledgment of her skills and potential advancement contrasts with the societal limitations she faced previously. The Canadian coach's offer to work alongside her and utilize her background knowledge in sports was particularly meaningful to Mahsa. Even though she expressed concerns about language barriers, he reassured her by providing access to a man trainer who spoke Persian, demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and support. Mahsa's reflection on this encounter stresses how different cultural landscapes shape and transform one's social inclusion in PA and PA-related job opportunities. The encouragement and assistance she

received showcase the positive impact of diversity and inclusion within Canadian society, enabling individuals like Mahsa to navigate new professional avenues and overcome previous societal constraints. This encounter exemplifies the broader theme of cultural openness and acceptance experienced by participants in Canada.

However, Samira noted the perceived gender biases among Muslim men regarding women's sports abilities even in Canadian contexts:

What was interesting to me, maybe it was my perception, but I felt that Muslim men in Canada were still not very comfortable accepting that Muslim women could also play sports at the same level as them. I understood that they still think they are better than us in sports. Maybe one reason I didn't want to continue [playing volleyball at the University A gym with Iranian men] was this.

Additionally, Hoda appreciated the acceptance of diverse physical appearances and health conditions within exercise settings: "The good thing that motivated me a lot to be able to exercise was that differences are accepted here, with every skin colour, with every physical problem you might have, no one looks at you badly." Hoda's experience in Canada contrasted sharply with her past in Iran. She shared, "When I was in Iran, besides studying, if my professor saw me exercising, I felt embarrassed. He would remark, 'Hoda isn't studying; she set aside her books to exercise.'" In contrast, in Canada, she felt supported and encouraged by her professor's positive attitude towards her exercise routine: "He always saw me and always encouraged me, saying how wonderful it is that, I also exercise in addition to studying and dealing with challenges."

Sudeh similarly noted the support and encouragement for sports she received in Canada compared to Iran, stating, “you feel encouraged because everyone here is actively participating in exercise.” She further noted the workplace initiatives promoting PA: “For example, we practice yoga one day a week at work. A yoga instructor is teaching us free of charge, and anyone can come to the class during lunchtime.”

Samira echoed this sentiment, explaining how supportive environments in Canada encourage PA as a part of daily life:

In Islamic cultures, there's a saying, 'the Prophet encouraged archery and swimming,' but still, when other matters arise, exercise is not a priority for the government. But here, it's important for everyone; it's part of people's life. They are encouraged go to the gym every day.

4.2.3 Diverse Barriers and Opportunities: New Navigations

Analysis of the participants' responses about PA barriers and opportunities in Canada revealed a range of experiences and perspectives. For example, Mahsa emphasized a personal barrier related to dressing and internalized scrutiny due to her background, stating,

One of the limitations that was always on my mind was how I would dress. I still struggle with this because even though I'm in my mid-twenties now, and I've been exercising for about 20 years, I always had to wear a hijab all these 20 years. My scarf couldn't fall off, and my sleeves had not to be pulled up. These things have unconsciously influenced my dress style. Even though I have the freedom to wear whatever I want, the first problem I encountered, and still haven't been able to solve, is my internal inhibitors due to my background.

Nafis also discussed the availability of sports facilities in Canada but also highlighted internal inhibitions that still posed challenges to consistent exercise routines:

Canada really has all the facilities. For example, at least in the university where we are, there are complete sports facilities... but it seems like there are still internal inhibitions within me, even though I know I should exercise. I've been to the university gym, I've been to the residential gym, I've tried a couple of times, but the same things that happened in recent years, where I registered for a gym and then quit, happened again. I cannot do it regularly.

Participants shared their opinions about PA opportunities in Canada. For example, Mahsa pointed out an opportunity related to athletic scholarships in North America, explaining,

Another thing that exists in this society now is that in the U.S. and Canadian universities, they offer athletic scholarships. I mean, if a high school student is an athlete, the university supports them and offers them a scholarship, saying, 'Just come play for my university team,' and study any field you want, and well, this is really great. Well, someone who is talented, can go where they need to go for competitions. They don't have financial problems about how to study while working. And they can achieve success at where they want to be. And because of that, the level of competition in these universities is very high. Because they quickly attract high-level players.

Samira also shared a positive experience participating in group sports with men in Canada as a facilitator for PA engagement, mentioning,

The second opportunity was participating in group sports with the opposite gender. I remember when I first came here, we had a sports group and played volleyball together. I hadn't played volleyball in Tehran, but we played here. It was really good, but then our schedules got busy, and we couldn't continue.

Hoda also discussed the positive impact of facilities in her university as an opportunity for PA, stating, "it has spaces where, for example, during break times, you can go there and play ping pong or billiards. These facilities are available." She also noted the encouragement within her university to take short exercise breaks: "people say, 'let's go for 20 minutes, half an hour, go for exercise for a bit, change the mood, and come back.'" Noora also highlighted the sense of freedom she feels in Canada to engage in PA such as riding a bike without judgment, stating, "I can ride a bike, and nobody looks at me... These things have a really positive impact on a person's mindset." She contrasted this with the societal attitudes she experienced in Iran.

Yasi reflected on the absence of time constraints for exercising in Canada as a facilitator for PA engagement compared to her previous experiences, expressing, "I don't have that limitation here in Canada... I have no problem staying there [in the gym] til 11 pm without any stress of safety or social stigma." Sudeh added her experience participating in a group PA at work promoting outdoor activities in summer: "Being supportive of sports is part of their workplace manners... a kind of encouragement for us to enjoy the good weather and not drown in work."

In contrast, Leyla had a markedly different experience as she focused solely on her studies since coming to Canada. She expressed disappointment in the quality and accessibility of sports facilities at her university compared to her previous experiences, noting, "I did not even

see... and stopped going there.” Sana also discussed challenges related to clothing requirements and weather conditions, stating, "The problem is that you can't exercise with everything you want, and you have to wear soft and stretchy clothes, and the cold here even makes it more difficult." She also mentioned transportation challenges during winter affecting her ability to attend yoga classes.

The analysis of participants' responses highlights the intricate relationship between barriers and opportunities that influence their PA engagement in Canada. Personal barriers such as internal inhibitors, internalized cultural norms related to dressing, and time constraints were commonly mentioned, reflecting the persistent influence of their cultural backgrounds and upbringing, along with new challenges in a different cultural context. Participants also identified significant opportunities that enhanced their PA experiences such as athletic scholarships, supportive workplace cultures, and a greater sense of freedom to engage in PA.

4.3 Envisioning a Healthier Future: Strategies and Aspirations

In the later part of focus groups, the researcher asked participants a series of questions to delve into their strategies and aspirations for maintaining PA in Canada. Questions included inquiries about the barriers and opportunities they encountered, how their strategies for engaging in PA have evolved in a new cultural and societal environment, and how they have adjusted their activities to incorporate family values and Islamic culture. Participants' responses illustrated a variety of personal and societal influences on their PA routines, reflecting a blend of internal and external challenges and opportunities. This included their goals for incorporating consistent and enjoyable exercise into their daily routines, the impact of supportive environments, and their hopes for broader societal changes.

The participants' responses reflected a blend of personal ambitions and a desire for greater societal support in promoting PA. While some faced challenges related to cultural norms and internalized limitations, they also saw the potential for growth and improvement through the supportive social structures available in Canada. This section delves into their individual and collective aspirations, highlighting the role of cultural capital, societal norms, and personal resilience in shaping their future PA practices.

4.3.1 Towards Health and Wellness

Several participants shared their strategies and aspirations for the future regarding PA. Nafis articulated her desire to incorporate exciting activities like swimming into her routine, with the aim of overcoming internal constraints and workload issues. She stated, "Well, just like Samira said, my dream, which is what I see in the future, is that my studies become easier, and I become a member of a sports club." Hoda similarly described her shift from exercising for aesthetics to prioritizing health, stating, "from just doing sports for body aesthetics when I was in Iran, I've come to believe in doing sports for health."

Noora envisioned a future where greater personal freedoms and societal acceptance allow for more confidence and satisfaction, expressing, "I feel more satisfied with myself because of the greater freedoms I've gained." Sana similarly expressed optimism about having more time in the future to prioritize PA, saying, "Once I get there, I will add sports to my daily routine." Mahsa further articulated the impact of societal openness on women's sports, contrasting the opportunities in Canada with those in Islamic societies, stating, "Well, a society's openness can have a significant impact on women's sports. Because in this society where we currently live, there are equal opportunities for men and women, and the one who is more deserving wins."

Mahsa also mentioned the difference in mindset between Islamic countries and Canada regarding gender inclusivity in sports, stating,

And this is why I'm saying, I feel that because of the interaction I've had with Canadians who grew up here, for example, Canadian men who grew up here, they always told me, 'It's okay, come join us, we'll help you reach the point where you need to be.' And what was their mindset? Their mindset was that this connection should exist, and if you reach a certain position, maybe later you'll help us, and we all help each other's progress. But this isn't the case in our society.

Samira similarly expressed a desire to establish a routine that prioritizes exercise in her future life: "I really want to establish a routine, like Mahsa mentioned, where exercise is always part of it." Also, Sana shared her struggles with integrating PA into her routine due to cultural expectations and the pressure of studies and work, "unfortunately, the pressure of studying and working in the first two years of my immigration impeded my efforts to work out. I'm pretty sure these pressures are temporary, and I will have more free time in the future."

Two other participants had different viewpoints. Yasi reflected on her uncertainty about committing to a specific sport in Canada, stating, "Because I didn't pursue a particular sport in Iran, I'm unsure if I'll commit to one here." Sofia emphasized her personal challenge in maintaining a consistent exercise routine despite encouragement, noting, "But it's not like I will change my lifestyle because people here are encouraging me. No, nothing has changed for me." These responses illuminate the participants' perspectives on the societal differences impacting women's participation in sports and their aspirations for integrating PA into their lives in Canada.

4.3.2 Navigating New Norms: The Role of Cultural Capital

In discussing cultural capital and the impact of societal norms on PA, participants shared their experiences and observations. For example, Sana emphasized the social significance of sports in Canadian culture, stating, "in this culture, sport is suggestive of social standing." Nafis expressed regret over having to set aside exercise due to academic pressures and societal expectations in Iran, reflecting,

Last year it was very interesting for me that as soon as the weather got better, you only saw people cycling on the streets. I mean, all of these really encourage you about how good it is. But still, I cannot do it regularly. There is also a regret for those years when I loved exercising, those years when I really enjoyed it, I had to put it aside because of my studies, because of being good and being a "good girl." Now it seems like I still... now I'm in a battle to be able to accept the conditions I've faced in Canada over the past two years. I still can't accept this freedom.

Sana believed that "There's no doubt about that. In fact, in this culture (Canadian culture), sport is suggestive of social standing." Yasi echoed Sana's sentiment about the importance of sports as part of leisure activities, adding,

Especially in relation to my saying that when someone asks us what we do in our free time, if you can mention sports as part of your leisure activities, that's excellent. And I also felt that sports must definitely be part of my routine.

Nafis and Hoda's reflections provide profound insights into their evolving perspectives on body image and self-acceptance, shaped by their experiences post-migration. Nafis

acknowledged the impact of global trends and social media on her body image, highlighting a positive shift in mindset. She noted, "My body image, which was not good, was always inhibiting. But now it's changing, and I think Instagram and social media help and educate everyone that it's not just about beauty standards; exercise is something more than beauty."

Hoda shared a transformative journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment, particularly in terms of clothing choices during exercise. She described overcoming initial self-consciousness and embracing her preferences confidently, stating,

I always tried to wear pants here. I thought if I wore a tank top or shorts, everyone would stare at me. The issue for me wasn't with the foreigners here. My problem was with Iranians that I saw at the gym. I thought if I go to the gym and an Iranian sees me with a tank top, what judgment will they make about me? And I was very scared of that. But if I knew that at the time I was going to the gym, there were fewer Iranians and less chance of being seen by them, I would wear revealing clothes more comfortably. Somewhere along the way, this gradually changed, and I decided to wear them, "So what? I want to wear shorts or tank tops when I am exercising." Whether it's an Iranian in the gym or not. At first, for example, the first few times I went, if I saw Iranian friends, I felt embarrassed. I hid myself a bit, but gradually, this went away, and now I'm very comfortable wearing whatever I want, and I have no problem. And I say this is their problem; they can't see. It's not my problem.

Hoda also observed the diversity of body types and appearance among her fellow gym-goers, leading her to challenge her own insecurities and ultimately embrace self-love and acceptance.

This transformation stresses the significance of inclusive spaces and positive social influences in fostering healthier attitudes towards body image and promoting holistic well-being:

In the gym, I saw girls who had skin blemishes, but they comfortably wore whatever they wanted. For example, my stomach is a bit big, and I don't have perfect body proportions, so I said, "Oh, my belly is visible, it looks ugly if I wear a tank top." But at some point, I said, "Well, this is my body; I should love it." And I wore it, and I saw nothing happened, and I got this good feeling to accept this change, to find this change that I don't care what others think or what might happen. Now I've found that I should love myself.

Her transition from feeling embarrassed to feeling comfortable reflects a deeper acceptance of personal appearance and diverse bodies. Hoda's experience of witnessing others confidently embracing their bodies in the gym contributes to her newfound self-assurance and serves as a motivating factor.

Noora pointed out the unconscious impact of cultural openness on behaviour and attitudes toward PA, noting,

But it seems like unconsciously, going to countries that are a bit more open-minded and where people have been raised with a different mindset about these things has an effect. Unconsciously, it seems to affect men too. I mean, Iranian men here are a bit different from... the same men who were in Iran. Their gaze or behaviour was different. But when they come here, it's like they're also being trained a bit, it's like they're also preserving their gaze or changing their perspective.

Additionally, Noora appreciated the freedom in Canada to ride a bike without getting unwanted attention, unlike in Iran, where she felt judged,

For example, I can ride a bike, and nobody looks at me. I'm not ugly to anyone, as Hoda says, or just that. That's it. These things have a significantly positive impact on a person's mindset that there's a difference between here (Canada) and there (Iran), but as I said from the very beginning it takes time for the change to happen.

There were also mixed interpretations on their experiences in PA engagement in Canada. For example, Sana believed that while PA was discouraged for women in her home country, she feels freer in Canada but also pressured to embrace accumulation, stating, "In my home country, PA was never encouraged for women. It was seen as something inappropriate. Here in Canada, I feel more freedom but also pressure to conform to new norms." Likewise, Leyla candidly shared her challenges with body image and stress-related weight gain since arriving in Canada, stating,

The sad part is that I have gained 10 kg since coming to Canada. I seem to suffer from bulimia for several reasons. The whole condition here is new to me and I am under so much stress juggling study and work and adapting to new applications. If it weren't for my fluffy baby [referred to her dog], I would stay home. I have to take this baby out for a walk for about half an hour or 40 minutes a day and this is the only reason that makes me go out.

Their perspectives provide insight into the participants' varied experiences and perceptions of how cultural influences in Canada shape PA and body image, allowing them to see PA engagement as a way to acquire social capital.

4.3.3 Redefining Self through PA

Samira reflected on her transformation in attitude towards cycling since moving to Canada, overcoming the cultural mindset barriers she faced in Iran. She quickly embraced the opportunity to learn and ride a bike in her new environment, expressing,

One or two differences that came to my mind after coming to Canada were about cycling. I had never had a bike, never ridden one in Iran. Again, it wasn't something from my family or society. Because I was in Tehran and girls could ride bikes. But again, it was a mindset barrier for me that I said, "no, girls shouldn't ride bikes." The difference was that when I came here, I quickly got a bike and learned how to ride it.

Nafis revealed that internal inhibitions, particularly related to dressing, hinder her exercise routine. Although she aims to transform her traditional beliefs about wearing the hijab or restrictive clothing, deep-seated inhibitions persist, limiting her PA participation. Despite her family's encouragement and her embrace of a new future in Canada, these lingering constraints continue to hold her back, even as she adopts a new lifestyle. She reaffirmed:

There are some inhibitions that prevent me from continuing. Well, I have the same problem with dressing. Even though I don't believe in the hijab or if my clothes are open... but I also have this internal thing like my peers that I can't overcome. It's like an internal inhibition that I don't know where it comes from, even though everyone, including my family, says go and exercise.

Noora also recognized the internalized barriers, yet anticipated a future transformed:

Well, I think exactly the problem that the friends had with clothing, I felt and still feel... I really don't know if I'll be doing much more exercise or not, but I can say that in ten years' time from now, I feel more satisfied with myself because of the greater freedoms I've gained. I mean, probably by then, because, as I said, changes need time, by then maybe those mental restrictions I have now about what to wear during exercise will be gone, and it's a nice feeling... a feeling... It's like a beautiful image forming in one's mind that I, who couldn't walk on the street with my long and open hair in my own country, but here, it's possible for me to walk on the street, smile, and nobody cares, and nobody cares how much of an expected normal girl in society I am and if I have an undesirable appearance for society.

According to this sentiment, Noora was navigating the cultural and personal changes she has experienced after moving to a new country. She reflected on the greater freedoms she now enjoys, particularly regarding her appearance and exercise choices, which were restricted in her home country. Despite these new freedoms, she still harboured a deep emotional longing for acceptance and recognition from her family, especially in the context of sports. Noora further expressed a heartfelt longing for acceptance and recognition in sports from her family, sharing,

And it was very heartbreaking for me because... because my dad, for example, used to go to the gym at least once a week and played volleyball there. He was in the bank, and retired bank employees would gather there to play. My dad always wanted to take my brother, he always offered to him just to spend time together, but since my brother wasn't into sports, I always wished I were a boy. But now. I always think of my dad, wishing my

dad were here, wishing he could see that we could play with the others. So, it's a different feeling now, like being able to show something to your family or spend time with them.

The participants' discussions illustrate that the new environment shapes and transforms experiences and identities, yet internalized barriers can impede progress. Nevertheless, exposure to new cultural norms and landscapes may have created avenues for fresh explorations of PA, fostering a transformed self and encouraging challenges to entrenched family and societal norms.

4.4 Integration of Field Notes in Findings

During the focus group sessions, the researcher documented non-verbal behaviours and verbal reactions of the participants in a notebook, with the goal of capturing the full range of their interactions and responses. The observation of participant behaviour, particularly laughter, provided additional layers of meaning to the discussions. Laughter often emerged in response to comments that highlighted cultural contrasts or common struggles, indicating a shared understanding among the participants.

For instance, when Mahsa remarked on the disparity in opportunities for women coaches in Islamic societies compared to Canada, saying,

Here you could be a very good female coach, and if you are better than a man, they might give you the men's national team if you are capable and have more knowledge than men. At least you need to prove yourself. But this never happens in Islamic society at all. I mean, in an Islamic country, how many women coaches have you seen on men's teams? Not even as part of the staff, not even as a coach. A fitness trainer, a masseuse, I don't know, a physiotherapist...

Noora responded with, 'It is like a joke!' which was followed by audience laughter. This laughter can be interpreted as a recognition of the absurdity or irony in the situation described by Mahsa, underscoring the participants' awareness of the gendered limitations in their home countries

Similarly, Samira remarked, "It was really interesting for me. I thought I was the only one person who feels uncomfortable wearing shorts and a tank top like Canadians," which was met with laughter from the group. This reaction suggests a shared experience of cultural dissonance, where the participants found solidarity in their mutual struggle with adjusting to new norms.

Nafis's reflections on her internal struggle to conform to societal expectations and her hope for a freer future also elicited laughter from the audience. She remarked, "Well, just like Samira said, my dream, which is what I see in the future, is that my studies become easier (audience laughs), and I become a member of a sports club." The laughter in response to her statement could be interpreted as a reflection of the shared wish among the participants for a time when the burden of their academic responsibilities might be lessened or even the broader hope that they will one day have the freedom to pursue personal aspirations.

These instances of laughter were not merely expressions of amusement but rather signalled deeper emotional and cultural resonances. The participants' use of humour highlighted their resilience and the complex negotiations they undertake in balancing their cultural identities with the pressures of adapting to a new social context.

In addition to the laughter observed during the focus group sessions, other non-verbal cues also provided valuable insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. During the focus group sessions, non-verbal cues played a crucial role in deepening the understanding of the participants' shared experiences and perspectives. Particularly when the discussions centred

around past experiences, such as their school years, many participants expressed their reactions through non-verbal gestures like shaking their heads with regret or nodding in agreement as they listened to each other's memories. These gestures often accompanied verbal interjections, where participants would interrupt one another to say, "Yes, exactly, or yes, you're right" These phrases were frequently used by Nafis, Nora, and Sana, clearly signalling their empathy and resonance with the stories being shared. These moments of non-verbal communication, such as nodding in agreement or shaking their heads in regret, demonstrated the depth of shared understanding and collective memory among the participants.

Moreover, when discussing aspirations for greater freedom and opportunities for women in Canada, most of participants nodding in agreement, or smiled, suggesting a shared sense of hope and solidarity. These significant non-verbal gestures indicated not only agreement but also a collective yearning for change and maybe reinforcing the optimism expressed.

By documenting these non-verbal cues, the field notes enriched the analysis, providing a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and psychological dimensions of the participants' experiences. This additional layer of observation allowed for a deeper exploration of how cultural and familial backgrounds continue to shape their perceptions and behaviours in the context of PA participation.

4.5 Researcher's Reflexive Accounts

My engagement with reflexive journaling aligns with scholarly perspectives that emphasize the importance of self-awareness and reflexivity in qualitative research (Johnson & Parry, 2016). By documenting my thoughts, emotions, and reflections on the research process weekly, I enriched the study with supplementary data that captured the nuances of my understanding and engagement with participants' narratives (Glesne, 2016). This practice not

only allowed for transparent documentation of my emotional journey but also helped me critically assess how my perspectives evolved throughout the research. It served as a crucial tool in ensuring that I approached the data with an awareness of my own biases, particularly as I shared many personal and cultural similarities with the participants.

Acknowledging the potential influence of these similarities on my interpretations, I actively used reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias in this interpretive project. As a Muslim woman who shares significant commonalities with the participants, I recognized the possibility of my background influencing how I interpreted their narratives. The journal became a platform for me to reflect on my role throughout the research process—during focus groups, transcriptions, and analysis. It provided a space for critical self-reflection, allowing me to confront my biases and remind myself to maintain neutrality as a listener and transcriber. This reflexive practice was essential in ensuring that participants' words were faithfully recorded without imposing my own interpretations or augmenting their statements.

I realized my shared cultural background with participants had some benefits and drawbacks. One of the benefits was the ability to ask relevant and insightful questions during focus groups and interviews. As an insider, I could probe into areas of discussion that an outsider might have overlooked. For instance, when participants discussed past events related to the first research question, many initially failed to mention the barriers posed by the educational system. However, because I understood the significance of this issue within our shared context, I was able to steer the conversation in that direction, leading to the revelation of valuable insights. Additionally, participants felt comfortable speaking freely, knowing that I shared similar cultural experiences. This sense of familiarity reduced the need for them to explain specific cultural concepts or provide additional background information, allowing for a more open and

conversational tone in our discussions. This dynamic fostered trust and enriched the data collected.

However, there were also drawbacks to this insider perspective. One challenge I encountered was my unconscious bias during interviews. In an effort to empathize with participants, I sometimes interrupted their speech with comments like, "Yes, I know what you mean," or "I understand how you feel." These interruptions may have inadvertently discouraged participants from fully explaining their points or elaborating on the meaning behind their stories, assuming I already understood due to our shared background. Additionally, participants occasionally provided incomplete statements, such as "this is how I felt about this matter, or we all know why..." While I understood the unspoken implications of these statements, it is possible that these assumptions limited the depth of the data.

Furthermore, these shared cultural experiences made the process of translation particularly challenging. With my own assumptions and prior knowledge, choosing the most appropriate words and phrases during translation was difficult. Ensuring the accuracy of participants' voices without imposing my own interpretations or cultural assumptions required constant self-awareness. Despite these challenges, I remained committed to representing the participants' experiences as faithfully as possible, without embellishment or distortion, to uphold the integrity of the research.

The discrepancy between my expectations and participants' responses prompted a reevaluation of the research focus. One significant challenge that emerged was my encounter with the issue of patriarchy in Islamic societies, which was novel and unexpected. Drawing from prior research and personal experiences in an Islamic country, I initially anticipated that participants would prominently mention how patriarchy influenced their decisions regarding PA

participation. Consequently, I extensively researched and even dedicated a substantial portion of the study's second chapter to defining patriarchy and its impact within Islamic contexts.

However, findings from participant discussions diverged from my assumptions. Contrary to expectations, only a few of participants directly discussed negative effects of patriarchy within their families. Surprisingly, a majority attributed their interest and involvement in sports to positive influences from their fathers. Unlike my own preconceived notions, participants' views revealed that patriarchal power structures are often so deeply ingrained in societal norms (and internalized by both men and women) that they can be more challenging to distinctly identify. Moreover, this does not imply that these structures were absent from their decision-making processes, but rather, they were often subtly pervasive.

As a result, I adjusted the study's focus, reducing emphasis on patriarchy in Islamic society within the second chapter and instead highlighting topics that emerged more prominently during interviews, such as gender-based marginalization. This experience challenges my preconceived notions of the complexity of participants' lived experiences, which may diverge from scholarly or cultural narratives. This reflexive practice also demonstrates my commitment to responsiveness and methodological transparency, ensuring that the study's narrative aligns authentically with participant experiences and perspectives. Through critical self-reflection and adherence to principles of neutrality and fidelity in representation, I navigated the complexities of my role, enriching the research process with insights that transcend the researcher's perspectives and biases.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, the participants' responses revealed three primary themes: 1) restricted opportunities, 2) exploring new realities, and 3) envisioning a healthier future. During the focus

groups, participants freely provided their opinions about their life experiences before and after immigration, primarily focusing on their PA experiences within cultural norms and family values. Their discussion further revealed subthemes discussing the roles of their parents in engaging with PA, the impacts of schools, and how social, cultural, and religious norms shaped their attitudes towards and experiences in PA. They also engaged in insightful discussions around gender inequity and gender inclusivity in both Iran and Canada.

The researcher recognized the importance of allowing participants to fully express themselves, leading to detailed discussions about their challenges. The participants' responses revealed a nuanced pattern reflecting the diverse impact of family dynamics on their involvement in PA. Mahsa and Samira shared narratives of familial encouragement, with Mahsa recounting her sports-oriented upbringing influenced by her father's passion for sports, which exposed her to various athletic environments from a young age. Similarly, Samira recalled her family's active engagement in sports, contributing to her early exposure to different disciplines. Conversely, Hoda and Noora's experiences illustrated instances of family discouragement or a lack of role models, affecting their limited engagement with sports beyond school activities. Hoda described a household where sports were not prioritized, while Noora expressed a sense of missed potential due to her family's failure to recognize her athletic abilities. These accounts highlight varying degrees of familial influence, from active encouragement to indifference or unintentional discouragement, in shaping the participants' early experiences with PA.

Subsequently, the conversation shifted towards exploring the participants' current experiences in Canada, focusing on how the transition impacted their engagement in sports activities and perceptions of PA. The participants shared experiences of transitioning from Iran to Canada and how this shift influenced their attitudes towards PA and societal norms. They

highlighted aspects of Canadian culture that fostered inclusivity and freedom compared to their home countries, including accessible gym facilities, encouragement for joint exercise among university students, and the emphasis on gender equality in sports participation. They reflected on newfound freedoms, such as Samira's ability to cycle in Canada compared to internalized barriers against women riding bikes in Iran. Many participants struggled with internal inhibitions and societal expectations related to sports, exemplified by Nafis' conflict between available facilities and lingering cultural barriers. Noora expressed regret over missed opportunities for sports due to societal restrictions in Iran, particularly reflecting on her desire to engage in volleyball with her father. These accounts also stressed evolving perspectives on self-image and dress codes in Canadian gyms, with Hoda and Mahsa overcoming internalized fears of judgment to embrace diverse body types and clothing choices.

The focus group findings illuminated the intricate interplay between cultural backgrounds, societal norms, and individual empowerment in shaping PA experiences, further complicated by the layered and compounded effects of migration and transitioning from Iran to Canada. Moving forward, further exploration of this thematic analysis will elucidate the multifaceted impact of family values and cultural norms on the participants' engagement in PA before and after immigrating to Canada. The quotes and excerpts set the stage for a comprehensive examination of the research questions within the context of cultural transitions and societal adaptations.

Chapter V: Discussion

Building on the themes identified in the previous chapters, this discussion integrates the participants' lived experiences with a comprehensive review of the literature. This research aimed to illuminate how immigration and cultural transitions impact Muslim women's perceptions and behaviours towards PA, given the shift away from direct family oversight and patriarchal cultures prevalent in most Islamic countries. The transition from Islamic countries to a non-Islamic country such as Canada presents unique challenges and opportunities for these women, potentially altering their engagement with PA due to different societal norms and levels of familial support. In this chapter, the participants' voices will not only be explored but the literature review will also be integrated to contextualize these experiences.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of PA, particularly for immigrant populations, there remains a lack of research on the specific challenges faced by Muslim women (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). Also, there is a substantial gap in our understanding of the influence of living away from the direct supervision of Muslim families and societal structures in non-Islamic societies on women. Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018) highlight the importance of intersectional discussions that consider the interactions of culture, ethnicity, identity, and gender in addressing the challenges faced by Muslim women in PA participation. These intersectional discussions are, therefore, included as traditional cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence Muslim women's ability to engage in PA (Benn & Pfister, 2013).

The narratives from the participants in this study stressed a variety of familial influences ranging from strong support to significant restrictions, all of which likely played a pivotal role in shaping the women's perceptions and engagements with PA, both in their countries of origin and in Canada. The shift from family-centred oversight to an independent lifestyle in Canada led

many participants to renegotiate their relationship with PA. The participants highlighted several barriers to PA participation, such as internal barriers, religious attire constraints, and time management issues due to academic pressures. Conversely, they also mentioned facilitators, such as freedom and access to diverse PA options. These barriers and facilitators will be discussed in relation to existing research to understand broader trends and unique individual experiences. By integrating academic perspectives with the qualitative data collected from focus groups with the ten Muslim women participants in this study, this analysis aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how cultural and familial backgrounds continue to shape their PA behaviours in a new social context.

5.1 Disconnection Between Islamic Values on PA and Realities

The disconnection between Islamic values on PA and the realities faced by Muslim women is a nuanced issue, deeply rooted in the interplay between religious teachings, cultural practices, and familial expectations. While Islam is often viewed as a religion that encourages health and well-being, including engagement in PA (De Knop et al., 1996), the actual experiences of the Muslim women in this study reveal a complex landscape where these religious ideals frequently clash with cultural norms and family pressures. These participant accounts are consistent with previous research, which indicates that Muslim women's participation in PA is often constrained by family expectations, cultural norms, and religious values (Dagkas et al., 2011; Alamri, 2015; Kay, 2006).

Participants in this study, such as Samira, highlighted the contradiction within Islamic cultures, where physical activities like archery and swimming are encouraged in religious teachings, yet in practice, exercise is not prioritized by societal or governmental structures. Similarly, Nafis shared that while her family supported her involvement in sports, societal

disapproval outside the family circle led to feelings of being judged and discouraged, illustrating the tension between familial support and broader societal constraints. Moreover, Nafis, shared that while her family was supportive of her involvement in sports, societal pressures outside the family circle led to feelings of being judged and discouraged, illustrating the tension between familial support and broader societal constraints. These accounts reveal how deeply intertwined religion, culture, and family are in shaping the opportunities and challenges Muslim women face in engaging in PA. These participant experiences underscore the dual nature of influences on Muslim women's engagement in PA, revealing both facilitating and constraining factors (Agergaard, 2016; Handa, 2003; Jiwani & Rail, 2010).

In many Islamic societies, religion and culture are inseparably intertwined (Kay, 2006), shaping not only individual behaviours but also societal expectations, especially concerning the roles and activities deemed appropriate for women. Family plays a pivotal role in this dynamic, serving as both a source of support and restriction for Muslim women's participation in PA (Knez et al., 2012). The literature highlights how these familial values are multidimensional and shaped by sociocultural and ecological factors (Aljayyousi et al., 2019).

The participants in this study vividly illustrate the complex relationship between family expectations, Islamic norms, and societal pressures that shape their engagement with PA. Hoda's experiences reflected the conflicting emotions that can arise from the desire to honour her family's expectations while also wanting to participate in PA. Similarly, Sofia and Noora expressed how their families, although supportive in some respects, still imposed subtle restrictions based on cultural expectations that made it difficult to fully engage in PA. These restrictions were not always overt but were embedded in societal norms dictating what was considered appropriate for women.

This study sheds light on the intricate relationship between religion, culture, and PA, demonstrating that while Islam may advocate for health and fitness, cultural interpretations of religious teachings, coupled with familial expectations, create an environment where PA is often seen as conflicting with traditional roles and behaviours for women. The participants' narratives underscore the importance of understanding these barriers within the larger cultural framework that governs the behaviour and identity of Muslim women.

As such, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how these factors interact to shape the experiences of Muslim women in PA, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches that consider the unique challenges they face. Moving forward, this research will delve deeper into these issues, focusing on the voices of the women who participated in this study to explore these themes more thoroughly.

5.2 Navigating Cultural Boundaries: The Complex Landscape of PA for Muslim Women

Elliott's (1996) assertion that the family serves as the primary social unit for the reinforcement of cultural values and norms was a central theme in this study, particularly in the context of PA participation among Muslim women. The family plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards PA, acting as both a source of encouragement and a site of restriction (Benn & Pfister, 2013). This dual role was evident in the participants' narratives, which reflect a wide range of familial influences on their engagement in sports and other PA.

5.2.1 *The Power of Family Support*

Mahsa, Leyla, and Samira's experiences provide clear examples of how positive reinforcement from the family can foster a strong engagement with sports. Mahsa, who identified herself as an athlete, attributed her athletic identity to her early exposure to sports within a sports-oriented family. This early engagement was not just incidental but a deliberate part of her

upbringing, reflecting a family environment that valued and supported athletic pursuits. The consistent encouragement she received from her parents, who actively participated in sports themselves, instilled in her a deep-seated love for physical activity. Similarly, studies have shown that when physical activity is valued within the family, Muslim women are more likely to feel supported and motivated to engage in sports (Kay, 2006).

Similarly, Samira's comfort and familiarity with various sports was rooted in her family's active involvement in these activities, particularly through her brothers. The presence of siblings who shared similar interests in sports created an environment where engaging in PA was a norm rather than an exception. Her brothers often involved her in their sports practices, providing her with opportunities to learn and excel in different PA. This familial engagement helped Samira feel at ease in sports settings, allowing her to pursue her interests without the barriers that might arise from cultural or societal expectations.

Leyla's experience is another prime example of family support, where her mother played a key role in introducing her to gymnastics. Unlike other participants who faced resistance or lack of encouragement, Leyla's mother recognized the importance of PA and ensured that Leyla had access to the necessary resources and training. This aligns with findings by Walseth (2006) who emphasizes that family encouragement can help Muslim women navigate societal and cultural barriers, leading to higher involvement in PA. Leyla's narrative of a supportive environment, both at home and at school, illustrates how positive reinforcement within culturally appropriate frameworks can foster participation in PA. Her experience demonstrates that when families provide support that respects cultural and religious values, Muslim women can engage in PA in ways that are both fulfilling and consistent with their cultural identity (Walseth, 2015).

These stories underscore the profound impact that a supportive family environment can have on the PA participation of Muslim women. When families not only accept but actively promote sports and PA as valuable pursuits, they help to create a pathway for their daughters to engage in these activities confidently and consistently. This support can mitigate the impact of external societal pressures and cultural barriers, allowing these women to develop a strong, positive association with PA that persists into adulthood. Moreover, the alignment of family encouragement with cultural and religious values ensures that the pursuit of sports does not conflict with their identity, but rather becomes an integrated and celebrated part of it.

The positive influence of family, particularly parents, in shaping attitudes towards PA among Muslim women is well-documented in the literature. Research by Dagkas et al. (2011) and Benn et al. (2010) underscores the critical role that parents play in either encouraging or discouraging participation in PA. When families actively support PA, as in the cases of Mahsa, Leyla and Samira, young Muslim women are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards sports, view it as an integral part of their lives, and pursue it with enthusiasm.

5.2.2 The Restrictive Side of Family Influence

However, this positive reinforcement was not the same for all participants, as other stories revealed the restrictive side of family influence. Findings from this study suggest that while some Muslim families may actively encourage sports, others impose significant limitations based on cultural values, norms, and concerns about modesty and safety. These restrictions often stem from a desire to adhere to traditional gender roles and maintain cultural identity, which can limit opportunities for women to engage in PA (Aziz et al., 2020).

Accordingly, Hoda, Nafis and Norra's situations, where their social mobility was restricted by their families' cultural expectations, underscored the powerful influence of deeply

rooted societal norms that often dictate the behaviour and choices of Muslim women. These cultural expectations frequently linked to concerns about maintaining modesty and safety and also imposed limitations on what was deemed acceptable behaviour for women, including their engagement in PA. For instance, the emphasis on modesty may lead to restrictions on participating in mixed-gender sports or activities that require specific attire, which might not align with traditional expectations of modest dress (Benn et al., 2010). Several participants noted that they were required to wear specific attire that, while culturally appropriate, was not practical for many forms of PA, thereby limiting their ability to participate fully. Similar findings were also reflected in Walseth and Fasting's (2003) study, which focused on barriers to Egyptian women's participation in PA, highlighting how cultural and religious expectations shape the limitations placed on women.

The experiences of participants like Hoda and Sofia provide a vivid illustration of how the lack of familial support and encouragement can serve as significant barriers to their participation in PA. In these cases, the absence of sports role models within their families meant that there was no one to guide or inspire them towards engaging in sports or PA. This lack of role models for women in sports can further exacerbate these challenges. As Mahsa and Noora noted, the absence of visible female athletes in mainstream media and cultural narratives contributes to the obscurity of successful women in sports. This lack of representation also reinforces the perception that sports are not a viable path for women, further discouraging their participation. Furthermore, this absence of role models can create a vacuum where PA is neither seen as a priority nor as an integral part of their daily lives, leading to minimal or no participation in PA.

5.2.3 The Impact of Missing Role Models

Furthermore, the systemic barriers embedded within cultural and societal frameworks contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women, particularly Muslim women, in sports. Research has shown that when young girls do not see women like themselves excelling in PA, they are less likely to perceive sports as a domain where they can succeed (Andersson, 2002). This absence of role models is compounded by societal expectations that prioritize academic and domestic responsibilities over physical pursuits, as seen in Sofia's experience. The lack of encouragement from family members, coupled with the absence of public role models, creates a formidable barrier that can hinder the development of a positive attitude towards PA among Muslim women. The need for culturally relevant and supportive environments that foster female participation in sports is crucial, as it can help bridge the gap between cultural expectations and personal aspirations (Aljayyousi et al., 2019).

Additionally, Mahsa addressed the societal stigma associated with women pursuing sports professionally, emphasizing the structural and cultural challenges that may marginalize women athletes. She pointed out that the lack of financial support and societal recognition for female athletes in Islamic societies further discourages women from pursuing sports at a professional level. This systemic neglect is reflected in the meagre financial rewards and limited opportunities available to women in professional leagues, which often push them away from the path of athletic careers. The experiences of participants like Hoda and Sofia highlight how deeply ingrained cultural expectations, and the absence of visible role models can create a cycle of discouragement where young women are less likely to view sports as a viable or rewarding pursuit. This systemic marginalization, coupled with a lack of encouragement and visibility, underscores the need for culturally sensitive interventions that not only support but also elevate

the presence and achievements of women in sports, helping to break down these barriers and redefine the possibilities for Muslim women in PA.

Moreover, these restrictions are not just personal or family-based but are part of broader societal norms prevalent in many Muslim communities. These norms create an environment where women feel that their participation in PA is not only discouraged but also potentially viewed as inappropriate or outside the bounds of their cultural identity. This societal pressure, compounded by the fear of being judged or criticized by the community, leads women like Hoda and Sofia to limit their participation in PA or avoid it altogether. The literature supports these observations. For instance, Walseth and Fasting (2003) discuss how Muslim women's participation in sports is influenced by cultural expectations surrounding modesty and femininity, often leading to constraints in how, when, and where women can engage in PA. They emphasize that women are frequently subject to community scrutiny, making it difficult to participate openly in physical activity. Similarly, Testa and Amara (2015) explore how societal and religious values intersect with family expectations to create a restrictive environment for Muslim women, particularly in communities where traditional gender roles are emphasized. These studies reinforce the notion that the barriers Hoda and Sofia experience are not isolated incidents but are part of broader structural and cultural dynamics that shape Muslim women's engagement in PA.

Yasi's narrative further illustrates the gendered perceptions of appropriate sports for women within her cultural context, where her parents' concerns about femininity and safety led them to encourage her participation in less physically demanding activities like badminton, even though she preferred sports like Taekwondo and bodybuilding. Such parental guidance reflects a broader societal expectation that women should engage in sports perceived as gentle or non-

threatening, which aligns with traditional notions of femininity. This is consistent with findings from Benn et al. (2010), who highlight that Muslim women are often steered toward activities deemed suitable for their gender, reinforcing the idea that physical strength and competitiveness are masculine traits. When Yasi later developed an interest in bodybuilding, a sport that challenges these conventional gender norms by emphasizing physical strength and muscular development, she faced disapproval from her parents. This mirrors findings from Walseth (2006), who discusses how Muslim women face additional barriers when pursuing activities that contradict cultural expectations about femininity. Yasi's experience underscores the tension between her personal aspirations and the culturally prescribed gender norms, a dynamic also observed in research by Kay (2006), where family concerns about maintaining traditional femininity often lead to restrictions on women's participation in more physically demanding sports.

Furthermore, the societal pressures Yasi faced are consistent with findings from Benn et al. (2011) and Marwat (2014), who highlight the broader cultural expectations of modesty and traditional femininity that often discourage Muslim women from participating in physically demanding or non-traditional sports. These pressures emphasize conformity to gender norms, limiting women's opportunities to explore activities that may not fit within conventional ideals of womanhood. As a result, women like Yasi may find their interests and potential in certain sports constrained by cultural expectations, which prioritize modesty and femininity over personal ambitions and physical capability.

5.3 Defying Limits: The Silent Battle for Physical Freedom Among Muslim Women

The influence of patriarchal values is evident in the participants' narratives, where male family members often acted as gatekeepers of women's participation in sports. Noora's

involvement in volleyball was significantly influenced by her father's support, highlighting the potential for paternal encouragement to serve as a catalyst for PA participation. However, this support was not the same for all, as participants like Sana faced opposition from male family members, curtailing their involvement in swimming activities. This reflects the broader imposition of patriarchal values, where Muslim men within the family often dictate the extent of women's engagement in PA, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting opportunities for physical engagement.

This gendered control is also reflected in the gender segregation prevalent in many Islamic societies, as noted by Samira. The separation of genders in schools and public spaces extends to sports, limiting opportunities for women to engage in mixed-gender activities. This segregation not only restricts women's access to a wider range of sports but also reinforces the perception that certain activities are inappropriate or inaccessible for women. The global discourse on gender equity in Islam often positions women as subordinate to men, limiting their participation in various aspects of social, economic, and political life (Prihatini, 2019). This subordination is reinforced by patriarchal interpretations of Islamic rules concerning women's bodies and decency, as argued by Sfeir (1985), which have been used to maintain male dominance. This patriarchal control extends to many areas, including sports and PA, where women's participation is restricted by societal expectations and norms.

For instance, Mahsa's experience, despite her family's support, highlighted significant societal and institutional barriers that hindered her athletic pursuits. These barriers reflect the broader societal emphasis on academic achievements over sports for women, deeply rooted in cultural expectations that prioritize education as the more acceptable path. The internalization of these norms often leads Muslim women to perceive fewer opportunities for an active life

compared to their non-Muslim peers, aligning with the concept of internalized hegemony discussed by Abraham (2019). This internalized hegemony discourages women from pursuing sports, as they feel it conflicts with traditional gender roles.

Samira and Nafis's experiences further illustrate this dynamic, where societal emphasis on academic success overshadowed any athletic aspirations. Her family, like many others, prioritized education over sports, seeing it as the primary path for women. This pervasive societal attitude was particularly evident during the preparatory years for university entrance exams, where extracurricular activities like sports were deemed secondary. This systemic devaluation of sports in favour of academic achievements underscores the barriers that can hinder the development of athletic role models for women (Benn et al., 2010). Also, Sana's observation that sports always decrease in value and significance in comparison to academic achievement further emphasizes the societal attitudes that limit women's engagement in PA.

The pressure to conform to these academic expectations often discourages women from pursuing sports as standalone careers, as highlighted by Noora who shifted her focus from sports to studying math. This shift was driven by societal perceptions that women do not get anywhere in sports or the arts unless these pursuits are coupled with more 'prestigious' careers in fields like STEM.

The resistance encountered by participants from family members who prioritized academics over sports reflects a broader societal attitude that regards sports as less important or even inappropriate for women, particularly when they conflict with cultural expectations of femininity. This sentiment is echoed in Benn et al. (2010), who highlight how patriarchal control within families and society often limits women's opportunities for physical engagement. This aligns with Ahmad (2001) and Shain (2003), who discuss how Muslim families often prioritize

academic achievement for women as a culturally acceptable path to social mobility and empowerment, while sports are viewed as secondary or even in conflict with traditional gender roles. The preference for academics reflects a broader societal framework where education is seen as a means to gain respect and independence within the boundaries of cultural and religious values, whereas physical activity may challenge these norms. As a result, many Muslim women find themselves navigating between the societal pressure to excel academically and the restrictions placed on their participation in sports, illustrating the complex interplay of cultural expectations that shape their experiences.

The participants' narratives also revealed the internalization of societal expectations and the impact this had on their sense of identity and behaviours. Nafis, for example, described feeling compelled to conform to traditional gender roles and abandon activities perceived as rebellious or inappropriate. This internalization can potentially lead to the abandonment of PA, as women strive to align their behaviour with societal expectations of femininity and modesty. Nafis's experience of being labeled a "bad girl" for engaging in sports with boys exemplifies the social pressures women face to conform, which can significantly influence their engagement in PA. Some studies have shown that Muslim women are less likely to participate in PA on account of being women (Benn et al., 2010). This may stem from the belief that women will become physically stronger and perhaps take on masculine characteristics if they engage in PA (Sfeir, 1985).

The internalization of these societal norms is not always explicit but is often unconsciously absorbed, as Noora noted. This unconscious transfer of societal expectations can subtly shape individual behaviours, leading women to restrict their own participation in PA even in the absence of direct opposition from their families. These findings align with earlier research

by De Knop et al. (1996) and Benn (2002), which points to the strong influence of religiosity and cultural norms in restricting Muslim women's participation in PA. The cumulative effect of these factors is a cultural environment where women may unconsciously internalize the belief that their engagement in PA is inappropriate or undesirable, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting their opportunities for an active lifestyle.

Noora, Nafis and Leyla's narrative further underscores the influence of these internalized norms. Despite having a relatively unrestricted childhood where they played soccer with boys in their neighbourhood, they eventually ceased these activities without any explicit reason or familial restriction. This abrupt halt in their participation appeared to reflect the subtle and often unspoken pressures exerted by societal expectations, which can lead Muslim women to withdraw from PA as they reach an age where traditional gender roles become more pronounced.

These experiences are consistent with studies that emphasize how patriarchal hegemony becomes deeply embedded within individuals, influencing their behaviours and self-perceptions. Research by Dagkas and Benn (2006) highlights how young Muslim women feel an increased responsibility to adhere to religious and cultural expectations, especially after puberty. This socialization process continues to shape women's attitudes towards their bodies and PA, often limiting their participation in PA. Similarly, the work of Agergaard (2016) and Amara and Henry (2010) demonstrate how these cultural and religious pressures intensify post-puberty, creating significant barriers to Muslim women's engagement in sports and physical education.

Additionally, Abraham (2019) elaborates on the concept of internalized hegemony, explaining how patriarchal values become embedded in the identities of individuals, leading them to unconsciously uphold these norms even in the absence of external enforcement. In the

context of Islamic countries, this internalization can result in Muslim girls and women believing that they do not have the same opportunities for active lives as their non-Muslim peers.

The interplay of these factors creates a complex landscape where Muslim women navigate both internalized and external barriers to PA. The internalization of patriarchal norms, coupled with societal pressures and cultural expectations, results in a scenario where even when direct opposition is absent, women may still restrict their participation in PA. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches that address both the visible and invisible barriers that limit women's engagement in PA.

The narratives also reflect the societal norms surrounding modesty and gender roles, which often conflicted with the study participants' desires for an active lifestyle. Many described facing societal scrutiny and stigmatization for engaging in sports, particularly in public spaces. For example, Noora's experiences with biking in Tehran illustrate the societal pressure and judgment faced by women who engage in PA. Despite her determination to continue, the societal expectations of modesty and gender-appropriate behaviour made it difficult for her to freely pursue her interests. This reflects the findings of Benn et al. (2010) and Marwat (2014), who have documented the societal pressures Muslim women face to conform to traditional femininity, often at the expense of their personal interests in more physically demanding sports.

The participants also highlighted the practical barriers to PA participation, such as limited access to appropriate facilities and programs. Yasi's struggle to find all-female gyms with suitable hours exemplifies the challenges many Muslim women face in accessing spaces where they can exercise comfortably and in accordance with their cultural norms. These restrictions are often compounded by societal attitudes that discourage women from using public spaces for PA, as Shuval et al. (2008) observed. The need to navigate these barriers often requires women to

make significant adaptations, such as exercising at odd hours or in less visible locations, to maintain their modesty and avoid unwanted attention (Shuval et al., 2008).

5.4 Balancing Two Worlds: The Complex Journey of Acculturation

The concept of acculturation, as originally described by Redfield et al. (1936), involves the cultural and psychological changes that occur when individuals from different cultures come into continuous contact (Schwartz et al., 2010). This process is inherently complex and challenging, especially for immigrants who must navigate the tensions between preserving their cultural heritage and adapting to the norms of their new environment. Central to understanding these challenges is the concept of identity work, where individuals actively shape and re-shape their identities in response to the cultural norms of both their origin and host societies (Walseth, 2006). This process involves continuous negotiation, often creating tension and internal conflict as individuals reconcile differing cultural expectations.

For the participants in this study, migration to Canada necessitated a significant re-negotiation of their identities, particularly in relation to PA. The dual pressures of integrating into a new cultural environment while maintaining a connection to their cultural heritage were evident in their experiences. As Brah (2005) argued, through the processes of displacement, migration, and integration into Western societies, such as Canada, immigrants often find themselves redefining their identities within the host society. For the women in this study, Canada offered enhanced opportunities for PA, such as better access to facilities, athletic scholarships, and a supportive cultural atmosphere, when compared to Iran. Participants like Noora and Sudeh highlighted the positive aspects of their new environment. Noora, for instance, appreciated the freedom to play volleyball with mixed-gender groups, something she felt comfortable with despite the cultural norms of her home country that would have discouraged

such participation. Similarly, Sudeh benefited from workplace initiatives promoting PA, such as yoga classes, which were integrated into her daily routine, reflecting the supportive and inclusive environment she found in Canada.

Hoda's transformative journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment, particularly in her evolving clothing choices during exercise, offers insight into the ways Muslim women negotiate personal identity in the context of societal expectations. Initially self-conscious about wearing revealing clothing at the gym due to potential judgment from fellow Iranians, Hoda's growing confidence reflects not only a personal shift but also the influence of inclusive spaces and positive social support on body image and well-being. This experience resonates with findings in Islamic societies where modesty, particularly through clothing like the hijab, plays a central role in shaping body image and identity. As Ruby (2006) highlights, for many Muslim women, the hijab serves as a form of empowerment, allowing them to focus on inner values rather than external beauty standards. However, as Kaplan (2006) suggests, Muslim women in globalized contexts often encounter conflicting pressures—balancing religious modesty with societal ideals of beauty. Hoda's experience encapsulates this tension, demonstrating how Muslim women continuously navigate between cultural, religious, and societal expectations while striving for self-acceptance and empowerment in environments that may not always align with their personal or religious values. This underscores the importance of creating inclusive spaces that support women in confidently expressing their individuality while maintaining cultural and religious identity.

However, despite these opportunities, personal and cultural barriers persisted. Participants like Nafis and Hoda found that while Canada provided excellent sports facilities and a more inclusive environment, they were still constrained by the practical challenges of life post-

migration. Research by Castles et al. (2014) suggests that immigrant integration is influenced by various factors, such as the context of reception and the relationship between the source and destination countries. These factors, combined with the individual's cultural background, can create a complex landscape for acculturation. Nafis, for example, mentioned that despite having access to gyms, she struggled with internal inhibitions that prevented her from maintaining a consistent exercise routine. Hoda echoed this sentiment, noting that her responsibilities post-migration, such as cooking and cleaning, made it difficult to find time for PA, even though she initially tried to engage in gym activities upon her arrival in Canada. Also, Leyla's dissatisfaction with the sports facilities at her institution underscores the varied experiences among participants, highlighting that the new environment does not uniformly translate into positive PA experiences for all.

The process of identity work, as outlined in the literature (Prieur et al., 2023; Berry, 2005), involves making conscious decisions about which cultural elements to retain and which to adapt or discard. The participants' experiences reflect this ongoing re-evaluation. Samira and Noora's experiences further illustrated the challenges of cultural adaptation. Samira discussed her struggle with clothing requirements, revealing that even in a more open society like Canada, the habit of wearing a hijab during exercise, ingrained over many years, still influenced her dress style and comfort level. Despite the more open and inclusive environment in Canada, these participants struggled with internalized beliefs about modesty and propriety and preferred to retain this part of their culture.

On the other hand, Mahsa's experience working with older women who view exercise as a lifestyle choice exemplifies the positive cultural influence and the potential for learning. Her reflection on the supportive environment she encountered in Canada contrasts with the societal

limitations she faced previously in Iran, illustrating the transformational nature of cultural adaptation. Similarly, Sudeh's integration of exercise into her daily routine, facilitated by the cultural norms in Canada, reflected the dynamic process of identity work as she navigated between different cultural expectations.

In addition, Mahsa noted the emphasis on gender equality in sports, where teams must include female players for games to proceed, reflecting a societal value that encourages women's participation. Yasi also found the freedom to cycle without societal judgment, particularly empowering, a significant change from her experience in Iran, where such activities were socially restricted for women. Noora, too, felt a positive shift as she was able to engage in physical activities like biking without the fear of being judged or harassed, a freedom she did not have in her home country.

The challenges of acculturation are further compounded by the societal expectations in Canada, which, while more inclusive, still require immigrants to navigate a complex cultural landscape. As noted by Dossa (2002), although the length of time spent in the host country can facilitate the acculturation process, it does not necessarily guarantee higher levels of integration, as various other factors also come into play. This includes not only adopting new practices but also dealing with the subtle pressures to conform to dominant cultural norms. For example, while the Canadian emphasis on gender equality in sports is empowering, it can also create pressure for immigrant women to participate in ways that may not align with their comfort levels or cultural preferences (e.g., participating in mixed-gender sports or wearing form-fitting athletic clothing). Moreover, this identity work is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that evolves over time as individuals continue to interact with both their cultural heritage and the dominant culture of their new environment.

It is worth mentioning that the process of acculturation for the women in this study involved not just adapting to external factors like language and social practices, but also re-evaluating deeply held beliefs and values that influenced their behaviour (Tailakh et al., 2016). This tension between old and new cultural expectations can create a sense of displacement or conflict for some, where individuals feel caught between two worlds, struggling to reconcile their past with their present.

In sum, the process of acculturation and identity work for these research participants, immigrants in Canada, is a multifaceted and ongoing journey. As argued by Smith et al. (2019), integration outcomes may be enhanced when an immigrant develops facets of cultural capital that are valued by both the immigrant and the destination country. This negotiation is particularly evident in their PA participation, where the freedom to engage in physical activities is continually weighed against internalized cultural restrictions and societal expectations. The participants' experiences underscore the importance of understanding acculturation as a complex and individualized process, one that is deeply influenced by the interplay of cultural heritage and the norms of the host society.

5.4.1 A Bridge between 2 Cultures: The Double-Edged Sword of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to the non-economic resources individuals possess, such as education, cultural knowledge, and social skills, which can influence their social mobility and status within society (Bourdieu, 2011). For immigrants, especially those from CALD backgrounds, developing new forms of cultural capital in the host country is often essential for integration. As Erel (2010) suggests, migration can result in new modes of cultural capital production, requiring immigrants to validate their cultural capital through negotiation with the ethnic majority.

PA can play a significant role in this process. Participation in PA within mainstream settings can assist immigrants in developing facets of cultural capital that are recognized by the dominant culture. For example, Doherty and Taylor (2007) found that immigrant children in Canada who participated in mixed-ethnicity PA settings developed valuable cultural capital, such as enhanced language proficiency and increased awareness of Canadian cultural norms. This aligns with the findings of Barker-Ruchti et al. (2013), who explain that young women from immigrant backgrounds often learn to embody a form of cultural capital that is highly valued in Western society, where PA is associated with health, appearance, and social integration.

Participants in this study echoed these findings, highlighting how PA in Canada has influenced their cultural capital and integration process. Sudeh, for instance, mentioned that the widespread participation in sports in Canada, as observed by runners in her neighbourhood, encouraged her to engage in PA. This reflects the socialization into a culture where PA is seen as integral to daily life and well-being. Similarly, Hoda appreciated the positive reinforcement from her professors who encouraged her participation in PA, something that would have been met with skepticism in her home country. This support helped Hoda to integrate PA into her routine, thereby developing cultural capital that aligns with Canadian societal values.

Despite the opportunities for integration through PA, participants also faced significant barriers rooted in their cultural backgrounds and the challenges of migration. As Erel (2010) notes, different facets of cultural capital are not equally transferable across countries, and immigrants may struggle to leverage their existing cultural capital in the new environment. This was evident in Nafis and Leyla's experiences, where internalized cultural norms and body image issues hindered their ability to fully engage in PA. Nafis, for instance, struggled with maintaining

a consistent exercise routine due to the internalized belief that exercise was less important than academic achievement—a value deeply ingrained in her cultural upbringing.

Leyla's experience highlights the intersection of cultural capital with mental and physical health challenges in the context of migration. The stress of adapting to a new environment and juggling study and work responsibilities led to weight gain and a lack of motivation for PA. Leyla's reliance on walking her dog as her primary form of exercise underscores the limited ways, she was able to incorporate PA into her life, reflecting the difficulties of transferring cultural capital related to health and wellness from her home country to Canada.

The process of integrating into Canadian society often involves negotiating between maintaining one's cultural heritage and adapting to new norms. This negotiation is particularly evident in participants' discussions of cultural capital and PA. For instance, Noora and Yasi recognized the importance of PA in Canadian culture as a marker of social standing and leisure. Yasi noted that being able to include sports as part of her leisure activities was seen as positive and desirable in the Canadian context. This reflects Taylor's (2004) findings that participation in sports can be motivated by a desire to adhere to the cultural norms of the host society, even when these norms differ significantly from those of the immigrant's country of origin.

Noora's reflection on how migration influenced the behaviour and attitudes of Iranian men in Canada adds another layer to the discussion. She observed that the cultural openness of Canadian society subtly influenced how these men viewed and interacted with women, particularly in the context of PA. This suggests that the development of cultural capital through PA is not only about individual adaptation but also about how social interactions and cultural exchanges shape collective identities and behaviours.

Sana's observation that sport in Canada is suggestive of social standing further illustrates how PA can serve as a means of cultural integration. Her awareness of this cultural expectation influenced her own engagement in PA, despite the internal and external challenges she faced. This aligns with Stodolska's (1998) research, which found that middle-class immigrants often used sport as a means to acculturate to the middle-class values of the host society, viewing sport participation as a pathway to social mobility and acceptance.

However, there is also evidence that CALD immigrants cultivate forms of cultural capital in sports and PA that are acknowledged and valued by the dominant culture. Gemar's (2020) research on sports participation in Canada shows that those with higher cultural and economic capital are more likely to engage in sports, suggesting that PA can serve as a bridge to social integration for those who are able to navigate the cultural and economic barriers.

The participants' experiences underscore the complex role of cultural capital in the integration process through PA. While PA provides opportunities for developing cultural capital that aligns with the values of the host society, it also reveals the challenges and barriers that immigrants face in navigating these new cultural landscapes. The negotiation between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to new norms is an ongoing process that shapes how immigrants engage with PA and integrate into their new environment. This chapter highlighted the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural capital and its implications for immigrant integration, particularly in the context of PA. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by CALD populations, we can foster more inclusive and supportive environments that promote both physical and social well-being.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This study has provided a deeper understanding of the PA participation experiences among Iranian Muslim women graduate students in the central region of Canada, focusing on the transition from living in Islamic societies to a non-Islamic country. By utilizing an interpretive approach and focus group, this research explored how distancing from Islamic society and familial supervision has influenced these women's perspectives on PA.

This research aimed to address how family values and cultural norms from participants' Islamic countries have played a significant role in shaping their engagement in PA, both before and after immigrating to Canada. The study's findings reveal that before immigrating, the participants' engagement in PA was profoundly shaped by familial influence, particularly the support from fathers, which played a crucial role in shaping these women's attitudes and behaviours. Alongside the family's role, cultural expectations related to modesty and appropriate behaviour for women were also significant in influencing their participation in PA. These norms frequently limited their participation in mixed-gender sports and activities considered inappropriate for women. Familial support varied, with some participants receiving encouragement, particularly from family members who valued physical health or had a sports background, while others faced strict limitations due to conservative views that prioritized academic and domestic roles over PA.

After immigrating to Canada, the influence of family values and cultural norms continued to impact the participants, although the context of these influences shifted. Despite the greater opportunities for inclusive and gender-neutral PA participation in Canada, many participants still felt hesitant to engage fully in certain activities due to ingrained beliefs about modesty and gender roles. However, this transition also provided a space for some women to reassess and

gradually modify their views and practices regarding PA, as they navigated their new social and cultural environment. The study found that while internalized cultural norms remained influential, participants began to renegotiate their cultural identities and redefine their engagement with PA, often adopting more active lifestyles while balancing their cultural beliefs with the opportunities available in Canada.

Additionally, the evolution of their PA engagement is also influenced by the broader acceptance and encouragement of diverse cultural expressions in Canada. Participants noted that being in a multicultural environment where different lifestyles are more accepted has encouraged them to experiment with new forms of PA that they might not have considered previously.

The migration experience has provided these women with both challenges and opportunities to reshape their engagement with PA. Before migration, their participation in sports was heavily influenced by family, Islamic culture, and societal pressures, dictating the type and extent of PA deemed acceptable for women. Activities like walking or gender-segregated sports were commonly pursued, either due to cultural endorsement and familial encouragement or the absence of other opportunities. However, years after migration, the direct influence of these pressures has diminished, leaving behind only a shadow in the form of internalized ideas. While external pressures no longer exist, and the new environment offers opportunities rather than threats, some women still face internal barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in sports. Despite this, their strategies for PA participation in Canada increasingly reflect a blending of old norms with new societal influences, illustrating a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation.

6.1 Summary

This conclusion chapter draws together the key findings and themes explored throughout this research, providing an analysis of how PA functions as a medium for acculturation and the role of cultural capital in shaping the experiences of Iranian Muslim women immigrants in Canada. Through comprehensive interviews with 10 participants, several significant themes emerged, shedding light on the complexities of their PA participation and the various factors influencing it. Through a synthesis of the participants' narratives and existing literature, this chapter reflects on the broader implications of the findings for understanding immigrant integration, cultural adaptation, and the role of PA in these processes.

Throughout the research, it became evident that PA is not merely a form of exercise but a complex social practice that intersects with cultural identity, social norms, and the broader dynamics of power and inclusion. The experiences of the participants revealed the dual pressures of integrating into a new cultural environment while maintaining a connection to their cultural heritage. This tension was particularly pronounced in the context of PA, where the values and norms of the host society often clashed with the participants' cultural and religious beliefs.

6.1.1 The Dual Role of Familial Influence

The journey of international Muslim women students in Canada is marked by a complex interplay of familial and cultural values that profoundly influence their engagement in PA. This study aimed to explore these influences, shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by this group. The findings reveal that while PA can be a pathway for integration and personal empowerment, it is also a space where cultural identities are negotiated and, at times, contested.

One of the most significant findings of this research is the dual role that familial influence plays in shaping the PA engagement of Muslim women. On one hand, families can be a source of encouragement, providing the support and motivation needed to participate in sports and PA. This support often aligns with cultural and religious values, creating a framework within which PA is not only acceptable but also encouraged. When families actively promote PA, they help to instill a sense of importance and normalcy around engaging in sports, reinforcing the idea that such activities are compatible with their cultural and religious identity.

On the other hand, the study also found that familial influence can act as a significant barrier to PA participation. This was particularly evident in families where traditional gender roles are strongly emphasized, and where cultural norms dictate that certain activities are inappropriate for women. In such cases, the pressure to conform to these norms can be overwhelming, leading to a reluctance or inability to engage in PA. For instance, in families where the emphasis is placed on modesty and the preservation of traditional gender roles, women may feel constrained by the expectation to avoid certain activities that are deemed inappropriate or overly masculine. This can lead to internal conflicts, where the desire to engage in PA for social reasons is at odds with the need to adhere to cultural and familial expectations. The fear of judgment or disapproval from family members can further exacerbate this tension, resulting in a withdrawal from PA altogether.

Moreover, the lack of visible role models within the family who engage in PA can also contribute to a lack of motivation or confidence in pursuing such activities. When PA is not modeled or encouraged within the family setting, women may struggle to see PA as a viable or valuable part of their lifestyle. This absence of role models can create a vacuum where PA is not

prioritized or even considered, making it difficult for women to overcome the cultural barriers that discourage their participation.

However, it cannot be concluded that family encouragement for participating in PA automatically leads to quicker and easier involvement in sports for Muslim immigrant women in a new country. Instead, many factors seem to influence this process. For instance, some participants who did not receive encouragement for PA from their families throughout their lives were able to embrace sports in the new environment more readily than those who were consistently encouraged. This difference appears to be largely influenced by the conditions of migration (e.g., level of social support upon arrival, exposure to diverse communities, access to inclusive sports programs) and the individual's personality, which may have enabled them to adapt more easily to the new environment.

This duality in familial influence underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how cultural and religious values intersect with gender and PA. It also highlights the importance of family dynamics in shaping the experiences and attitudes of Muslim women towards PA. While family support can be a powerful enabler of PA participation, it is clear that other factors—such as individual resilience, the conditions of migration, and the broader societal context—also play crucial roles in determining whether Muslim immigrant women are able to engage in PA in their new environment.

6.1.2 Navigating Cultural Expectations and Gender Norms

The intersectionality of gender, culture, and PA was another critical theme that emerged from the research. The study found that gender played a significant role in shaping the participants' experiences with PA, particularly in relation to societal norms and expectations around femininity and modesty. The narratives of participants highlighted the gendered nature of

PA, where women often faced additional barriers to participation due to cultural and religious expectations. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that immigrant women, particularly those from Muslim backgrounds, often face unique challenges in accessing PA opportunities due to cultural and societal constraints (Kay, 2006; Walseth, 2006). In addition, these studies report that racialized girls and women are less likely to be involved in PA compared to their European counterparts, such as Danish women, and compared to racialized men as well (Agergaard, 2016).

Cultural expectations and gender norms are deeply embedded in the lives of international Muslim women, shaping their perceptions and experiences of PA. The study reveals that these norms often create a restrictive environment where women feel the need to navigate carefully between their desire to engage in PA and the societal expectations placed upon them. The cultural emphasis on modesty, for instance, can lead to significant challenges when it comes to participating in mixed-gender sports or activities that require specific attire.

This tension between cultural expectations and personal aspirations in a new environment is a recurring theme in the study. Many women found themselves caught between two worlds—one that encouraged them to maintain traditional values and another that offered new opportunities for personal growth and self-expression through PA. This struggle is not merely about PA but is deeply intertwined with their sense of identity and belonging. The need to balance these competing demands often led to internal conflicts, where the women needed to weigh the benefits of PA against the potential cultural repercussions.

6.1.3 The Impact of Societal Norms

The societal norms and expectations in the host country play a significant role in shaping the PA experiences of international Muslim women. In Canada, the cultural landscape around

PA is often more open and inclusive, offering new opportunities for engagement. However, this inclusivity can also bring with it slight pressure to conform to the dominant cultural practices. The expectation that everyone should participate in PA as a marker of integration and social belonging can be both empowering and challenging for Muslim women.

The study reveals that while many women appreciate the freedom and opportunities available in Canada, they also feel the weight of societal expectations that may not align with their cultural values. This can create a dilemma where they must choose between adapting to the new cultural norms or maintaining their traditional practices. The pressure to conform can lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy, particularly when their participation in PA does not match the standards set by the host society.

For some women, the pressure to engage in PA in ways that are culturally accepted in Canada can be a source of internal conflict. The expectation to dress in a manner that is typical in Western PA settings, for example, may clash with their cultural or religious beliefs about modesty. Even when they feel physically comfortable participating in PA, the pressure to conform to certain attire or behaviours can lead to feelings of discomfort or self-consciousness.

These dynamics highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of how societal norms impact PA engagement among international Muslim women. It is essential to recognize that integration does not necessarily mean assimilation and that these women should be supported in finding ways to engage in PA that are meaningful and authentic to their cultural identities.

The literature on cultural capital also sheds light on this phenomenon. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu can be used to gain social advantage. In the context of PA, the dominant culture's expectations around participation in sports can be seen as a form of cultural capital that

immigrants are expected to acquire in order to be seen as integrated or successful in their new environment.

However, acquiring this form of cultural capital is not always straightforward for Muslim women, particularly when it requires them to navigate unfamiliar or uncomfortable social norms. While PA in Canada may be more accessible in terms of infrastructure and opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that not all groups have equal access due to factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural barriers, and the lack of inclusive spaces. For Muslim women, the cultural expectations surrounding PA may still feel foreign or even incompatible with their values. This can result in a complex negotiation of identity, where women must decide how much they are willing or able to conform to the dominant culture's expectations without losing touch with their own cultural identity.

The participants' experiences highlight the ways in which these societal expectations can be both empowering and burdensome. On one hand, the encouragement to engage in PA can be seen as a positive force, offering opportunities for health, socialization, and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, the pressure to conform can lead to feelings of alienation or inadequacy when women are unable or unwilling to meet these expectations. This tension is particularly pronounced for those who come from cultures where PA is not traditionally emphasized or where it is bound by strict gender norms.

Ultimately, the study highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of PA engagement for Muslim women in Canada. It is not simply a matter of whether or not they choose to participate in sports, but how they navigate the myriad cultural, familial, and societal influences that shape their experiences. As they strive to integrate into a new society while maintaining their

cultural identity, these women must constantly negotiate the spaces where these identities overlap, creating a unique and often challenging experience of PA engagement.

6.1.4 Challenges and Opportunities for Integration Through PA

PA emerged as a central theme in this research, serving as a lens through which the broader processes of acculturation and cultural adaptation were examined. The participants' narratives revealed that PA is often positioned as a means of acculturation, where immigrants are introduced to the values and norms of the host society through sports and fitness activities. However, this process is not without its challenges. The findings of this study underscore the potential of PA as a tool for integration, but they also reveal the significant challenges that must be addressed to make this a reality for international Muslim women students. Some of their barriers to PA participation—ranging from familial restrictions and cultural norms to societal expectations—are deeply rooted and multifaceted. Overcoming these barriers requires a concerted effort to create environments that are both supportive and culturally sensitive.

One of the key opportunities for promoting PA among international Muslim women is through the development of culturally tailored programs that take into account their unique needs and concerns. These programs should offer safe and inclusive spaces where women can engage in PA without fear of judgment or cultural repercussions. By doing so, it is possible to create a more welcoming environment that encourages PA participation while respecting the cultural values of these women.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the resilience and agency of the women themselves. Despite the challenges they face, many women in the study demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating PA into their lives, finding creative ways to balance their cultural values with the opportunities available in Canada. Their experiences highlight the importance of

listening to the voices of international Muslim women and involving them in the design and implementation of PA programs.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on the intersection of migration, culture, and PA by illuminating how cultural capital and societal norms from both home and host countries shape PA participation among Muslim women. It extends our understanding of how gender roles and familial influences in Islamic societies can persist and evolve in a new cultural context, affecting individual behaviours and attitudes towards PA.

One of the key theoretical implications of this research is the application of intersectionality to enhance our understanding of the barriers to PA experienced by Muslim women. The study highlights how gender, religion, cultural background, and migration status intersect to shape the participants' experiences with PA. For instance, the participants' narratives reveal that religious and cultural norms significantly influence family expectations and societal pressures, which in turn affect their engagement in PA.

Furthermore, the study informs theoretical frameworks on acculturation and adaptation. The participants' experiences of transitioning to Canadian society reveal both challenges and opportunities in adapting to new norms around PA. The shift in PA behaviours post-migration emphasized how exposure to different cultural values and societal structures can influence individual behaviours and attitudes towards PA. This finding contributes to our understanding of how migrant populations navigate and negotiate their cultural identities in relation to physical health practices.

6.3 Practical Implications

The insights from this research have significant implications for policymakers, educators, community leaders, and health professionals seeking to promote PA among immigrant populations, particularly Muslim women. Understanding the cultural and familial dynamics that influence PA participation is crucial for designing more inclusive and supportive environments that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity.

One key implication is the development of culturally sensitive PA programs. These programs should consider the specific cultural norms regarding modesty and gender segregation, offering options like female-only fitness classes or sessions led by female instructors. Facilities should also accommodate modest attire by allowing and respecting the use of hijabs and other culturally appropriate sportswear. By aligning PA opportunities with the cultural preferences of Muslim women, these programs can enhance accessibility and encourage greater participation.

In addition to program development, community engagement and support are vital. Community centers and local health organizations can play a crucial role by fostering a supportive environment that encourages PA among immigrant Muslim women. Initiatives such as workshops or seminars tailored to the needs and concerns of Muslim women, potentially delivered by peers from similar cultural backgrounds, can help normalize PA participation and reduce stigma or misconceptions associated with women's involvement in sports within certain cultural contexts.

Policy advocacy also plays a critical role in promoting inclusive environments. Policymakers should consider the unique needs of immigrant Muslim women in their public health strategies. This could include advocating for equitable access to sports facilities, funding programs that address the specific needs of immigrant women, and developing community-based

initiatives aimed at reducing gender and cultural disparities in PA. Inclusive policies can lead to the creation of public spaces and recreational facilities that are accessible to all, regardless of cultural background.

Furthermore, the importance of training and education for health and PA professionals cannot be overstated. Training programs should incorporate cultural competence, emphasizing the importance of understanding and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of participants. Educators and trainers who are culturally aware can better support Muslim women in finding comfortable and enjoyable ways to engage in sports and fitness. This training also equips professionals to advocate for culturally responsive practices within their organizations.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study on PA participation among Iranian Muslim women in the central region of Canada provide a foundation for further exploration and deeper understanding of this topic. Several areas for future research have emerged that could further enhance knowledge in this field, address existing gaps, and contribute to more effective interventions.

Here are some recommendations for future research:

6.4.1 Intersectional Discussion

Future research should employ intersectional discussion to better understand how various intersecting identities, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, and immigration status, collectively influence PA participation among international Muslim women.

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals do not experience their identities in isolation but rather as interconnected by mutually shaping systems of oppression or privilege. By examining the interplay of these factors, researchers can uncover nuanced insights into the barriers and facilitators of PA participation. This approach would allow for the development of more

inclusive interventions that address the unique needs of diverse subgroups within the international Muslim women population.

6.4.2 Longitudinal Studies

Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies that track changes in PA behaviour over time among Muslim women immigrants. Such studies would provide insights into how acculturation processes affect PA participation as these women adjust to their new environment over longer periods. Understanding the dynamics of change could help in designing interventions that are responsive to the evolving needs of this population as they navigate through various stages of cultural adaptation.

6.4.3 Comparative Studies Across Different Immigrant Groups

Comparing the experiences of Muslim women with those of other immigrant groups can provide a broader perspective on the commonalities and differences in barriers and facilitators to PA. Such comparative studies could reveal whether the challenges faced by Muslim women are unique to their cultural and religious backgrounds or are part of a broader immigrant experience. This research could also extend to comparing Muslim women in different non-Islamic countries to understand how different national contexts influence their PA participation.

6.4.4 Exploration of Socioeconomic Factors

Future studies should also consider the impact of socioeconomic factors on PA participation among immigrant Muslim women. Research could explore how variables such as education level, employment status, and economic security influence their ability to engage in PA. This approach would help to disentangle the effects of cultural and religious factors from socioeconomic influences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators to PA.

6.4.5 Qualitative Insights from Family Members

Incorporating perspectives from family members of Muslim women could enrich the understanding of the familial and cultural dynamics influencing PA participation. Qualitative research that includes interviews with spouses, parents, or children could provide additional insights into the family dynamics and social norms that shape women's behaviour regarding PA.

6.4.6 Broader Cultural and Religious Contexts

Further research could also explore the diversity within the Muslim community itself, such as differences in PA participation among women from various cultural backgrounds and sects within Islam. This would acknowledge the heterogeneity of the Muslim population and provide a more nuanced view of how intersecting cultural and religious identities impact PA participation.

6.4.7 How Self-views and Self-policing Are Enacted in New Cultures

Studies could investigate how individuals' self-perceptions and internalized cultural norms influence their behaviour and participation in physical activity in a new cultural context. This research could examine how self-policing—conscious or unconscious self-regulation based on cultural expectations—shapes their engagement in PA and how this process changes over time in different sociocultural settings.

6.4.8 Meanings of Space, Freedom, and Access Influence PA Engagement and Experience

Research could explore how individuals interpret and navigate physical spaces (e.g., public parks, gyms) and how perceptions of personal freedom and accessibility affect their PA engagement. This might include understanding how environmental factors such as safety, inclusivity, and cultural appropriateness of spaces shape the experiences of immigrants, particularly women, in physical activity settings.

6.4.9 How Spousal Impacts in a New Culture Play Roles After Immigration

Future studies could investigate the influence of spouses in shaping PA participation in a new culture. This could include examining how spousal attitudes, support, or constraints affect individual decisions to engage in PA, particularly in the context of traditional family roles and expectations. The research might also focus on how these dynamics shift as couples acculturate to a new environment.

These recommendations aim to expand the scope of research on PA among Muslim women in non-Islamic countries, enhancing understanding and informing the development of targeted and effective health promotion strategies. Through these future research efforts, scholars and practitioners can better address the intricate relationship of cultural, familial, and individual factors that influence PA among immigrant populations.

6.5 Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of Muslim women regarding PA participation, several limitations should be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

The study's credibility could be compromised by the fact that only one researcher analyzed the data. Burla et al. (2008) suggest that collaborating with multiple researchers who offer diverse perspectives can enhance credibility in the interpretive qualitative research paradigm. Additionally, having participants provide feedback on the generated themes could further strengthen the study's authenticity and ensure that their experiences are accurately represented.

Additionally, the study had a relatively small group of participants (n=10), which presented a challenge to its transferability. Transferability argues for providing detailed information about the research through thick descriptions. A larger group of participants or prolonged engagement with participants enables researchers to witness a wide range of participants' activities taking place in the study context. This prolonged engagement gives researchers a great opportunity to observe participants in their environment, learn their language, and gain a better understanding of their norms, facilitating a better interpretation of meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thick descriptions would enhance comprehensive insight, which was lacking here due to the nature of this research. While qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, future studies with larger and more diverse participants could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing PA participation among Muslim women across different cultural, social, and geographic contexts.

Another limitation was recruitment since the participants had to meet several specific criteria. While finding international Muslim women students from University A and University B might seem straightforward, meeting all other requirements posed a significant challenge. To participate in the study, individuals needed to:

Identify as Iranian international Muslim women students, be women, be Muslim, be international students at either University A or B, whose first spoken language is Farsi, live in Canada without their parents, and have lived in Canada for at least two years.

These stringent criteria significantly narrowed the pool of potential participants. For example, the requirement for participants whose first spoken language is Farsi and who have lived without their parents for at least two years added layers of complexity to the recruitment

process. This specificity aimed to ensure a more homogenous group for the study but also made it difficult to find eligible participants who met all the necessary conditions.

Lastly, while focus groups offer advantages such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness, however, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations associated with gathering data through focus groups. One limitation was the potential for social desirability bias, wherein participants might alter or censor their responses due to a desire to conform to societal norms or present themselves in a favourable light (Morgan, 2002). This could impact the authenticity and depth of the data collected. Additionally, the dynamics within the focus group itself influenced participants' responses, as dominant individuals in some cases, steer the discussion or overshadow quieter participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

In conclusion, while this study contributes valuable insights into the complexities of PA participation among Muslim women, researchers should remain mindful of its limitations and strive to address them in future research endeavours to advance knowledge and inform evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting health and well-being in diverse populations.

6.6 Conclusion

Through in-depth interviews with 10 participants, significant themes emerged, shedding light on the barriers, facilitators, and nuances shaping their PA behaviours and perceptions. The journey of Iranian international Muslim women students in the central region of Canada highlights the dual role of familial influence in shaping their engagement in PA. On one hand, families can serve as powerful motivators, providing the support and encouragement necessary to pursue sports and PA. This positive reinforcement, often grounded in cultural and religious values, creates an environment where PA is seen as not only acceptable but also integral to their identity. On the other hand, familial influence can also act as a significant barrier, especially in

contexts where traditional gender roles and cultural norms impose restrictions on women's participation in certain activities. The pressure to conform to these expectations can lead to internal conflicts, where the desire for physical engagement is at odds with the need to adhere to cultural and familial expectations. This duality underscores the complex interplay of cultural and familial dynamics in the lives of Muslim women, making it clear that PA participation is influenced by a multitude of factors beyond mere encouragement or resistance from family members.

The study also reveals the broader societal and cultural challenges that Muslim women face in navigating their participation in PA. The expectations and norms in a host country, such as Canada, often present both opportunities and pressures. While the open and inclusive environment may offer new avenues for engagement, it also brings with it the subtle pressures to conform to dominant cultural practices that may not align with their cultural values. This creates a tension between the desire to integrate and the need to maintain cultural identity, leading to a complex negotiation of self-expression and societal expectations. The participants' experiences highlight the importance of developing culturally sensitive and supportive environments that allow them to engage in PA in ways that are authentic to their identities. This conclusion emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by international Muslim women in PA participation and the critical role of supportive structures in fostering their engagement and integration.

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PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

MASTER'S THESIS



Exploring the Impact of Familial and Cultural Values on Physical Activity Engagement Among International Muslim Women Students in Canada

We would like to hear about your experiences participating in physical activities.

ARE YOU:

- Muslim woman?
- §
- International Student?
- §
- Native Farsi speaker?
- §
- Living here without your parents?
- §
- Living in Canada for more than 2 years?
- §
- Currently studying at the University of Manitoba or the University of Winnipeg.



WE NEED YOU FOR 1 SESSION FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

90 TO 120 MINUTES

At Qualitative Research Lab in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management.

University of Manitoba

All information you provide to us will be kept confidential

Interested? Question?

Contact researcher, Sara,
Graduate Student, University of Manitoba,
shirazis@myumanitoba.ca

or

Professor Jay Johnson, University of Manitoba,
jay.johnson@umanitoba.ca

**\$15
e-mail
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UM

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

Appendix B – Sharing the Poster on the University of Manitoba Iranian Students’ Association (UMISA)

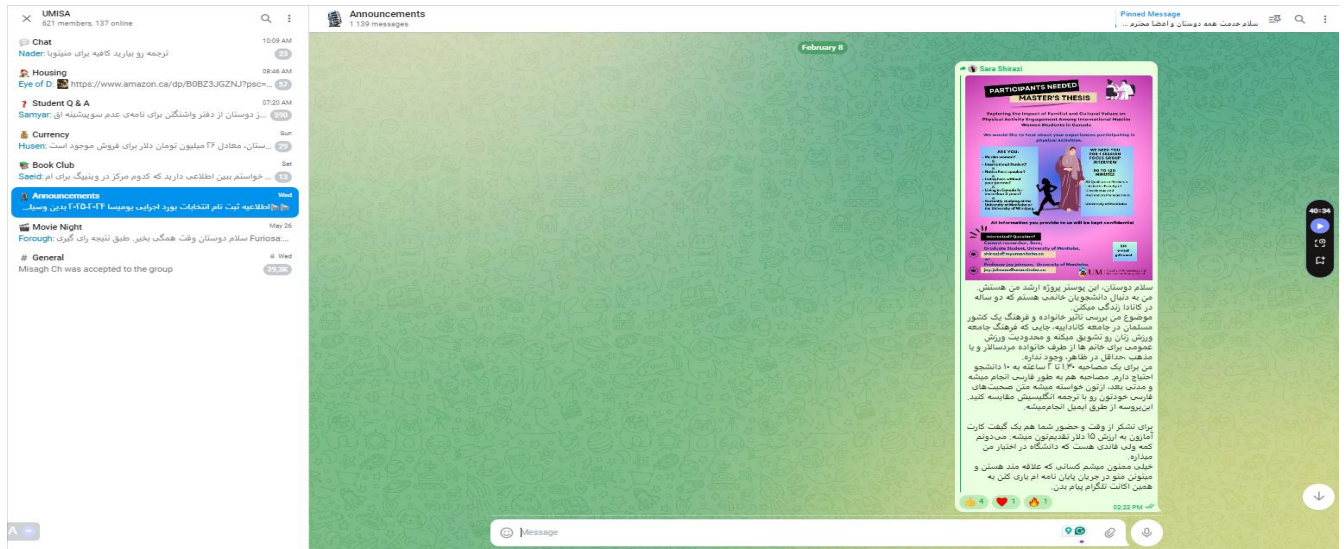


Figure 1-Screenshot from Windows



Figure 2-Screenshot from cellphone

Appendix C – Focus Group Guide

Exploring the Impact of Familial and Cultural Values on Physical Activity Engagement

Among International Muslim Women Students in Canada

Research Questions:

1. How have family values and cultural norms from participants' Islamic countries influenced international Muslim women students' engagement in physical activities before and after immigrating to Canada?
2. In what ways do family values and Islamic cultural influences shape the current participation in physical activities among individuals who have moved to Canada, and how have their strategies for engaging in physical activity evolved due to cultural and societal transitions?

Past Experiences:

- How did you engage in physical activity before coming to Canada, and how were family and cultural values reflected in your participation?
- What were some of the challenges or limitations you faced in engaging in physical activities due to your cultural background and family influences? Additionally, what opportunities did you find within your community or environment that supported your participation in physical activities?

Present Experiences:

- How has your engagement in physical activity changed since you arrived in Canada? Can you elaborate on any differences you've noticed?
- In what ways have your family values and Islamic cultural influences shaped your participation in physical activities in Canada?

Strategies

- Could you discuss any barriers and opportunities you've encountered in terms of physical activity since moving to Canada?
- How have your strategies for engaging in physical activity changed after transitioning to a new cultural and societal environment?
- Considering the factors that impact your physical activity, what adjustments have you made to incorporate your family values and Islamic culture?

Generic Probes:

- Can you tell me about the type of physical activity you enjoy?
- What are the significant differences between Islamic culture and Canadian culture concerning participation in physical activities?
- How could you envision yourself engaging in physical activity ten years from now?
- Are there any additional aspects related to your physical activity experiences, either in your home country or in Canada, that you'd like to share?

Appendix D - Consent Form



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Research Information and Consent Form

Research Project Title: Exploring the Impact of Familial and Cultural Values on Physical Activity Engagement Among International Muslim Women Students in Canada

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University of Manitoba

Research Supervisor: Professor Jay Johnson,
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University of Manitoba,

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the experiences and perspectives of physical activity participation among international Muslim women students studying in Canada, living away from their families. Specifically, this study investigates how distancing from Islamic society and Muslim familial supervision can affect their perspectives on physical activity participation within Canadian cultures and systems, compared to their experiences before immigrating to Canada.

This research aims to provide new insights into the perceptions of international Muslim women students studying in Canada regarding their participation in physical activity in a non-Islamic society.

Overall, the study aims to shed light on the complex interplay of culture, religion, family, and societal context in shaping international Muslim women's experiences of physical activity.

Valid Participants

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are recognizing yourself as an international Muslim woman student.

You should not participate in this study if you do not meet all the requirements.

You cannot participate in this study if:

- You are not a woman.
- You are not Muslim.
- You are not an international student at the University of Manitoba or University of Winnipeg
- You are not a native Farsi speaker.
- You are not living here without your parents.
- You have not lived in Canada for at least two years.

A total of 15 participants will be asked to participate.

Study Procedures

The data collection method for this study will involve in-person focus group. Focus groups are group discussions with individuals who possess knowledge about the topic under discussion. These sessions serve as a means to gather insights and ideas about a specific subject.

Each focus group will consist of five participants. Participation in the study will involve a single session, lasting approximately 90 to 120 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in the interview room at the Qualitative Research Lab, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, University of Manitoba.

To schedule the interviews at a convenient time, a doodle poll containing various dates and times will be shared with you. Once a mutually convenient time is identified through the poll, the researcher will contact you individually to confirm the exact date and time for your interview, which will involve you and four other participants.

The researcher will act as the facilitator during the interview, posing open-ended questions and guiding the discussion. No additional individuals will be present, and only the researcher will be responsible for note-taking.

You will be asked questions related to your experiences with participating in physical activity both in your home country and in Canada. These questions aim to enhance our understanding of the opportunities and barriers Muslim women face when engaging in physical activity in non-Islamic societies. The findings from this study could inform policies and interventions aimed at increasing Muslim women's participation in physical activity.

It is important to note that you will be responding to questions in your native language, Farsi, which is also my first language. All interviews will be audio-recorded with your consent, and

verbatim transcriptions will be made following each interview. I will then translate the transcriptions from Farsi to English.

To ensure the accuracy of translations, a Ph.D. student studying Linguistics at the University of Manitoba will review all transcriptions and translated interviews (All of these data are coded by alias). The researcher will share the transcribed data with each participant via email to verify its accuracy. Participants will be asked to check the accuracy of their answer transcriptions within two weeks to review their transcripts and translations. If a participant does not respond or provide feedback within this timeframe, it will be assumed that they have reviewed their data and are satisfied with its accuracy.

If you require one-on-one follow-up interviews, the researcher will conduct you either in person or online, offering a more private setting for sharing additional stories or experiences.

The research findings will be utilized for the researcher's thesis. This thesis will be a comprehensive document that provides an in-depth analysis of the research outcomes and their implications.

The intended purpose of disseminating the research results also is to contribute to knowledge, raise awareness, and practices, or interventions related to the research topic. The dissemination process aims to reach relevant stakeholders, including academic communities, practitioners, community groups, and the participants themselves, with the goal of promoting understanding, facilitating positive change, and generating further dialogue and collaboration in the field of Muslim women participating in physical activity.

A concise and easily understandable summary of the research results will be prepared and will be sent via email to the participants. This summary will highlight the study's key findings, themes,

and implications. Participants will be informed of the approximate timeline (April 2024) within which they can expect to receive the summary.

Finally, once the thesis is defended, the final results will be shared with all participants.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated physical risks to participants. However, you may experience:

1. **Emotional Risks:** Since Muslim women will be conversing in a group, you may experience emotional discomfort or disclosure of personal experiences that could lead to distress. To mitigate these risks, the researcher will create a supportive and respectful environment where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves. The researcher will exercise empathy, active listening, and sensitivity to participants' emotions.
2. **Risk of Breaching Confidentiality:** A potential risk might exist if information about you is discussed outside the group by other participants and is traced back to you. Maintaining confidentiality is crucial to protect participants' privacy and sensitive information. Steps will be taken to mitigate this risk by obtaining informed consent, explaining the importance of confidentiality, and emphasizing the need to respect the privacy of others within the group. Anonymization techniques, such as using pseudonyms, will be employed during data analysis and reporting to ensure participant identities remain confidential. If this is a potential issue for you, you are encouraged to ask for an individual interview with the researcher.

Costs and Benefits:

There are no fees or charges to participate in this study. You will receive a \$15 e-mail gift card from Amazon.ca to thank you for your time. It serves as a token of appreciation for your time and contribution. You will receive compensation upon attending the focus group session and carefully reviewing all Farsi and English interview transcripts, confirming their accuracy. So, you can expect to receive compensation via email ten days after your confirmation. If a participant withdraws after completing the focus group interview, she will be compensated. However, if withdrawal occurs before the focus group session begins, i.e., by contacting the researcher expressing willingness to participate but not starting the focus group interview, no compensation will be provided.

Confidentiality

At the beginning of the session, everyone will be reminded to respect the privacy of other group members. Participants will be instructed not to disclose any information shared within the context of the discussion. However, it is important to acknowledge that other group members may not uphold complete confidentiality. To protect anonymity, no names will be requested or revealed during the focus groups. In the interview when another participant addresses you by name, the researcher will remove all names from the transcription.

A list of names and personal information of participants will be held in a secure file in a locker in the interview room located within the Qualitative Research Lab of the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at the University of Manitoba. If the results of this study are presented in a meeting or published, nobody will be able to tell that you were in the study. Please note that although you will not be identified as the speaker, your words may be used to highlight a specific point. The collection and access to personal information will be in compliance with provincial and federal privacy legislation.

Audiotapes of the group discussion will be typed and used to prepare a report. The audiotapes and typed notes will be kept for three years until November 2027, in a secure, locked file cabinet in the Qualitative Research Lab. Only the researcher and her supervisor can access them and know your name.

Some data and information from this study may be sent outside of the University of Manitoba to other researchers, and organizations, or made publicly available. This is for further analysis, testing, or as part of the research study. All of these people have a professional responsibility to protect your privacy.

These people or groups are:

- The Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba which is responsible for the protection of people in research and has reviewed this study for ethical acceptability.
- Quality Assurance Staff of the University of Manitoba
- The researcher's advisor, Professor Jay Johnson, faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, University of Manitoba.
- The research committee member, Dr. Kyoung June Yi, Department of Kinesiology Faculty of Science, University of McMaster, will have access to directly identifiable data and anonymized data.
- Atieh Amini, PhD student at the Linguistic Department, University of Manitoba will have access to anonymized data.

All participants' answers will be stored on the University of Manitoba OneDrive, and confidentiality will be protected by a password. If any of your research records need to be copied

to any of the above, your name and all identifying information will be removed. No information revealing any personal information such as your name, address, or telephone number will be left.

Participants in this research study will have the opportunity to maintain their anonymity throughout the study. Your identity will be protected by assigning you an alias name, ensuring confidentiality. All data such as all personal information, anonymized data, audio tapes, and typed notes will be destroyed by my supervisor in November 2027.

Permission to Quote:

The researcher may wish to quote your words directly in reports and publications. With regards to being quoted, please check for the following statements:

I agree to be quoted directly if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used. *	
I do not agree to be quoted directly under any circumstances.	

* An example of a pseudonym quotation:

Real Name: Zahra Rahman

Pseudonym Convention: Noor

Participants Rights

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, and we will stop the study immediately if you withdraw from it at any time.

If you choose to take part and later change your mind, you can stop your participation at any time. A decision to stop the study will not affect the confidentiality of your data. Also, you will not be asked why you withdraw, and all your data will be shredded or erased upon withdrawal.

Procedures for participants who wish to withdraw at any point during the study will prioritize respecting their decision and ensuring their data is handled appropriately. If you decide to withdraw at any point during the study, the following procedures will be followed:

If the withdrawal occurs during a focus group session, you will be allowed to leave the session immediately.

If you decide to withdraw from the research after the interview session, you can communicate your decision to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher or her supervisor. You can do so through PI or her supervisor's email or phone. The final opportunity for withdrawal occurs within 30 days after participants review their transcribed original responses and their corresponding translations (Feb 2024). Upon receiving the withdrawal request, all raw data and identifiable information (e.g., Personal Information Form and Consent Form) related to you will be immediately and securely erased or shredded. Also, the will commit to isolating and erasing your voice recording from others and erase it and your contributions will be removed from the final transcripts.

The researcher, at any time and for any reason, may stop your participation even though you might want to continue. This might happen if you are not showing active participation in the interview or do not cooperate with the researcher. The researcher will explain the reason why you must stop.

Consent Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

1. I have read all 5 pages of the consent form.
2. I have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.
3. I understand that by signing this consent form I have not waived any of my legal rights as a participant in this study.
4. I understand that my records, which may include identifying information, may be reviewed by the research staff working with the Principal Investigator and the agencies and organizations listed in the Confidentiality section of this document.
5. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and my data may be withdrawn prior to publication.
6. I understand I will be provided with a copy of the consent form for my records.

7. I agree to participate in the study.

Participant signature _____ **Date** _____

(day/month/year)

Participant printed name: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ **Date** _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix E - Personal Information Form



Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation
Management
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2, Canada
kinrec@umanitoba.ca
Tel: 204-474-9747

Personal Information Form

Last name:

First name:

Your age:

Gender:

Religion:

Marital Status:

Single Married Divorced Not Prefer to Say

Country of Origin:

Duration of Stay in Canada:Years months

Education Institute:

First Languages:

Your English Level:

Proficient Advanced Upper-Intermediate Intermediate Pre-intermediate

Moving to Canada:

Alone With parent(s) With sibling(s) With Husband

Now living in Winnipeg:

Alone With parent(s) With sibling(s) With Husband

Contact Information

Email Address:

Phone Number (Optional):

Preferred Method of Contact:

Thank you for providing this information. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Your personal information will be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of this research study. This form will be stored on the University of Manitoba OneDrive of the researcher's Outlook email and will be accessible only to me and my supervisor. After the study is completed, the data will be transferred to a memory stick, and all files will be deleted from my laptop and OneDrive. The memory stick will be handed over to my supervisor, and all data will be destroyed after 3 years (October 2027).

If you have any concerns, please contact the researcher (Sara) or her supervisor.

Sara Shirazi (she, her)

Graduate Student

Faculty for Kinesiology and Recreation Management

University of Manitoba

Dr. Jay Johnson (he, lui),

113 Frank Kennedy Centre

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

University of Manitoba

Table 1 Characteristics of University A and University B

University	The University Name	Location
University A	The University of Manitoba	Winnipeg, Manitoba
University B	The University of Winnipeg	Winnipeg, Manitoba

Table 2 Detailed Participant Demographic Survey

Participant (pseudonym)	Age	Religion	Country of Origin	Martial Status	Duration of Stay in Canada	Education Institute	Level of Study
Mahsa	30	Islam	Iran	Single	2 Years 1 month	U of M	Master
Samira	27	Islam	Iran	Single	2 Years 9 months	U of M	Master
Nafis	33	Islam	Iran	Married	2 Years 1 month	U of M	PhD
Hoda	32	Islam	Iran	Single	2 Years 6 months	U of M	Master
Noora	30	Islam	Iran	Single	2 Years 5 months	U of W	Master
Sana	36	Islam	Iran	Married	2 Years 2 months	U of W	Master
Yasi	35	Islam	Iran	Married	2 Years 4 months	U of M	PhD
Sudeh	28	Islam	Iran	Married	3 Years 3 months	U of M	Master
Sofia	38	Islam	Iran	Married	2 Years 4 months	U of M	Master
Leyla	36	Islam	Iran	Single	2 Years 6 months	U of M	PhD