Capturing the Shadow and Light of Researcher Positionality: A Picture-Prompted Poly-Ethnography

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Abstract
Acknowledging researcher positionality and engaging in ongoing reflexivity are important components of qualitative research. In this manuscript, we share our experiences of examining our positionality and engaging in reflexive practice related to a research project with newcomer women in Canada. As a team of researchers from diverse backgrounds, we engaged in a picture-prompted poly-ethnographic conversation to better understand our attitudes, assumptions, and biases in relation to the topic of our research and gain a better understanding of what were asking of participants. Using thematic analysis, we uncovered four themes: 1) researchers bring multiple identities, 2) researchers bring privilege/power, 3) understanding what we call home, and 4) walking in participants’ shoes. We discuss these themes in detail, highlighting their implications for reflexive research with newcomer communities.

Keywords
researcher positionality, reflexivity, poly-ethnography, qualitative research, newcomer women

Acknowledging individual and/or research team positionality at the onset of a research project has been a longstanding practice in qualitative traditions of inquiry (Bourke, 2014). The degree to which researchers acknowledge this position differs depending on the specific method of inquiry and the epistemological stance being utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2015). Multiple viewpoints on the usefulness of researcher positionality have been articulated, with some researchers appealing for a more removed stance (e.g., through bracketing personal assumptions and experience; Giorgi, 2012), while others maintain that researchers are inseparable from the investigations they conduct (Moules et al., 2017). Although practiced from a variety of perspectives within qualitative research, positionality has played a central role in feminist research since its inception (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

In line with this epistemological stance, in this paper, we review our research team’s process for examining our positionality and engaging in reflexivity related to an arts-based qualitative research project with newcomer women in Canada. As a team of researchers with diverse identities and professional backgrounds, we engaged in a picture-promted conversation about our positionality to this research project using a poly-ethnography approach (Arthur et al., 2017), which is a broadening of the duo-ethnographic approach (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

The goal of this conversation was twofold: First, we sought to explore the diverse personal connections of team members to the research process. Second, we sought to better understand the process of engaging in arts-based research from the perspective of our participants. To illustrate our reflexivity, we begin with a brief discussion of the role of research positionality in feminist research. Next, we provide an overview of our research project with newcomer women in Canada as the context for this reflective dialogue. We then describe the means by which we engaged in our poly-ethnographic conversation.
Finally, we present our findings and discussion, and conclude with some reflections on the reflexivity process.

**Researcher Positionality**

Feminist scholars believed that research cannot be objective or value-free and that concepts including subjectivity, personal experience, emotions, and worldview are important to consider throughout the research process (Worell & Remer, 2003). Rather than trying to eradicate life experience or superficially distance oneself from either the research topic or process, we align with the position that acknowledging connections to the phenomenon being investigated is an asset in qualitative research (McHugh, 2014). Exploring personal connections is especially important for acknowledging the influences of social location and social status, especially for researchers who seek to better understand “issues of social justice and action for change” (Trussell, 2014, p. 344).

As such, it is critical for researchers to reflect on one’s own multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations throughout the research process. Using an inclusive definition of culture (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016), this assumes that each researcher has the responsibility to examine the factors that play a salient role in their lives to determine how they may interact with the research being conducted. This includes, but is not limited, to cultural identities and social locations such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, status in country, Indigenous heritage, religion, spirituality, social class, as well as physical and mental abilities and disabilities. Beyond identifying the factors that are important to any given researcher, it is also necessary to consider the socio-political systems in which those multiple and intersecting identities and locations are nested (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). It is those systems that maintain power and privilege (or a lack thereof) for many; hence it is important to consider the personal biases one may hold due to their privileged identities and locations along with the systems that affords one that institutional power (David & Derthick, 2017). In this way, researchers are not immune to societal and structural influences on topics selected for research, nor to power and privilege that pervades enactment of research processes.

In addition to acknowledging one’s personal and professional positionality, researchers are invited to also engage in reflexivity, or an ongoing process of critically examining beliefs and assumptions related to the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 2012; Gorelick, 1991). This is especially important, given that one’s positionality can change as research progresses. This process can be complex and uncomfortable, due to uncovering personal biases, and requires constant attention by individual researchers (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002). Further complications and difficulties may arise in attempts at reflexivity, given that there is a lack of established procedures (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). Challenges may also arise due to the subjective positions within a diverse research team. Each member of a research team provides an “intellectual autobiography” (Moules et al., 2017; Stanley & Wise, 1993) regarding their interest in, and relationship to, the phenomenon being examined as well as to the research participants. From this perspective, each team member’s positionality is important to consider throughout the duration of the research process, as they are each personally connected to the research in different ways. It is prudent to remember that connections to research topics and/or processes may be associated with perceived levels of personal or professional power and a sense of relative ownership or authority.

Researchers who use arts-based qualitative methods have described how such approaches can challenge researcher positionality (Becker, 2019; Koski, 2019). In their book on arts-based educational research, Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) outline instructions for a reflective arts-based activity to better understand researcher positionality, whereby the reader takes photographs of their everyday life and is guided through a reflection process. However, to our knowledge, no published research exists on the outcomes of using arts-based qualitative methods to explore researcher positionality. As discussed above, our research team engaged in a similar process, using a poly-ethnography approach (Arthur et al., 2017). To provide the reader with adequate context to understand this reflexive process, we offer some information on the literature and methodology that guided our study with newcomer women in Canada.

**Broader Research Context**

Prior to the commencement of a research project with newcomer women in Canada, our team believed it was important to consider how to ethically engage in research with a group that has often been considered to be vulnerable (Birman, 2006; Hernández et al., 2013). Furthermore, we wanted to know how an Arts-Based Engagement Ethnography (ABEE) approach to our research would influence the research process with this community (Kassan et al., 2019). We felt that by putting ourselves “in the shoes” of participants and engaging in a process similar to what we would be asking of them, we could examine these ethical considerations from a more informed perspective. As such, we engaged in a picture-prompted poly-ethnographic conversation, as a parallel to the ABEE that would guide our research with newcomer women. In essence, we sought to explore our positionality about the topic to better understand the multiple lenses that would subsequently inform our research relationships and processes.

**Experiences of Newcomer Women**

In Canada, individuals who have recently migrated to a new country are considered to be newcomers, and this may include immigrants, refugees, and international students. “Recent” newcomers are defined, by the Government of Canada, as individuals who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years (Immigrants, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2018). Newcomers to Canada typically contend with an array of experiences and
concerns that span multiple domains, including transitions with respect to education and employment, language barriers, and discrimination and racism, among others (Bierman et al., 2009; Kennedy & Chen, 2012; Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2018). Newcomers are challenged to navigate their cultural beliefs and values with different ways of living in a new country (Choudhry, 2001; Dixon & Arthur, 2019). Pre- and post-migration experiences often involve a myriad of emotional, economic, and cultural stressors that have been associated with negative outcomes for women newcomers and particularly for refugee women (Arthur, 2015; Holliday et al., 2019; Shishehgar et al., 2017).

An important transition for newcomer women includes their subjective, lived-in experiences of their bodies in the world—a concept known as embodiment (Piran & Teall, 2012). Although embodiment research specifically with newcomer women is limited, an emerging body of work has associated positive embodiment with a range of measures of wellbeing, including self-esteem and life satisfaction (Piran, 2019). Several scholars have called for increased attention on newcomer women’s embodiment to promote a broader perspective of newcomer women’s health and wellbeing (Silvey, 2005; Spitzer, 2011).

While research pertaining to the experiences of newcomer women in Canada is not scarce (Sinacore et al., 2015), this scholarship is historically quantitative in nature and dominated by empiricist-positivist approaches (Iosifides, 2011). Over the past 15 years, qualitative methods have been applied more broadly to migration research, accounting for the complexities of the many phenomena related to migration (Yalaz & Zapata-Berro, 2018). However, qualitative research that explores embodiment specifically with newcomer women has received limited academic attention. Thus, it is unclear how to explore this concept in a culturally sensitive way in a Canadian context. Accordingly, our broader research project was guided by the following research questions: 1) How do participants experience being a newcomer woman in Canada? and 2) How do participants experience embodiment and disembodiment? To address these questions, nine newcomer women participated in an arts-based engagement ethnography (ABEE: Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2020), sharing their everyday experiences of migration and embodiment in Canada. Our reflexivity process, which will be described in greater detail below, took place prior to engagement with participants to prepare us to conduct our research in a culturally sensitive manner. Our poly-ethnographic conversation paralleled some of the initial components of ABEE.

**Arts-Based Engagement Ethnography**

As mentioned above, ABEE (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2020) was employed in our main study with newcomer women with the goal of capturing newcomer women’s experiences of migration and embodiment in Canada. This innovative, multi-modal research design aims to provide rich, multi-layered data from participants in a relatively short period of time. Ethnographic research, with its roots in cultural anthropology, aims to understand the social and cultural meanings of a phenomenon in order to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within a specific group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; O’Reilly, 2004). Researchers across the fields of education, public health, nursing, and business have employed various types of ethnographic methods to study complex processes and experiences (Hall et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2000). ABEE was designed to maximize the full engagement of newcomer communities in the research process through the use of creative methods of inquiry that provide participants with multiple ways to express abstract concepts related to the self and embodiment. Moreover, creative ways of eliciting data that involve visual and artistic materials have been shown to help individuals who have undergone life challenges engage in meaningful conversations (Böök & Mykkänen, 2014; Rousseau & Heusch, 2000; Rousseau et al., 2005).

In line with ABEE procedures (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2020), newcomer women shared their in-depth experiences of migration and embodiment through two distinct, but related phases: 1) use of cultural probes and associated individual qualitative interviews, and 2) focus groups. Cultural probes are sets of simple items (e.g., cameras, postcards) that are given to participants to assist them in recording specific events, feelings, or interactions in their everyday environments. They are distributed to participants to use as they see fit and help researchers to get to know them better. The cultural probes that were used in this study included a satchel bag, journal, maps, and a digital camera. Participants were asked to use these items to document their experiences of migration and embodiment in Canada. Participants then had an opportunity to share the contents of their cultural probes through individual qualitative interviews as well as a series of two focus groups. This lengthy period of data collection, where in-depth, multi-modal experiences where captured, has been shown to be valuable when prolonged periods of observation in the field are not possible or inappropriate (Wall, 2015). For our reflexivity process, we used our own cameras to create probes for our discussion, described below.

**Reflexive Process**

**Feminist Epistemology**

We engaged in this research through a feminist lens; that is, we sought to design a study that emphasized local, contextual knowledge production, deconstructed power dynamics, and stressed researcher reflexivity (Del Busso, 2007; Wheatley, 1994). More specifically, our work was rooted in feminist multicultural theory, which allowed for a broad and inclusive conceptualization of women’s cultural identities and social locations (Nakamura & Kassan, 2013). Through this lens, we recognize newcomer women’s multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social location that include not only race and ethnicity, but also, for example, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, social class, and physical and mental
Table 1. Brief Description of our Research Team.

| Team Member | Brief Biography |
|-------------|-----------------|
| AK          | I am a bi-racial, cisgender, heterosexual woman. I am a second-generation newcomer to Canada and grew up in a bilingual, multi-faith household. I am a mid-career professional and my program of research centers primarily on migration. |
| SN          | I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual, and large-bodied woman. At the time of this reflective discussion, I was a doctoral student and am currently a postdoctoral scholar, with research that focuses on weight stigma. |
| NA          | I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, woman, with roots in a rural community but lived in an urban Canadian setting during adulthood. I have recently experienced migration as a permanent resident of Australia. My research focuses on career development and international transitions of students and workers. |
| AG          | I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman, and doctoral student in Counseling Psychology. After living in Germany for 2 years as a non-permanent resident, I became interested in embodiment in the context of migration as a research topic. As such, my dissertation research used ABEE to explore embodiment among racialized newcomer women in Canada, comprising part of the research discussed in the current paper. |
| SRM         | I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman. I am a late mid-career professional and my program of research focuses on weight-related issues. |
| MSV         | I am a Mexican Mestiza passing White, cisgender and abled woman. I am an immigrant in Canada, on work permit, hoping to have the opportunity to be a permanent resident one day. My professional activities in education, counseling, and research support and focus on immigrant and refugees' well-being in Canada. |

Note. These brief descriptions represent some of the cultural identities and social locations that we hold, and we recognize that there are many additional aspects of our worldviews that influence the research process.

ability (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). Moreover, we attempted to remain attuned to the systemic barriers and challenges facing newcomer women, while also acknowledging their diverse strengths and resiliencies (Chung et al., 2008).

Poly-Ethnography

Prior to participant recruitment, we engaged as a research team in a process of reflexivity through a picture-prompted poly-ethnographic conversation (Arthur et al., 2017). We did so in order to better understand our individual and collective attitudes, assumptions, and biases in relation to the research topic and gain a sense of the procedures we would ask of our participants to engage in through our study. Poly-ethnography represents an extension of duo-ethnography (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013), which was developed to invite researchers into critical conversations, constructing dialogic transactions that illuminate and problematize topics of study, and increase trustworthiness of research. With its roots in ethnographic research, auto-ethnography, duo-ethnography and poly-ethnography offer opportunities for the stories of two or more individuals to “provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 9).

Poly-Ethnographic Conversation

The manner in which we opted to enter into our poly-ethnographic conversation (Arthur et al., 2017) stemmed from the ABEE guiding our larger research project. ABEE was designed to gather in-depth participant data, through different mediums, over time, paralleling the aims of ethnographic research to “walk with” a particular cultural group (Kassan et al., 2020). As such, we utilized the central aspect of ABEE, that of cultural probes. Our research team was given the following prompt: Take up to five photographs of places, spaces, and/or objects that represent who you are (or some element(s) of who you are). In line with a poly-ethnographic approach, these photographs represented the starting point of our reflexivity conversation.

Our poly-ethnographic conversation (Arthur et al., 2017) took place at a midsize, Western Canadian university. We met as a research team for a 2-hour period and took turns presenting each of the photographs we took in response to the research prompt. These photographs were displayed on a projector as we discussed what compelled us to take them, how they represented our personal and professional identities, and why they were meaningful. We situated each picture within the historical, social, cultural, and political context of our lives as women. We also interacted with one another during the conversation, asking questions, offering support, and validating one another’s experiences. Team members shared their observations and emerging reflections throughout the discussion. This poly-ethnographic conversation was video recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Further, it was reviewed for accuracy (Schwandt, 2015) by each member of the research team.

Research Team

Our research team (the authors of this paper) included six cisgender women at varying levels of professional development (i.e., doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and early, mid, and late career professors in counseling psychology). As can be seen in Table 1, as a diverse group, we brought to the research multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations, including different ethnicities and experiences of racialization, privilege, and marginalization; generations of
immigration to Canada; as well as socio-economic histories and statuses. Collectively, we held personal and professional interests in the topic of newcomer integration, and brought varying areas of expertise to the research team (e.g., content, methodological). In addition to engaging in feminist, multicultural, and social justice research, we all expressed deep value for the reflexive process involved in qualitative research. As such, we opted to engage in a deeper level of reflexivity, beyond the often suggested means of discussion and/or journaling, which paralleled the methodology adopted in our broader research project.

**Zooming in on Our Understandings**

We conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) on the transcript in order to uncover the common and unique themes addressed during the reflexive conversation. Specifically, we engaged in the following process: 1) decoding, 2) encoding, 3) theme search and organization, 4) theme review, 5) defining and naming themes, and, 6) write up. Steps one, two, and three were conducted by a team member (NA) who shared her initial themes with us as a larger research team. As a group, we conducted steps four and five. Subsequently, another team member (SN) completed step six, which was also reviewed by the entire research team. This approach offered the multiple members of the research team a clear and usable framework for organizing discussion data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In this way, it allowed us to highlight some of the similarities, differences, and unanticipated insights within the reflexive conversation. In the following section, we share these discoveries and discuss their implications for reflexive research with newcomer communities. Our findings and discussion are combined, which is appropriate for qualitative reporting standards (Levitt, 2019) and, more specifically, our poly-ethnographic approach.

**Discoveries and Discussion**

From our discussion, four themes were created: 1) researchers bring multiple identities, 2) researchers bring privilege/power, 3) understanding what we call home, and 4) walking in participants’ shoes. These themes highlight the central role of researcher positionality and lend themselves to important considerations for research with newcomers. Specifically, these themes highlight the researchers’ multiple identities along with the various areas in which they hold positions of privilege and power. They also highlight the importance of deepening our understanding of what home may represent for various individuals as well as what participation entails for newcomer women in our specific research project. Each of these themes is discussed in detail below.

**Researchers Bring Multiple Identities**

The first theme that arose from our discussion was the multiple cultural identities and social locations that we, as researchers, bring to the research. In discussion, there was recognition of ancestry, connections to Canada and different places within Canada, as well as our roles, such as daughter, mother, feminist, and psychologist. For example, one team member (AG) recognized her connection to her ancestry through a conversation with her grandmother: “Her mother was part of a German speaking population in Czechoslovakia...so, it connected me more to my roots and like where my family is actually from, because I always thought that most of my ancestors were from Germany which is not the case.” She also then recognized her connection to Canada by stating that she comes “from a family of farmers.” Other team members identified strongly with the influence of ancestral roots (SRM) as well as a rural upbringing (NA & SN). The influence of her rural community on her identity was noted by one team member (NA), who reflected that an apple is “a symbol of what the community was about, the industry... like how people took pride in what they grew, what they shared, what they ate, what they prepared.” Another team member (SN) noted that, while she did not grow up on a farm, the image of barns reminds her of her rural upbringing: “I don’t identify with a lot of things in that area so I think that it’s important for me to recognize that but yeah barns...barns are a little bit different.”

In addition to these identities, one team member (MSV) recognized her own identity as a newcomer to Canada as important. She stated that:

...being an immigrant or moving person runs in my family. My parents moved to Mexico City when they were young because of the University. My mom is from Zacatecas and my father from Chiapas. My mother moved to Mexico City because she wanted to be excellent in her profession. I have family from Spain as well. From my father’s side, his great grandparents moved from Spain to Mexico to pursue a better life, a dream. Now, I moved from Mexico City to Canada with my family. Though I like North American western life, it is difficult. We have different cultural values.

She (MSV) also noted the connections between her Mexican culture and her identity as a newcomer and a feminist:

This is why I love Frida Khalo, as I mentioned before. She is a very Mexican icon. She was very loyal and strong about her ideals, I identify myself with her. She was very proud to be Mexican, and when she was travelling around the world, she was a genuine Mexican ambassador. She was very strong woman, she’s an inspiration to me. She was proud of her Mexican background and culture, about hospitality and generosity. She was proud of our language. For example, I love to keep my strong accent and English mistakes. I believe in linguistic rights. This is the way I show that I am proud to be Mexican. I do not want to hide that, and I think it is important in this English Era.

These identities can be used to understand the context with which we, as researchers, approached our work newcomer women in Canada. Researchers have previously documented personal experiences that highlighted how the academic context of graduate school contributes to the formation of the...
researcher identity and the ways in which researchers portray themselves (Mertkan & Bayrakli, 2018). Similarly, we posit that our personal experiences of growing up within our cultures and our communities also contribute to our identity and approach as researchers. In addition, the influence of personal and cultural identity has also been extended to qualitative research analysis. Madill and colleagues (2000) found that, after being analyzed by a number of different researchers, the results of qualitative interview analysis demonstrated similarities and differences between researchers. In reviewing the results of this work, West and Abu Talib (2002) described these differences as being potentially due to individual and cultural identity differences. In their examination of similarities and differences in qualitative analysis, West and Abu Talib (2002) asserted that differences may be better explained by cultural differences as opposed to methodological differences.

In the current study, as we moved forward with data collection and analysis, we knew that we could not unravel our personal and cultural identities from our approach to research and our interpretation of findings. Thus, as a team, we engaged in ongoing conversations and reflections about how our various identities may have impacted our analysis, and undoubtedly shaped the research process. For example, AG, who conducted the study’s individual interviews and focus groups, was cognizant that she approached data collection from both an outsider and insider position. In regard to the former, she identified as a white, third generation Canadian with primarily Western European roots. In regard to the latter, she identified as a cisgender woman, with lived experiences of the joys and challenges that come with living in a woman’s body. Aware that she would not be able to “silence” these various identities as she engaged in the research process, AG addressed similarities and differences with participants where appropriate and relevant. During data analysis, we also remained attuned to times when our various overlapping and differing identities likely impacted the types of experiences we may have been more attuned to, and, thus, the directions that interviews and focus groups took. However, we propose that, by engaging in the research process both as a researcher and with the perspective of a participant, we were better equipped to understand these personal and cultural identity factors that contributed to our approach to research as well as our interpretation of findings. As such, reflexivity became an analytic tool to understand how researcher positionality undoubtedly shapes research process.

**Researchers Bring Privilege/Power**

The second theme that arose through the discussion was the influence of researcher power and privilege. These concepts, which have been discussed extensively in the feminist literature, play a critical role in multiple aspects of the research process. Power has been discussed as a researcher’s knowledge base and decision-making in relation to that of participants (McGarry, 2016). When working with participants who are considered to be vulnerable, such as newcomer women, a researcher’s power can be misused in many ways, when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data for example. Privilege has been discussed as a researcher’s access, ability, and means (Nicholls, 2009). In this way, a university researcher, even someone who holds non-dominant cultural identities and social locations, is offered privileges through their employment.

Through the process of taking photos of places, spaces, and objects that represented ourselves and our lives, we reflected upon our own privilege, as individuals and as researchers. When sharing her photos, one team member (SRM) stated “I think there’s something for me about power and privilege that, um, that’s somehow connected to a sense of guilt or something, which I haven’t quite figured out yet because I only started thinking about it [the guilt].” In response to the sharing of these thoughts, another team member (AK) shared a similar experience of taking photos for the conversation. She noted that:

> When we were preparing for this exercise, I was worried. I told Suzanne “What are we doing? We’re just gonna take a bunch of pictures of privileged spaces and sit around and talk about that?” So, I’m still a little bit confused about that, but I’m glad to hear like that the privileged piece came up.

The recognition of privilege and power, in combination with the experience of having moved to different places within Canada, impacted our perspectives on the task we were asking participants to complete. For example, one team member (SN) shared the following thought:

> Our experience of being limited in the pictures that we can take, um, it really helps us to identify with participants who will experience that a lot more and be able to understand… the feelings that they might have.

In recognizing and reflecting upon this privilege, AK noted that:

> … there is also so much richness and so much of our identities in all of this [conversation], I’m quick to dismiss it… like, what’s even the point of us taking the time to sit here, for me to sit here and talk about all of these great things that I have, that represent who I am but—but I think just because I feel privileged, it doesn’t mean I should dismiss myself and my background and my identities or what this [process] can bring.

AK’s thoughts reflect the idea that addressing issues of power and privilege is not a “tidy” or linear process. However, researchers committed to a reflexive practice must be willing to take risks, make mistakes, and admit errors (Finlay, 2002). Further, the aspects of our power and privilege that we did not address in our conversation potentially reflect our hesitancy around these topics and our own oversights. For example, themes that reflected our middle-class social locations were prominent in our conversation. All of us had access to cameras or phones to take photographs. Moreover, our photographs reflected themes of safe housing, social supports, high levels of education, experiences of travel, valuable personal
belongings, health, and able-bodiedness. However, the fact that we did not always recognize or name these as privileges reflects some of our own blindspots. As we moved forward with the research process, we attempted to keep our power and privilege at the forefront of our understanding. For example, we were cognizant that our various positions of power (e.g., for some of us the whiteness of our skin, or our researcher positions) likely impacted what participants felt comfortable or uncomfortable to share. At times, and where appropriate, we addressed some of these privileges with participants in situ. Moving forward, we argue that truly committing to a reflexive practice, wherein researchers address their power and privilege and the impact of these on the research endeavor, can become an act of social justice; indeed, Finlay (2002) argued that, “done well, it has the potential to enliven, teach, and spur readers toward a more radical consciousness” (p. 544).

The privilege that our team felt in completing the task of taking photos and the connections we made to the potential impact of this task on our participants is consistent with the recognition of power and privilege by other researchers. Råheim and colleagues (2016) noted that “the privileged position of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched” has been highlighted by qualitative researchers (p. 1). Researchers have noted that the power imbalance between researchers and participants reflects differences in the social position, social role, and social status of researchers (Richards & Emslie, 2000) and that researcher values, worldview, and life experiences can impact how qualitative interviews are conducted and interpreted (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Similar to the conversation described in the current paper, Råheim and colleagues (2016) engaged in multiple discussions related to the researcher role in qualitative research. Guided by Nader’s (1969/1972) concepts of studying up and studying down, they described how such reflective conversations allowed them to identify shifts in power on behalf of the researcher (Råheim et al., 2016). A similar shift occurred within our research team, highlighted above, whereby our participation in an activity allowed us to have a stronger sense of the experiences of our participants. Doing so allowed us to “push against norms that ask participants to tell vulnerable stories but discourage researchers from doing so for fear of loss of reputation or prestige, or for imputing bias into research outputs” (Rice et al., 2018, p. 7). At the same time, we are cognizant that we could never be positioned identically to participants; indeed, as researchers we hold various privileges and protections that participants may not. Thus, just like we chose which photos to take and which stories to tell as we engaged in the research process ourselves, we encourage researchers to prioritize participant autonomy in the research process, inviting them to tell the stories they feel comfortable and empowered to tell.

Understanding What We Call Home

The third theme that emerged through our discussion was a deeper understanding of the complexity of home and what we call home. Home was identified by one team member (SRM) as a place that “is my like safety, this is my security, this is where I can have things that represent me.” However, we reflected upon the difficulty of not being able to take pictures of all the spaces and places that are home, with one team member (AK) stating that:

If your space is like, you’re never gonna go back to it or it doesn’t exist anymore . . . how challenging to represent your identity in a new space when it’s so new and you don’t have access to everything that maybe felt like home or your roots, you know.

In reflecting upon this, another team member (SN) said:

The one thing that you said that was really profound for me, because both you mentioned, and I really connected with not being able to necessarily take the pictures of the spaces we wanted to and then you just said in conversation um you know thinking about people where their spaces are no longer there and I just had like felt the weight of say like a newcomer . . . and thinking about how they might feel being asked to do this and ah and really feeling lost in a place that wasn’t their home or that they couldn’t . . . they couldn’t capture what home meant to them because it’s not there.

Additionally, another team member (NA) connected the idea of culture and home to the sensory experience of the spaces and places that comprise it, noting that:

I just have such a sensory experience of what, what that smell is of the harvest or what the sound is, the crunching on maple leaves so it’s the um . . . for me culture is not about things, but it’s very much an embodied experience of who we are or what we do together, what’s around us.

Engaging in this activity prior to the recruitment of research participants provided the research team with a deeper understanding of the importance of home as well as informed the potential interview questions we later asked participants (e.g., not equating one’s home with only one location and not assuming that one’s home represents a physical space). We realized that asking participants about the spaces and places that are missing may lead to fruitful conversation in addition to the exploration of the new spaces they have since moving to Canada. At the same time, we recognized that spaces, old and new, held a great deal of meaning in our personal and professional lives, and this would likely be the case for our participants as well. In this way, these conversations can be emotional, as was the case for some of the members in our team during the poly-ethnography. Considering the challenges that typically accompany migration, discussions of home, spaces, and places and their respective meaning could bring out emotionality among participants.

These realizations are consistent with the findings of previous research examining the home-making processes of newcomers. Researchers have recognized that home can be experienced in a multitude of ways, and has physical, social, individual, collective, spiritual, and temporal dimensions that are important to consider when examining a newcomer’s
cultural transition (Kreuzer et al., 2018). Kreuzer and colleagues (2018) interviewed first-generation newcomers in Austria and found that newcomers experienced home in different ways; for example, via a longing for the past, social relationships with other newcomers from their country of origin, and within themselves, such as through a focus on their emotional well-being (Kreuzer et al., 2018). When interviewing newcomers from Turkey on their home-making practices in Germany, Bilecen (2017) found that participants described their home in multiple ways, including its physical description and location, the items within it that were brought from Turkey, as well as the relationships, social gatherings, and daily routines that took place within it.

We recognized that home, for us, was also a multifaceted concept; for example, it encompassed “the outdoors” (AG) and “having two places where I belong” (SN). It meant connection with others, pets, places, and community. For MSV, home meant being surrounded by vibrant colors—something typical in her home country of Mexico, but something she missed deeply in Canada. As such, she shared that “I could feel blue someday, homesick, and I can understand my emotions in colors.” Overall, by discussing the meaning of home for us as researchers, we were able to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of this construct, and what that may mean for participants who would take part in our research.

**Walking in Participants’ Shoes**

The fourth theme that emerged from the discussion was a deeper understanding of what we were asking of newcomer women who participated in our research. We identified the power of taking pictures as opposed to choosing pictures that had previously been taken, with one team member (AK) stating:

> I thought, okay, the instructions should be “bring pictures of...” and Suzanne said “no you want folks to take pictures of...” I asked “yeah but what’s the difference...” but engaging in the process of going to those places that I wanted to photograph, even though most of it is pictures or whatever, um that changed the experience—so I could see the difference in asking a participant to say “bring me your photo album” versus “go to these places and take pictures or do drawings or do your whatever creative piece you wanna do” in those different spaces—it was an interesting process that I kind of got into it.

Another team member (NA) reflected upon the emotional impact of the activity, and what that may mean for participants:

> You know I think just because it’s, it was quite an emotional experience like... what are we asking people to do and where, you know, it’s not just a cognitive exercise, like what’s gonna be triggered through this, um, I think we need to really prepare our interviews for that... I moved from another province here and it was like coming to another planet in the differences between cities and customs and all of those things.

This emotional impact was realized when one team member (AK) shared of a photograph of a special tribute to a loved one [her father] in her home, where she became tearful and said, “And that’s another space in our house. I think that’s all can say about that right now.”

Finally, as the conversation closed, an exchange between research team members summarized the impact of having such a conversation on ourselves as researchers, our understanding of our participants’ tasks, and the realization of the importance of “home”:

> SN: I really enjoy being able to do that sort of processing as a team to experience it, um, you know, first to experience what we’re doing on a different level I think that’s... I want to do that all the time.
> AG: I agree this was really good.
> SRM: I think we’ll be better researchers. You know I think there’s team [understanding] and understanding ourselves, there’s lots of reasons there that I... you know I really think we’ll be better researchers.
> AK: It just brings a whole new meaning.

Researchers have investigated the ways in which participants are both comfortable and uncomfortable engaging in the research process, such as within randomized controlled trials (Morris & Balmer, 2006). In one study, researchers and participants in a trial of new medical diagnosis equipment construed and experienced comfort in the research process differently, but reflection and feedback from the researchers throughout the study prompted them to broaden their understanding of participant comfort (Morris & Balmer, 2006). Similarly, we propose that engaging in the process of a research study from the perspective of a participant provides an opportunity for researchers to gain a clearer sense of their participants’ potential comfort and discomfort in the research process. It was through engaging in this discussion that the emotional impact of this activity and the importance of feeling (dis)connected to spaces, places, and objects that comprise home was felt and understood. This allowed us to gain a deeper sense of the task we were inviting participants to take part in and the impact their participation may have on them. We recognize that we could never fully walk in participants’ shoes. However, we wanted to go through the actions and instructions to truly understand the nuances of the research process.

Finally, the practice of engaging in the research process as both researchers and participants may serve to reduce power differentials between these two groups. In providing recommendations for reducing power differentials in community based participatory research, Muhammad and colleagues (2015) suggested that research teams engage in continual self-reflexivity, in addition to the practice of individual researcher reflexivity, and that researchers should strive for a co-learning environment. We believe that such recommendations can improve the practice of research teams using methods other than community-based participatory research, by increasing opportunities for reflection and deeper understanding of
participants’ experiences, similar to what was achieved through our conversation.

Reflections and Conclusion

Through this article, we hope to demonstrate the manner in which we approached our research with newcomer women, using a culturally responsive, arts-based methodology (i.e., ABBE), and prioritized our collective reflexivity as a first step in this process. By participating in an exercise that paralleled that of our what participants would be asked to do (i.e., taking photographs and engaging in a reflexive conversation as a research team), we obtained a better sense of our own attitudes, assumptions, and biases related to the topic of study. Further, we gained experiential learning about some of the experiences that our participants might face through the research process. More specifically, the process of taking and sharing pictures acted as a strong catalyst in the reflexivity conversation in that it allowed us to partake in an in-depth, experiential conversation. This would not necessarily have occurred had we relied solely on a discussion of our attitudes, assumptions, and biases. Similarly, we believe that employing ABBE as a research methodology allows for deeper, more culturally responsive research process.

Engaging in this reflexive process as a research team led us to nuanced insights, which we believe might be useful to other qualitative researchers. Specifically, we believe that it is essential to consider qualitative methodologies that are culturally responsive and socially just, particularly when aiming to conduct research with vulnerable groups. Thus, before beginning the research process, it is critical for researchers to examine their relationship with the topic of study. One way of entering into this process of reflexivity is by examining our own cultural identities and social locations, and the manner in which these bring different levels of power and privilege. In this paper, we focused on these concepts as they pertain to the researcher-participant relationship (Bourke, 2014; Finlay, 2002; McGary, 2016). However, power and privilege have farther reaching implications with respect to several critical factors, including but not limited to a) the relationships among team members, from junior to more senior scholars (McHugh, 2014), b) the socio-political systems in which researchers and participants operate (Trussell, 2014), c) the larger societal context in which researchers are conducting their research (e.g., how research funding is obtained) and newcomer women are transitioning (e.g., status in Canada). It is important for future research to examine both micro and macro understandings of power and privilege as they pertain to the research process.

For our team, reflexivity was best prompted by taking photographs of places, spaces, and/or objects that represent who we are, and then discussing them in a collective setting. In the same way that a great deal of research conducted in western countries is over-reliant on proficient understanding of the English language, we wanted to avoid falling into an intellectual conversation alone. Thus, our approach to examining researcher positionality in this paper is similar to other qualitative work using photo elicitation or production (Silver, 2013) and object elicitation (Willig, 2017). Silver (2013) described photo elicitation as the use of existing images, whereas photo production involves the taking of photographs for research purposes. Similarly, Object elicitation supports reflection of research participants using a tangible object from their life (Willig, 2017). The use of objects and photos are also consistent with the cultural probes used an ABBE, which is the approach that grounded our use of picture-prompted reflexive conversation (Goopy & Kassan, 2019; Kassan et al., 2020).

When it comes to conducting research with newcomer communities specifically, our reflexive conversation allowed us to connect with the concept of home. While researchers who work in this area would certainly be knowledgeable about the potential challenges faced by newcomer participants, the experiential reality encountered in the research process might not be at the forefront when designing and implementing studies. A common point of discussion occurring more frequently among social science researchers is whether or not newcomer researchers can adequately conduct studies with newcomer communities. While debating this point goes beyond the scope of this paper, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the richness that we gained by forming a multicultural research team comprised of individuals with multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations, including first- and second-generation newcomers to Canada. Regardless of a researcher’s status in the country, we believe it is critical to infuse reflexivity in the early stages of the research process. In this way, engaging in a process of collective reflexivity allows researchers to “activate a different sort of listening and attention” (Cannon, 2018, p. 572).

Overall, engaging in this picture-prompted poly- ethnography meant that we were better attuned to the voices, stories, and experiences that our participants shared throughout the research project. We were more aware of our identities and privileges, and where these could overlap and differ from participants. Knowing that these would inevitably influence the research process, we attempted to name and address these social locations throughout data generation and analysis—among ourselves and with participants. Furthermore, our understanding of the diverse and multifaceted idea of home allowed us to better attune to the ways in which participants addressed this concept. In fact, we were better equipped to understand a theme that emerged from participants’ stories—that is, that homesickness was felt at an embodied level. In other words, home was not simply a physical location for participants, but also something felt at an emotional and spiritual level. Finally, our increased understanding of what we were asking of participants meant that we were able to shift power dynamics, by challenging the “norm” whereby participants are expected to tell their stories while researchers are expected to remain unbiased and detached. Indeed, engaging in this polyethnography allowed us to better understand the emotional, vulnerable, challenging, insightful, and empowering aspects of engaging in the use of the ABBE and, specifically, cultural probes. In sum, this increased our investment in this work—
particularly our desire to engage in such research in a way that is ethical, culturally sensitive, intentional, and flexible.

Authors’ Note
Dr. Kassan is an Associate Professor who hold a high impact position in child and youth mental health at the University of British Columbia. Her scholarly interests are informed by her own bi-cultural identity, and include topics pertaining to social justice, migration, multicultural counseling, adolescent development, qualitative research, as well as training and supervision. Authors from this point for forward (i.e., Nancy Arthur) are presented in alphabetical order and have made equal contributions to the manuscript.

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