

Ensuring Women's Access to Higher Education and Employment in Iran and Canada: A
Comparative Study

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Abstract

In this systematic literature review, I explored how Canadian and Iranian governments have facilitated women's access to higher education and employment opportunities, as well as the purpose of higher education for Canadian and Iranian women, over the past four decades. I examined peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as OECD, UN, UNESCO, and UNICEF online documents and reports, to understand the dynamics of women's educational and employment experiences. The review of the literature revealed similarities and differences between Iranian and Canadian women's experiences in higher education and employment. In both countries, women's access to higher education has increased over the past four decades; however, a gender gap between men's and women's employment opportunities persists in favour of men, particularly in policymaking and leadership positions in academia and other sectors. The intersection of gender and religion impacts Iranian women's access to higher education positively and employment opportunities negatively while the intersection of gender, racial identity, and/or immigrant status hinders Canadian women's educational and employment opportunities. Building on Shields (2010) transformative leadership framework and Collins' (2015) matrix of domination, I argue that merging these two frameworks can help higher education researchers, educators, and administrators understand the experiences of individuals simultaneously belonging to multiple oppressed groups. Increasing women's access to higher education and financially rewarding employment opportunities remains imperative across the globe. This increased access can be accomplished through building international collaborations; educating educational and employment policymakers about matrix of domination, intersectionality, and transformative leadership; and developing gender-inclusive and family-friendly policies that meet the needs of diverse women groups.

Dedication

To all women

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

One of the key tasks of higher education is the development and transfer of knowledge as an asset in helping countries to adapt to economic and social transformations. Nearly half the population of the world is female (United Nations, 2017). Although the gender gap in education has been shrinking globally over the past decades (Baker, 2016), there is a 31.4% average gender gap to be closed globally (Global Gender Gap Report, 2020). In 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reported that over the past four decades the proportion of women in higher education has increased in all regions across the world. For example, in North America and Western Europe, women's participation has increased from 39% to 56.4%, and in South and West Asia from 21% to 32.8%. The 2019 report by Organisation for Economic and Co-Operation Development (OECD) also indicates that university-educated women outnumber university-educated men in almost all OECD countries. OECD is an international organization founded in 1961 with 36 member countries including Canada, the United States, and European and Asian countries. One of its key goals is fostering a strong education and shaping policies that promote equality and opportunity for all.

Research studies show that facilitating women's participation in education from elementary through higher education has significant implications for improving economic growth and health in society (Renn, 2014; UNICEF, 2013). For example, "The risk of maternal death is 2.7 TIMES higher among women with no education than among women with more than 12 years of education" (UNICEF, 2013, p.1). Additionally, women and girls who earn income often "REINVEST 90% of it into their families" (UNICEF, 2013, p. 1). Education also benefits women by enhancing their employment opportunities and decreasing

gender gaps in employment and wages. Parvazian, Gill, and Chiera (2017) assert that women who possess postsecondary credentials have greater potential for labor force participation and earning power. Furthermore, changes in women's family planning decisions (e.g., the age to have their first child or the family size) and transformation of their personal beliefs and values are additional outcomes of higher education for women. Educated women are empowered to overcome discrimination as they are more aware of their rights (e.g., the right to equitable employment opportunities) and are confident to make decisions that affect their lives.

As a university-educated woman who immigrated from Iran to Canada several years ago, I am interested in conducting a comparative study of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran. There is a large Iranian immigrant population, including women immigrants, in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016) and understanding the complexities of Iranian women's educational and employment experiences in Iran and Canada can inform future policy development in both countries. Aligned with global trends over the past four decades, women's participation in higher education has increased in Canada (Baker 2016; Renn, 2014, 2017) and in Iran (Rezai-Rashti, 2015; Rezai-Rashti, Mehran, & Abdmolaei, 2019). However, there is still a gender gap in favour of men in employment opportunities in Canada (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Baker, 2016) and Iran (Rahbari, 2016; Rezai-Rashti & Moghaddam, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran to learn how their governments can ensure gender-inclusive programs, policies, job markets, and communities.

Background of the Problem

In this study I focus on women's access to higher education and employment in Canada and Iran. Canada and Iran share some similarities in the field of higher education. Firstly, women's access to higher education has increased significantly in both countries over the past four decades (Baker, 2016; Shams, 2016). Secondly, there is a gender gap in favour of men in employment opportunities in higher-paid leadership positions, as well as academic positions (e.g., tenure-track positions or university president positions), in both countries (Baker, 2016; Rezai-Rashti, 2015). In terms of the main differences between Canadian and Iranian women's experiences in higher education, most Iranian research studies identified religion as a significant contributor to women's educational and social experiences (Mehran, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2015) while Canadian research studies reported the social construction of race as a contributing factor to women's social and educational experiences in higher education (Agosto & Roland, 2018).

Iranian Context

The first official university in Iran, Tehran University, was established in 1934 and women were admitted to Tehran University three years later. There are no colleges in Iran and students willing to pursue a post-secondary education apply to public or private universities that operate under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran. Today, there is a large network of public and private universities in Iran that admit students through a unified, nation-wide entrance exam called *Konkour*. The word Konkour is derived from the French word "concours" that means competition. This exam is a four hour and a half comprehensive multiple-choice exam that includes questions from the subjects taught in Iranian high schools, such as mathematics, science, Islamic studies, and

foreign languages. The exam ranks students based on their performance in the exam and they are admitted to either public or private universities based on their ranking in the exam. The better ranking the students achieve, the more chances to be admitted to more prestigious public universities that are funded by the government and are tuition-free (or charge very small tuition fees). Private universities are less selective in admitting students and charge high tuition fees. In very recent years, to further increase students' access to higher education, students are being admitted to few programs in universities based on their high school transcripts instead of Konkour. Students in these programs pay high tuition fees, but degrees obtained through these programs often do not hold the same value compared to degrees obtained from public or private universities through Konkour.

Although female-only colleges and universities are increasing in many regions, such as the Middle East (Renn, 2014), there is only one public female-only university in Iran, Alzahra University. The University was established in 1964. During its early years of establishment, it offered limited majors such as translation studies, psychology, secretarial studies, and family studies. Today, the University has 11 departments that provide women with the opportunity to study at undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels in 171 majors, such as arts, educational studies, engineering, mathematical science, physics, chemistry, and theology. Alzahra university has had a key role in empowering Iranian women through education and fostering women's capabilities to become future leaders, educators, and researchers (Alzahra University, n.d.).

Any discussion of educational and employment issues related to Iranian women cannot be led outside the religious context. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 impacted Iranian women's social and educational lives in both positive and negative ways. For example, in

terms of women's access to higher education, women experienced the paradox of facing discrimination and exclusion as well as increased equality and empowerment (Mehran, 2009). Passing laws that demonstrate gender inequity in Iran, such as reducing women's legal marriage age to 13 years according to Islamic Law (although, the general public has a very negative attitude towards this law and in practice marriage at this age rarely happens), could limit women's opportunity to stay in the educational system longer and graduate from high school. According to the laws in Iran, married women are not allowed to attend the same schools as unmarried girls. This usually interrupts women's schooling and excludes them from education. Forcing gender segregation in all public places such as educational spaces, reducing the value of a woman's testimony at court to half the value of a man's testimony, and enforcing compulsory hijab in public places affected women's lives negatively because it violated women's rights, freedom, and social status.

In the early years of the Islamic Revolution, universities were closed for three years from 1980-1983 to reform the education system in ways that reflect the ideologies of the Islamic Republic. Many books were banned because they were deemed to be promoting Western values, and thousands of students and faculty were purged because of their Western orientation. Different technical-vocational textbooks were produced for boys and girls and unmarried girls and women were prohibited from studying abroad under Government scholarships (Mehran, 2009). However, some of these laws such as women's marriage age and women's right to obtain government scholarships to study abroad are now changed, allowing girls to stay in school longer, continue with higher education, or use government scholarships to study in universities abroad. After the re-opening of universities in 1983, women were barred from attending 91 out of 169 fields of study, most of which were in

engineering and technical fields as these fields were assumed masculine and inappropriate for women (Rezai-Rashti, 2012). These restrictions were lifted in 1993 to allow women to participate in all fields of study and this shift resulted in an increased enrollment of women in higher education institutions (Rezaei-Rashti, 2012). However, with the Conservative Government being elected in 2005, gender segregation became a priority again and quota systems were introduced to limit women's participation in 77 fields of study, such as political sciences, engineering, and computer sciences, which have higher employability in the labour force.

Women's education after the 1979 revolution aimed at creating an Ideal Muslim Woman. An Ideal Muslim Woman was defined as a woman who would prioritize family life, assume the main responsibilities within the family (Rezaei-Rashti, 2012), and raise Muslim children who will be dedicated to the cause of the Islamic revolution (Mehran, 2009). The Islamic Government developed school textbooks for children as young as seven years old, portraying the Prophet's daughter or wife as ideal Muslim women and encouraging children to follow Islamic values, such as embracing hijab and dedication to family life. The Iranian Government does not recognize March 8th, International Women's Day, that celebrates women's social, political, and economic achievements and calls for gender equity; instead, the Prophet's daughter's birthday is celebrated as Women's/Mother's Day.

In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Islamisation of the educational system through the Cultural Revolution between 1980-1983, gender relations were the most significant social change; women's increased access to higher education increased their confidence in challenging the inequalities they face in family and society and backlashed the governmental policies (Rezai-Rashti, 2012). Rezai-Rashti (2012) argues that

the state's paradoxical ideologies of educating and controlling women did not achieve its intended goals. By educating women in order to control them, the state has assisted women in identifying, understanding, and resisting oppression. Women were perceived as "holders of culture and tradition" (Rezai-Rashti, 2012, p. 2) and the state's most important task was to "Islamise their behaviour, appearance, and position" (Rezai-Rashti, 2012, p. 2). The *Family Protection Act of 1967* (amended in 1973) was revoked by the Islamic state and replaced by the Islamic family law which allowed polygamy and granted the right to divorce and custody of children to men. Compulsory veiling of women was introduced (beginning at age 6 for female students), and the new morality police would ensure that all the new laws were followed. In terms of the characteristics of post-revolutionary educational policies, there are explicit gender stereotypes in school textbooks and female students are streamlined towards limited fields of study, such as teaching and nursing, which are assumed suitable for women (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Mehran, 2003).

Today, despite the remarkable progress in Iranian women's access to higher education, the employment and social experiences of Iranian women continue to be characterized by inequality and exclusion. For example, at the time of writing this MRP, female quotas in university admission do not appear to be in place and, overall, women outnumber men in higher education institutions. However, cultural and religious ideologies continue to encourage women to pursue so called "more suitable to women" fields of study at universities. Women remain underrepresented in fields of study such as engineering or computer sciences and overrepresented in fields of social sciences and humanities that offer lower employment opportunities after graduation. According to the Statistical Center of Iran (2018), women's unemployment rate (19.1%) is about double men's unemployment rate

(10.1%). According to Iran's Civil Code, women are under the guardianship of their husband. The Code authorizes husbands to prevent their wives from working if they consider the occupation to be damaging to their reputation, principles, or the family unit. In social spheres, many of the discriminatory policies and laws still prevail. For example, women living in or visiting Iran—Muslim or non-Muslim, Iranian or non-Iranian—are required to wear Islamic hijab. Although this rule is loosely followed by many young Iranian women, it remains a punishable offense.

Canadian Context

In Canada, universities are regulated provincially, and each university is autonomous in its admission, academic matters, policies, and procedures. In 2002, The Canadian Policy Research Network's *Report on Access to Postsecondary Education in Canada* stated that over 65% of youth aged 18-20 aspire to pursue university education, with young women being more likely to complete higher education than young men. In 2005, there was a 15% gender gap in favour of women in attending higher education, most of which can be attributed to the fact that there is a more favourable financial return or "University Premium" from higher education for women than men (Christofides, Hoy, & Yang, 2010, p. 400). Christofides et al. (2010) studied university-educated men and women's earnings and high school-graduated men and women's earnings for five years subsequent to graduation. Comparing the earnings of men to women with and without university education revealed that women benefit from more financial gains from higher education compared to men.

Several research studies in Canadian higher education focus on overall employment outcomes of university graduates and the inequitable pay structures for men and women. Although there is a smaller pay gap in academia compared to the gap in other professional

positions (Doucet, Smith, & Durand, 2012), the pay gap between men and women academics still needs attention. Since 1980s, in line with many developed countries, Canadian women are attending higher education institutions in larger numbers than their male counterparts (Christofides et al., 2010). Statistics show gaining a university education can facilitate employment (Statista, 2019). However, Canadian women have limited access to employment opportunities in leadership or decision-making positions. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation (2019), even though women comprise over 50% of the Canadian population, only 19.5% of the board members of Canada's top 500 companies are women and women hold just 8.5% of the highest-paid positions in Canada's top 100 listed companies. This underemployment issue is further intensified among immigrant and Black women.

According to Statistics Canada (2019), most (82.2%) of the population growth in Canada is driven by the arrival of new immigrants. One in five Canadians was born outside of Canada. Canada's unique immigration policies such as the points-based system that rewards human capital (e.g., university education, professional experience, and language skills) attracts many educated immigrants with professional experiences from developing countries. However, female landed immigrants aged 25 to 54 years with a university degree lag behind their male counterparts in labour market participation. In 2019, female landed immigrants' employment rate was 77.4% versus 90.2% of their male counterparts. Additionally, Canadian-born women's employment rate was 90.9% versus Canadian-born men's employment rate of 92.3% (Statistics Canada, 2019). It can be concluded that educated female immigrants in Canada are at a disadvantage in finding employment compared to male immigrants or Canadian-born males and females.

According to the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) (2011) analytical report 13, based in York University, university-educated immigrants, particularly women, from countries in Africa as well as South, East, and West Asia earn the lowest wages among the immigrant population. Furthermore, TIEDI (2011) reports that the highest number of immigrant women with university education come from Pakistan (43.6%) and Iran (41.4%); however, the university-educated women from Pakistan and Iran earn the lowest wages among immigrants arriving from other countries. TIEDI's (2010) analytical report 9 found that immigrant women who did not return to school in Canada are less likely to find employment compared to immigrant men who did not return to school in Canada.

The Black population comprises 3.5% of Canada's total population and 15.3% of the visible minority population. Over 56% of the Black population in Canada are first-generation immigrants and over 51% are women. James and Turner (2017) report that Black students and faculty are underrepresented in universities in Ontario. Black people's unemployment rate is higher than Canada's total population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Black women are the largest visible minority group in Quebec (29.4%) and third-largest visible minority group in Ontario (17%), and they are the least likely (24.4%) among the visible minority groups to hold a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2016). These statistical data confirm the effect of intersectionality and the matrix of domination on the experiences of Black immigrant women where the intersection of race, gender, and immigration status triple-burdens them in the process of accessing higher education or employment opportunities in Canada. For example, Freeman (2005) highlights the historical lack of support for Black students, women and men, in the process of making decisions to whether participate in higher education or not. Tillman

(2018) highlights the challenges of Black women with respect to recruitment, promotion, and access to mentors who can help to facilitate Black women's career success.

Immigrant women encounter discrimination in higher education and employment opportunities in Canada, especially Black women and women from Islamic countries such as Pakistan and Iran while Canadian-born women experience increased access to higher education but limited access to employment opportunities in leadership or decision-making positions. In this context, it may be beneficial to study the impact of religion on (post-immigration) experiences of immigrant women, such as women from Pakistan and Iran where the dominant religion is Islam to gain a deeper understanding of the women's education and employment in Canada.

Purpose and Focus of the Study

In this paper, I conducted a systematic literature review to explore women's access to higher education in Canada and Iran and consequent opportunities for women's employment in academia as well as leadership and decision-making positions. As a woman who has experienced Iranian and Canadian higher education and employment, I believe it is important to have more women in leadership positions because women in those positions can act as role models for girls and other women, influencing high-stakes decisions that impact women's lives. I also explored how women's participation in Iranian and Canadian higher education can influence their status in the family and society. I examined peer-reviewed articles as well as books and reports exploring women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran during the past four decades. I reviewed only the literature published in English because there are limited peer-reviewed articles on the topic of

education in Persian and many of the Iranian government websites are not accessible from outside Iran.

Research Questions

My main research questions are as follows:

1. How have Canadian and Iranian governments facilitated women's access to higher education in the last four decades?
2. What are the societal and employment outcomes of women who graduate from higher education institutions in Canada and Iran?
3. What is the purpose of higher education for Canadian and Iranian women?

By addressing my main research questions, I will provide information about the dynamics of women's access to higher education, the purpose of higher education, and the consequent professional and social outcomes for Canadian and Iranian women.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this paper I explored how Canadian and Iranian governments facilitate women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in academia and leadership positions through Shields' (2010) transformative leadership theory and Collins' (2015) matrix of domination. According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership "begins with questions of justice and democracy, critiques inequitable practices, and addresses both individual and public good" (p. 558). Furthermore, she argues that there is a positive correlation between the inequities men and women experience in society and in the educational settings. Unlike Shields' (2010) one-dimensional approach to social justice and equity, Collins' (2015) matrix of domination—rooted in Crenshaw's (1989) theory of

intersectionality—places women at the centre of discussion and argues that the intersections of gender and other social constructs put women at a greater disadvantage than men.

I have selected these two theories because Shields' (2010) transformative leadership theory, although very effective in addressing inequities in educational settings and aiming at social justice in general, does not recognize women's unique experiences of oppression which can be amplified when intersecting with their other identities, such as being a Muslim, Black, and/or immigrant woman. Bringing an intersectional perspective to transformative leadership theory can assist educators and policymakers in identifying and addressing the present injustice and inequities that women continue to experience in educational settings and society at large.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

I have selected exploring women's access to higher education in Iran and Canada due to a personal interest and my lived experiences as a graduate student in Canada, who has completed an undergraduate degree in one of the public universities in Iran. My experiences of academic matters and equity of access to universities in higher education systems of both Iran and Canada motivated me to pursue this research and gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and limitations of each system. There are research studies that explore and compare developed and developing countries in terms of women's access to higher education or their employment outcomes (McCowan, 2016; Parvazian et al., 2017); however, the notions of developed and developing countries should be problematized. In other words, the unique cultural and political system of each country can impact higher education policies and practices. For example, the historic background of Iran, along with religious and political shifts in the country over time, make contemporary Iran distinct from the other developing

countries in the region in many ways, including educational policies and literacy rates. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017), the youth literacy rate in Iran is 99% for males and 99.2% for females compared to the regional average of 63% in South and West Asian countries. However, women's increased access to education has not translated into women's increased labour participation and women's unemployment rate remains relatively high (19.1%) (Statistical Center of Iran, 2018).

The most recent Canadian census data indicate that Iranians are the fourth largest recent immigrant population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016), impacting Canadian educational systems and society. To date, limited comparative studies have explored women's access to higher education and employment outcomes in Iran and Canada, and I hope this research study contributes to filling this gap. Educational and workplace policymakers can use the findings of this study which call for changes in educational and employment policies that aim at justice and equity of access to higher education and employment opportunities for women.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, firstly, I explain the reason for selecting Shields' (2010) transformative leadership framework and Collins' (2015) concept of the matrix of domination for my analysis. Next, I discuss Shields' (2010) transformative leadership followed by Collins' (2015) matrix of domination rooted in Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality. Through this chapter, I highlight how these theories apply to the context of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities and how they can be used as an effective tool to advance equity and social justice agendas.

Why the Transformative Leadership Theory and the Matrix of Domination?

In this study, I explored how Canadian and Iranian governments facilitate women's access to higher education and professional employment opportunities by situating the study in Shields' (2010) transformative leadership theory and Collins' (2015) matrix of domination that is rooted in Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality. I use transformative leadership theory because I am interested in education and employment opportunities of women leaders and transformative leadership can be used as a tool for macro-level analysis of the inequities that female educational leaders confront (Agosto & Roland, 2018). Additionally, I use the concept of the matrix of domination and theory of intersectionality to discuss the complexity of women leaders' experiences at the micro-level.

The theory of transformative leadership pinpoints the various dimensions of social inequality such as racism or sexism that place individuals in marginalized social categories. Shields (2010) discusses social inequalities such as racism and sexism separately; however, a single-axis analysis with a focus on one dimension of oppression may not be able to capture all the experiences of individuals who simultaneously belong to multiple oppressed groups.

Collins' (2015) concept of the matrix of domination maintains that social categories are not independent of each other but rather contingent and connected. Therefore, multiple systems of power can simultaneously interact to impact the lived experiences of an individual. The tenets of intersectionality, including women's complex and multi-dimensional social experiences can be brought into educational leadership to inform the development of transformative leadership practices that include social justice goals. For example, transformative leadership practices that recognize women's multi-faceted oppressions can better address the inequalities that women experience in educational settings and society. Carolyn Shields (2010), Patricia Collins (2015), and Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) introduced the above-mentioned theories and concepts and explored the issues of inequities and injustice in the context of North America. However, the concepts can have a broader application and can be adopted in other contexts, such as Iran and Canada, to address the inequities that the marginalized populations face.

On a global scale, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges the concept of intersectionality by constituting similar ideas as intersectionality in pursuit of social justice for all human beings. Article 2 states, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (United Nations, 1948, p. 2). Shields' (2010) theory of transformative leadership draws on critical theories, theories of cultural and social reproduction, and the notion of leadership for social justice. The majority of educational leadership theories discuss various social categories independent of each other; however, the theory of intersectionality pinpoints the cumulative effect of being positioned at the intersection of multiple social

categories and its effects on experiences of inequality. In this study, I aim at bringing the idea of intersectionality to educational leadership.

Among the limited educational leadership studies with an intersectional perspective, Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) use a critical intersectional lens and argue that Black female principals face intersectional gender and race-related challenges in their professional landscapes. Lumby and Morrison (2010) argue that diversity and inclusion frequently appear in educational policy and practice discourses; however, the multiple aspects of identity and diversity remain under-researched. Therefore, it is important to expand transformative leadership's relation to intersectionality theory to ensure that women's complex and multifaceted identities are brought into the discussion to challenge the inequalities that women face. Such an approach will, in turn, allow for an analysis from the micro-level to the macro-level.

Transformative Leadership Theory

Shields (2004) argues that educational leadership is complex and challenging. Transformative educational leadership “begins by challenging the inappropriate use of power and privilege” (Shields, 2010, p. 7) that create disadvantage. William Foster (1986) was among the first scholars who discussed the notion of transformative educational leadership. He argued that critical notions of leadership should include the educative and transformative aspects. Leadership should not only observe the prevailing inequities; it should also decide how to transform them. Similarly, Shields' (2010) transformative leadership framework focuses on academic achievement as well as social justice to address the needs of the education systems. Educational leaders are expected to attend to the needs of various stakeholders such as students, teachers, communities, and decision-makers, and to be

transformative. Transformative leadership may not eliminate the pressures of accountability and political interference (Shields, 2004), but transformative educational leaders can end the silence about issues such as racism and classism. Educational leaders can use transformative leadership as a tool to inform their practices to lead for social justice and to effect change in educational organizations and the broader society.

The origins of transformative leadership can also be traced back to Burns' (1978) seminal study of leadership. Burns identified two basic leadership types: transactional and transforming. He explained that transforming leaders can become moral agents who can promote social change. This characteristic—social change—formed the distinction between transactional and transforming leadership for him. Although Burns' conception of transforming is particularly relevant to transformative leadership, and he is acknowledged as the originator of transformative leadership, he never used the term "transformative" (Shields, 2010).

Transactional, transformational, and transformative leadership have dominated the educational sphere over the past decades (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Shields, 2010). Transactional leadership is power-centered and hierarchical while transformational and transformative leadership styles share common traits of making positive and valuable change. The two latter leadership styles are sometimes used interchangeably. However, Shields (2010) distinguishes the two, builds on the concept of transformational leadership, and argues that, in today's diverse and complex educational systems, transformative leadership is the most promising in meeting the educational and social justice demands. Unlike transformational leadership, transformative leadership goes beyond the institutional arrangements and recognizes the realities within the social and political contexts, challenging

the use of power and privilege that perpetuate inequities in educational settings and society. Therefore, Shields' transformative leadership, which is built on transformational leadership, can be the most effective leadership style in educational organizations in increasingly diverse schools and societies. Shields (2010) asserts that:

Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others.

Transformative leadership, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. (p. 559)

Astin and Astin (2000), also discuss transformative leadership in connection with social transformations. They argue that the tasks of leadership should include promoting equity, increasing access, embracing and encouraging respect for diversity, reinforcing democracy, and encouraging cultural enrichment. It is evident from the work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1985); Foster (1986); and Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991), among others, that the theory of transformative leadership started to emerge in educational leadership scholarship in the mid-1980s. The theory of transformative leadership emerged through a critical lens with the promise of opportunities for social transformation. The basic tenets of transformative leadership that distinguish it from other leadership theories include:

a combination of critique and promise; attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes; deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; acknowledgment of power and privilege; emphasis on both individual

achievement and the public good; a focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and finally, evidence of moral courage and activism. (Shields, 2010, p. 562)

These tenets are interrelated and provide a comprehensive leadership approach in diverse contexts that aim at effecting deep and meaningful change in educational settings and broader society. Considering the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, Keddle (2006) advocates for deconstructing and reconstructing boys' conceptions of gender and argues that by problematizing the knowledge frameworks that create gender inequity, we may address such social disadvantage. In the context of acknowledging power and privilege, Mezirow (1996) highlights the importance of acknowledging our culture and the power and privileges that are associated with that culture if we were to deconstruct deeply rooted knowledge structures. Furthermore, in discussing transforming leadership, Burns (1978) emphasizes the need to understand how the individuals in the positions of power, privilege, and decision making can influence the policy and practice within their organizations and the broader society. Reaffirming the transformative leadership's tenet of moral courage and activism, Shields (2010) asserts that transformative leadership is a form of leadership with an activist agenda that aims to "redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes" (p. 572).

Transformative educational leaders must ask the following questions :Why is education important? What to include in a curriculum? What does constitute success? An education system that is inclusive and equitable does not allow the perpetuation of sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia (Weiner, 2003). The purpose of transformative leadership,

therefore, is promoting an inclusive, equitable, and socially just education for individuals who are traditionally marginalized due to their race, gender, language, or religion.

Transformative leaders will acknowledge the relationship of power and privilege, recognize the potential of education for public and private good, aim at deconstructing knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and replace them with new inclusive knowledge frameworks, and ensure that critique leads to promise and transformation towards democracy and social justice. However, there are limited leadership studies that discuss how the intersection of gender and other social constructs interact to amplify the effects of inequity and multiple oppressions that women experience. To understand the complexities of women's experiences, I propose that Collins' (2015) matrix of domination rooted in Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality can be brought into educational leadership studies—and transformative leadership in particular—to inform the practices of educational leaders who lead for social justice.

Matrix of Domination/Intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality is a critical analytic framework grounded in Black feminism and critical race theory (Allen, 2009). Collins' (2015) matrix of domination proposes that sexism, racism, or religious bigotry can impact the lives of marginalized individuals. Moreover, the intersection of two or more of these types of oppressions can amplify the oppression experienced by individuals from a given demographic sector. For example, Muslim women, Black women, or immigrant women are multiply burdened because of the intersection of their multiple marginalized identities. Harris and Patton (2019) recognize the potential of intersectional analyses in advancing social justice agendas in higher education and argue that intersectionality can be used as a tool to advance “a

transformative social justice agenda” (p. 347) in higher education with a potential to transform knowledge, society, and higher education.

Crenshaw (1989) advanced the theory of intersectionality with a focus on the experiences of marginalized women located at the intersection of multiple systems of power, such as sexism, racism, and classism. Breslin, Randey, and Riccucci (2017) contend that “Power relations—the ability of dominant groups to assert their will or preferences—are central to our understanding of intersectionality” (p. 168). While the majority of theories in educational leadership studies have a general approach to inequities rather than identifying various lines of subordination such as gender or race that intersect to multiply oppression (Breslin et al., 2017), Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) applied an intersectional perspective to highlight the importance of considering the various aspects of women’s oppression simultaneously, including their social categorizations of gender, race, and class. Collins’ (2015) matrix of domination reflects and expands this perspective, provides a new angle of vision on social phenomena, and calls for a critical inquiry into inequalities and educational praxis to inform a deeper understanding of inequality.

Collins (2015) views intersectionality operating in a matrix of domination where the notion of matrix emphasizes connections and interdependencies. She identifies four interconnected domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal with the structural power being the overall organization of power in the matrix of domination; the disciplinary power managing oppression; the hegemonic power legitimizing oppression; and interpersonal power influencing all aspects of our everyday life. Breslin and colleagues (2017) argue that one of the factors contributing to the limited use of intersectionality in leadership studies is the lack of definitional clarity on what intersectionality and its value are.

However, Davis (2008) upholds that the ambiguity and open-endedness in intersectionality is one of its strengths that allows for its broad application. For example, its lack of a clear definition or specific tenets allows it to be used in any context of inquiry and it allows “endless constellation of intersecting lines of difference to be explored” (Davis, 2008, p. 77). This vagueness can lead to new discoveries and critical insights. Davis (2008) further upholds that open-endedness of intersectionality can stimulate our creativity to look for “new and often unorthodox ways of doing feminist analysis” (p. 79). The second factor identified by Breslin and colleagues (2017) as the reason for limited use of intersectionality in leadership studies is the general tendency to use one-dimensional and simple constructs that are easier to collect data for and to analyse.

Over the past three decades, the concept of intersectionality and intersectional inquiries have expanded and are not limited to only social categories of race, gender, or class (Breslin et al., 2017). Based on the evolving nature of intersectionality (Davis, 2008), Collins (2015) maintains that the several forms of social stratification such as gender, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity can be included in intersectional feminism and its social and cultural effects can be discussed inside and outside the academy. Scholars working within traditional social sciences fields and more applied fields, such as education, have found intersectionality to be a valuable tool. Collins (2015) highlights the use of intersectional perspectives by a broad range of individuals such as “teachers, social workers, parents, policy advocates, university support staff, community organizers, clergy, lawyers, graduate students, nurses, and other practitioners [who] find themselves upholding and challenging social inequalities” (pp. 2-3). It is possible for individuals in various fields and with various perspectives to use the concept of intersectionality to challenge the perpetuation

of injustice because of the intersectionality's core characteristics that include fluidity, broadness, and complexity.

Collins (2015) posits that intersectionality has the potential to help address three important issues in this regard to actualize human rights: to identify the multiple identities that constitute discrimination, to assess the types and magnitude of pain and suffering of victims of human rights abuse, and to place responsibility and accountability measure to remedy the victims of human rights abuses. Hancock (2007) argues that the theory of intersectionality is distinct from the reductionist approaches that focus on a single social category such as gender or race (a unitary approach) or approaches that focus on multiple social categories but view them as operating in parallels independently and not intersecting (a multiple approach). The unitary and multiple approaches do not consider the potential differences among members of a social group. For example, women who are Black, Muslim, and working-class may experience an amplified effect of marginalization at the intersection of sexism, racism, Islamophobia, and classism. The theory of intersectionality pinpoints that the social constructs are "mutually constituting rather than parallel constructs" (Breslin, 2017, p. 166), meaning that, for example, an individual's experiences of gender inequality is not separable from her experiences of racial inequality.

Crenshaw (1989) asserts that the experiences of those women who are "multiply-burdened" (p. 140) is greater than the sum of each single-axis discrimination effect and any analysis that fails to consider intersectionality will not be able to address the ways in which multiply-burdened individuals are subordinated. Likewise, Collins (2015) asserts that social identities do not "operate as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). She further

posits that intersectional knowledge projects embrace one or more of the following provisional guiding assumptions to illuminate how intersectionality unfolds as an analytical strategy. Firstly, in performing an analysis it is best to consider the relations/intersections between social categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, or ethnicity rather than study them in isolation from one another. Secondly, these intersecting social categories shape intersecting systems of power such as racism and sexism. Thirdly, these intersecting systems of power form complex social inequalities and experiences for individuals who reside within them. Fourthly, the various perspectives of individuals, who reside within each of the intersecting systems of power, about their own and other's experiences usually lead to "advancing knowledge projects that reflect their social locations within power relations" (p. 13). Finally, the unjust nature of social inequalities shaped by intersecting systems of power fosters learning and engagement that challenge the status quo.

In conclusion, although Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality originated with a focus on Black women, it expanded over time to include individuals identifying with characteristics of other social categories. In this paper, I applied Shields' (2010) theory of transformative leadership and Collins' (2015) matrix of domination rooted in Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality to compare the experiences of Iranian and Canadian women leaders with Iranian women experiencing the intersections of gender, religion, and culture, and Canadian women encountering the intersections of gender, race, and immigration status. A transformative leadership approach that embraces the concept of a matrix of domination is instrumental in addressing the issues of marginalization and inequities that Canadian and Iranian women face in terms of accessing higher education, employment, and leadership opportunities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter, I explain the methodology and procedures used in this study. Firstly, in the researcher's positioning section, I explain my motivation to research this topic that derives from my educational and employment experiences as an Iranian-Canadian woman. Then, I discuss the research methodology I used to conduct a systematic literature review on the topic. Finally, I outline the limitations of this study and how I addressed these limitations. The following research questions guided my research: How are Canadian and Iranian governments facilitating women's access to higher education? What are the societal and employment outcomes of women who graduate from higher education institutions in Canada and Iran? What is the purpose of higher education in Canada and Iran?

Researcher's Positioning

Henry (2003) asserts that the researcher's identity influences the process and product of the research and challenges the researcher's neutrality and objectivity. Being aware of this dynamic, I discuss my social, educational, and employment experiences as an Iranian-Canadian woman. Women's issues concerning social, educational, and employment experiences have always had significance for me. My experiences of growing up, getting an education and employment in Iran, as well as immigrating to live, study, and work in Canada, shape my understanding of women's issues in relation to education and employment across cultures. Living in Iran, I witnessed news stories, social media, and people's everyday conversations filled with women's stories from domestic violence to inequities in employment opportunities and wage pay gaps to institutionalized discriminatory laws in judiciary and legal systems. Even though I am now geographically relocated from my homeland to Canada by my own will, I still feel attached to Iran and continue to have a

strong sense of duty to my nation. I feel the responsibility to have the Iranian women's voices heard in other parts of the world such as Canada, my second home. All of these reasons motivated me to pursue this research study.

Being born after the Islamic revolution of 1979, I experienced an Islamized education system in Iran, from elementary through higher education, that celebrated the Islamic history and values while labeling Western ideologies and worldviews unethical. Education is a political practice (Freire, 1979) and oftentimes authoritarian governments utilize education to teach as well as to control their citizens (Rezai-Rashti, 2012.). The Islamized education system in Iran aimed at providing girls and boys, women and men with limited knowledge sets and the government deprived the citizens from easily accessing information and knowledge about other ideologies and worldviews. Limiting access to information outlets was done through banning Western-oriented books that criticized Islam and/or Iran, limiting internet access, filtering certain Western websites such as websites of international news agencies, and banning Western satellite TVs. However, many Iranian women and men find ways to overcome these limitations to access the information and knowledge in other parts of the world. Freire (1968) argues that a critical pedagogy awakens critical consciousness and enables us to move from oppression to emancipation. The Iranian education system, however, did not promote critical thinking but rather promoted and valued obedience (to the government and the Islamic ideologies). In contemporary Iran, many women are aware of their rights and challenge institutionalized discriminations and the status quo. However, the lack of a critical pedagogy approach in the education system and a transformative leadership that embraces the effect of intersectionality has kept some other women in the dark and misinformed about their rights. I met a woman in Iran who said she did not realize the

magnitude of the discriminatory laws against women and how little status women had before the law until she had to fight for the custody of her child after divorce. Although she finally had the physical custody of her child, the legal guardianship of the child remained with the child's father. This meant that, according to laws in Iran, the father had authority in major decisions in the child's life and in his absence this authority was transferred to the paternal grandfather not the child's mother.

In a 2017 speech, one of the highest-ranking male officials in Iran called gender equality "one of the biggest mistakes of the Western thought" (Sukic, 2019). In Iran, many of the women and men who fight for human/women's rights are accused of having foreign agendas to corrupt the moral fabric of Iranian society. This is evident in the imprisonment of many human/women's rights activists in notorious prisons in Iran. Although Iran has committed to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 that calls for gender equality, Iran does not participate in the Voluntary National Review process which can be attributed to the regime's discomfort with Goal 5 and gender equality (Sukic, 2019).

In Canada, initiatives such as inclusive education policies and the Employment Equity Act provide structured guiding principles for educational leaders and employers that have led Canada to the top 20 out of 154 countries in terms of gender equality (Global Gender Gap Report, 2020). Under the Canadian Constitution all Canadians have the right to equality, fair treatment, and an environment free of discrimination. However, upon my arrival to Canada as an immigrant woman, I immediately felt excluded from Canadian society because all my educational and professional experiences seemed to be negated because of being *Iranian experiences* rather than *Canadian experiences*. In my continuous

search for a relevant employment opportunity, I was excited to see welcoming statements (that I had not seen in Iran) at the end of job postings after the description of the job and the required qualifications, such as the following statement: “We are an equal opportunity employer committed to inclusive, barrier-free recruitment and selection processes and work environment. We particularly encourage applications from women, disabled and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates.” I identified with these categories; I was a minority woman and I had the educational and professional qualifications, albeit from Iran. However, a minimum-wage job in a factory was the best I could secure as my first job in Canada. I was engaged in a continuous critical reflection on my recent Canadian life and employment experience. I wondered whether those welcoming statements were only token statements in job postings or true practice. I still do not have an answer to that wonder.

After a short time in Canada, I heard about Indigenous stories especially Indigenous women’s stories for the first time. It came to me as a shock to learn about Canada’s historic discrimination against the original owners of this land. Starting my first employment in Canada, I observed that the majority of about 200 employees belonged to Black or other minority groups, with a fair share of women employees included, but the top leadership team consisted of four White men and one White woman. I started to reflect critically on Canada’s human rights statements and the celebration of diversity and multiculturalism. Henry (2015) critiques the prevailing institutional practices that privilege White men and discriminate against women, racialized women in particular. Although there has been progress in terms of gender equity in Canada, I believe that there is a need for gaining a deeper understanding of women’s capacities and potentials. Sexism, racism, and the intersection of racism and sexism remain to be a concern in Canada (Tillman, 2018).

As I toggled between various low-wage positions from factories to offices in Canada, which I did not find connected to my past university education and professional experiences as an educator, I decided that I needed to reinvent myself. Research studies have documented personal benefits from higher education and a positive correlation between the level of education and employment opportunities (Christofide et al., 2010). Furthermore, immigrant women in Canada with a Canadian education have more employment opportunities compared to immigrant women in Canada without a Canadian education (Shields et al., 2010). For these reasons, I enrolled in the Master of Education program at Brock University.

Today, I employ an analytical lens to understand gender equity in Iran, where I had lived for over 30 years, and in Canada, my adopted society. My social life in Canadian society and my educational journey at Brock University continue to shape my understanding of my rights and responsibilities as an educator, a researcher, and a woman who works across cultures, educational systems, and work environments. This major research paper is an attempt to sharpen my analytical lens and help me navigate my own life as a woman. Additionally, I hope the findings of this research study will contribute to filling the gap in the literature in terms of a comparative study between Iran and Canada, benefit women who seek education and employment internationally, and inform Iranian and Canadian policymakers' decisions that affect women's social, educational, and employment experiences.

A Systematic Literature Review

For this study, I conducted a systematic literature review to learn how Canadian and Iranian governments and educational institutions have facilitated women's access to higher education and employment opportunities over the past four decades. My literature was selected through five phases, including database searches, bibliographical branching,

website/the internet searches, supervisor's recommendations, and MRP proposal sources (see Table 1).

Table 1

Literature Search Phases

Phases	Retrieved Sources	Selected Sources
Phase 1: Database Searches	151	20
Phase 2: Bibliographic Branching	18	9
Phase 3: Website/The Internet Searches	8	4
Phase 4: Supervisor's Recommendations	7	7
Phase 5: MRP Proposal Sources	12	4
Total Sources	196	44

In the first phase, I adopted the protocols described by Rogers, Schaenen, Schott, O'Brien, Trigos-Carrillo, Starkey, and Chasteen (2016) to conduct this review. I searched for peer-reviewed journal articles and books that focus on the complexities of women's access to higher education and employment outcomes in Canada and Iran and the main contributing factors. In the second phase, I used biographical branching and identified relevant articles from the reference lists of the literature sources selected in the first phase. In the third phase, I reviewed the literature on women's access to education and employment opportunities on a global scale at internet websites such as OECD, UN, UNESCO, and UNICEF and used the relevant resources to contextualize my study. In the fourth phase, I reviewed the literature recommended by my supervisor and included all the sources that were relevant to my study. Finally, I reviewed the literature I had collected during the preliminary research for my Major Research Paper (MRP) proposal and included the journal articles that pertained to my MRP topic. I then performed a critical analysis of the selected sources considering my research questions and my theoretical frameworks.

I defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen the literature to achieve objectivity, credibility, and focus in my study. Based on my search criteria, I included in this literature review peer-reviewed journal articles and books published in the last four decades. I included only the sources published in English. The articles were considered non-relevant if they did not explicitly use the terms women (or girls or female), higher education (or postsecondary or university) and/or employment.

The first phase of the review included two strands of research: Canadian context and Iranian context. During each strand, I searched three online databases separately, cross-checked the results from the three databases, and removed the duplicated studies. Then, I

read the titles and abstracts, excluding the studies that were not relevant to the context of my MRP. I located the PDF files of all studies and categorized and stored them in Zotero, a reference management software. The main categories were Canadian context and Iranian context.

In the first (Canadian) strand of the first phase, I searched the Brock University Library's SuperSearch tool. According to the Brock University website (2019), "Super Search is a powerful multidisciplinary tool. It includes content from the Brock library catalogue, digital repository, all of the EBSCO databases (including Academic Search Complete), JSTOR, Web of Science, and journal article citations from many scholarly publishers" (para. 1). I searched SuperSearch using the keywords *women AND higher education AND employment opportunities AND Canada* together. I also used the advanced search options to *apply related words* and *apply equivalent subjects*. I applied filters to search for *full text, peer-reviewed, English language* studies that were *published between 1979-2019*. I limited the language to only English because there was no option to search for studies in Persian. Additionally, I am currently located in Canada and most of the sources, including some government websites are not accessible from outside of Iran. This search yielded 18 results and eight of them were considered relevant and selected for my study. All the eight studies discussed women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in some capacity.

The second database that I searched was Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC): "The ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) database is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to provide extensive access to educational-related literature ... ERIC provides coverage of journal articles, conferences, meetings, government

documents, theses, dissertations, reports, audiovisual media, bibliographies, directories, books and monographs” (ERIC, 2019, para. 1). I searched for the same keywords and the same filters utilized when searching the Brock University’s SuperSearch tool. This search yielded five results. Three of them were replicated from SuperSearch results. One was irrelevant to my study because it mainly discussed K-12 education and not higher education. One was considered relevant because it discussed women’s access to higher education over the past four decades and was selected for my study.

The third database that I searched was Journal Storage (JSTOR). According to JSTOR’s website (2019), JSTOR provides access to “academic journal articles, books, and primary sources in 75 disciplines” (para. 1). I searched for the same key words as above; however, I limited the search results to the field of education as this database provides the option to limit the search to different disciplines. This search yielded 19 results and 12 of them were duplicates of the previous search results. Five of them were not relevant to the specific context of my study because they discussed the contexts of countries other than Canada. Two sources were considered relevant because they discussed women’s access to higher education in Canada and were selected for my study.

For the Canadian context, I additionally searched The Canadian Business and Current Affairs database. I searched for the same keywords and applied the same filters to search for peer-reviewed, full-text articles over the past four decades. The search yielded 13 results. Three were duplicates of other searches. Eight were irrelevant to the specific topic of my study. Two were found relevant and selected for my literature review.

In the second strand of the first phase, I replicated the same process above to collect the literature for the Iranian context. I searched using the key terms *women* AND *higher*

education AND employment opportunities AND Iran together. I applied the same filters and search options as above. The Brock University Library's SuperSearch tool yielded four results and two were identical journal articles. Therefore, three articles were selected that pertained specifically to Iranian women and access to higher education and employment. I searched the second database, ERIC, for the same key terms and applied the same filters. It resulted in only one journal article which was found in the previous search. I searched the third database, JSTOR, and entered the same key terms and filters. I restricted the results to the field of education. This search yielded 107 results. I screened the titles of all the sources. One hundred and two articles were found irrelevant to the context of my study because their focus was not Iranian women and their access to higher education and employment experiences. Only the first five were relevant to my study, one of which was already found in the previous searches. I selected the four journal articles that discussed the complexities of women's access to higher education and employment in Iran and the impact of religion on women's educational and social experiences. In total, I selected 20 articles (13 articles from the Canadian context and seven articles from the Iranian context) in the first phase.

In the second phase of my data collection, I performed biographical branching. I reviewed the reference lists of the 20 articles found in the first phase of the review and based on the title screening and abstract review I selected the studies that pertained specifically to women, higher education, and employment opportunities. For the Canadian context, I located and reviewed the abstracts of seven articles and selected three articles through this process. For the Iranian context, I located and reviewed abstracts of 11 articles and selected six articles through this process, resulting in nine selected articles.

In the third phase, I expanded my search to the global context by reviewing the online websites of UN, UNESCO, OECD and the World Bank for key terms of *women/female/girls* and *education* to find reports and documents relevant to my study and to gain a deeper understanding of the global context. I read eight documents related to women's education globally. I selected four reports to use in my study to contextualize my study on a global scale.

In the fourth phase of my data collection process I reviewed the sources I had received from my supervisor including a print version of a book exploring the role of women-only universities in developed as well as developing countries, five UN infographics, and one report. I included all the recommended resources in my study to contextualize my study on a global scale

Finally, I reviewed the studies I had collected during the preliminary research for my MRP proposal. For the Canadian context, I included one journal article from this collection that explicitly discussed gender equity in higher education in Canada. For the Iranian context, I selected three articles that were closely relevant to my MRP topic. In this final phase, I selected four articles.

Through the five phases of conducting a literature review, I selected 11 sources from the global context, 17 journal articles from the Canadian context, and 16 articles from the Iranian context (44 sources in total) to develop my literature review. Table 2 describes the context and type of the reviewed literature.

Table 2

Summary of the Reviewed Literature by Context and Type (N = 44)

Literature Context and Type	Total Literature Reviewed
Canadian Context – Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	N = 17
Iranian Context – Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	N = 16
Global Context – Website Documents	N = 9
Global Context – Books	N = 1
Global Context – Reports	N = 1

Limitations

One limitation of this systematic literature review is that I only used four databases to search for literature on the topic. A systematic literature review can be an arduous process; however, I aimed at searching the optimal combination of databases to collect enough data for conducting my literature review. The SuperSearch tool is a comprehensive multidisciplinary search tool that combines a large number of databases. ERIC provides full-text sources on the topic of education. JSTOR provides the opportunity to narrow the search and retrieve data on the topic of education. The Canadian Business and Current Affairs provides studies on the Canadian context. These four databases provided me with sufficient data to reach saturation and to inform my study. Conducting this study, searching four databases, and exploring three contexts (i.e., Canadian, Iranian, and Global context) provided me with a foundational knowledge on the topic of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities and helped me identify experts in the field, the gaps in the literature, and the current state of the research body on the topic. During my database search I did not include the keyword *global* context; however, as I read the literature, I realized the need to understand the topic from a global perspective. Therefore, I expanded my search to websites of international organizations such as the UN, UNICEF, and OECD to learn how the global trends and issues relate to the context of Canada and Iran.

Another limitation of this study is that I only included English language sources because there are limited peer-reviewed journal articles in Persian that are relevant to the topic of my study and some of the government websites, reports, and documents are typically not accessible from outside of Iran. However, I explored English language research studies that were conducted by both Iranian and non-Iranian scholars on the topic of Iranian

women's access to higher education and employment opportunities to understand different perspectives and complexities of Iranian women's issues as well as evolution, if any, of Iranian women's education and employment since 2013, when I left Iran.

My insider/outsider status to the topic of the study may also be viewed as a study limitation. I identify as an Iranian-Canadian woman that can position herself as an insider to both Iranian and Canadian women's contexts. My immigration, dual citizenship status, and university education from both Canada and Iran have created my intersecting social identities, experiences, and roles informing and shaping this study. I have been mindful of this dynamic and my potential biases throughout the research process and put every effort to remain committed to reflexivity. I continually reflected on the new knowledge I gained through the research process and how it built on my previous knowledge. This critical reflexivity was also practiced during my weekly meetings with my supervisor, ensuring a guided reflection and a safe journey. Bahkru, (2008) argues that this idea of integrated learning through the research process is in contradiction with the typical assumption that the researcher can control her positioning or place herself outside the research circumstances. Therefore, I continued to question my assumptions, interpretations, and methodological decisions throughout the study to allow for an impartial and credible analysis of the data. Despite the above-discussed limitations, I believe the results that I drew from the reviewed literature can be used by policymakers and educational stakeholders to make evidence-informed decisions that foster women's access to higher education, employment, and leadership opportunities in Canada and in Iran.

In summary, I used a systematic literature review approach to explore women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran. I searched four

databases as well as website/online documents to reach saturation and be able to answer my research questions. After highlighting the methodology and procedure used to collect data, I will move forward to present the findings of the study and the themes that emerged from the review of the literature from Canadian, Iranian, and global contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, first, I present the Iranian and Canadian contexts. Next, I discuss the findings of the study that include similar themes as well as different themes that emerged from the review of the literature exploring women's higher education and employment in Iranian and Canadian contexts. Through this chapter, I discuss how the findings of this study can inform the practices of decision/policy makers in Canada and Iran to enhance gender equity in their educational and labour market systems. I also discuss how an intersectional perspective can complement transformative leadership practices to promote equity of access to higher education and employment opportunities for all women regardless of race or religious affiliations.

Women's Education, Employment, and Social Justice

The field of education and women's study were brought together by feminist scholars. Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn (2018) argue that women's issues have been pushed to the margins of educational objectives and policies because of the myths of overachieving girls and failing boys that mask the struggles of women, such as the sexism they face and the inequality they experience in their careers. A social justice argument and the need for critical examination of power, privilege, and biases in higher education are strong rationales for studying women's access to higher education and employment opportunities. Shields (2004) suggests that to reach the goal of creating socially just and deeply democratic communities, educational leaders need to adopt a transformative leadership framework in their practices. In such a context, a gender-inclusive transformative educational leadership (Shields, 2010), rooted in an intersectionality perspective (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989), can foster equity of access to educational and employment opportunities for all women, regardless of their

ethnic, cultural, geographic, and socio-economic locations. Such a leadership approach may enhance women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in developing and developed countries despite their diverse socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. The contexts of Canada and Iran, for example, may seem very different because Canada is considered a developed country located in North America while Iran is considered a developing country located in Western Asia/Middle East. However, the findings of this study suggest that there are similarities and differences between the two countries in terms of the dynamics of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities.

The Iranian Educational and Socio-Cultural Context

In Iran, women were offered access to higher education for the first time in 1935; however, this study covers women's access to higher education and employment opportunities since the Islamic revolution of 1979 and radical changes in the entire educational system. After the 1979 revolution, Iran shifted from being a secular country to a heavily Islamic society under the rule of the clergy. There is a correlation between trends in education and society where the educational system reflects macro-level changes at the societal level and, at the same time, the society is impacted by the transformations and trends happening in the educational system (Mehran, 2003).

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, religion and the state were linked together very closely. The rule of Islam was applied in every aspect of life which impacted the daily lives of all Iranians, but women's lives, including their educational life, were the most affected (Mehran, 2009). For example, compulsory veiling (Islamic dress) for women and schoolgirls as early as seven years old, banning co-education, streamlining women to the fields of study that are deemed appropriate for women (e.g., education and nursing), and refusing women's

applications for state scholarships to study abroad (this policy was revoked in 2001) are some of the post-revolutionary educational policies that aimed at regulating women according to the Islamic codes (Mehran, 2009).

The impact of the Islamic rules and regulations on Iranian women is not only in the educational sphere but also in the social realm. For example, the age of criminal responsibility for a girl is 9 years old compared to the age of 15 for boys and a woman's testimony in court has half the evidentiary value of a man's testimony (i.e., two women's testimony in court equal one man's testimony). Women also face inequality in inheritance rights (e.g., according to Article 911 of the Iranian Civic Code, which is based on Islamic law, sons inherit twice as much as daughters when a parent is deceased, and a widow inherits one-eighth of the deceased husband's property if he left children behind and one-fourth if he left no children).

Here, I present a few controversial cases presented in the media that illustrate how discriminatory laws have impacted the social and professional lives of women in Iran.

Shirin Ebadi. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.), Shirin Ebadi is an Iranian lawyer, former judge, educator, human rights activist, and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. She received an education in the pre-revolutionary educational system, and in 1969 she became the first woman judge in Iran. However, she was among the women who were hit the hardest by the Islamic revolution of 1979. She was dismissed as a judge (along with 50 other female judges) because the new regulations in the newly established Islamic state prohibited women from becoming judges. Shirin Ebadi was given a clerical position at the very court once she presided. Soon after, she went on an early retirement but continued to write books and articles and work as an activist for women's and children's rights. In 1992,

after her struggles to obtain a lawyer's license that the government was refusing to provide, she was finally able to obtain a licence and start to practice law. In 2000, Shirin Ebadi distributed evidence of the government officials' involvement in 1999 murders of student protestors at the University of Tehran. She was accused of "disturbing public opinion" (The National, 2011, para. 7), fined, and imprisoned for three weeks. Shirin Ebadi has defended many women and political cases in courts including Zahra Kazemi. Kazemi was a Canadian-Iranian photojournalist who was arrested taking photos of student protestors outside Tehran's Evin prison (the primary site for political prisoners) and suspiciously died while in custody in 2003, which led to serious deterioration of Ottawa-Tehran relations and later closure of the embassies in Ottawa and Tehran. Ebadi has won numerous awards including the Noble Peace Prize in 2003 for her significant efforts to promote democracy and women's and children's rights in Iran. She is the first Muslim woman to receive a Nobel Peace Prize. In 2004, *Forbes Magazine* recognized Shirin Ebadi among the 100 most influential women in the world. Because of the increase in persecution of Iranians who are critical of the Islamic regime in Iran, she has been living in exile in the UK since 2009. Many other human/women's rights activists in Iran have had to flee for similar reasons, and many of those who stayed in Iran are detained in prisons with charges, such as propaganda against the state and threats to national security.

When President Rouhani's progressive/reformist government took office in 2013 in Iran (still in office for the second term), he acknowledged Iranian men and women abroad as the human capital and invited them to return home promising them safety. The president requested University officials to identify Iranian academics abroad and invite them to return. However, many academics, journalists, and activists who returned were arrested, charged, or

jailed. For example, Kavous Seyed-Emami, a Canadian-Iranian university professor, was arrested on suspicion of espionage while he was visiting Iran in 2018 and later passed away in Evin prison. Iranian authorities said he committed suicide. Seyed-Emami's family did not believe the government's claim and requested an autopsy that was denied by the Iranian authorities (CBC News, 2018). Shirin Ebadi has never returned to Iran.

Niloufar Ardalan. Niloufar Ardalan, a physical education graduate and the best female player and the captain of the Iranian national futsal team, missed the 2015 AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Malaysia—an important event in her sports career—because, under the country's law, her husband did not allow her to renew her passport. For the second time in the same year, Niloufar's husband denied her permission to travel, this time for the World Championship in Guatemala (The Guardian, 2015). Ardalan's ordeal resonates with many Iranian women's social and professional experiences. She went to court to fight for her most basic right to renew her passport. The judge ordered in her favour to allow her to join the team in the World Championship. Her success at the court could be due to the controversy her story had created; not every typical married Iranian woman can easily claim the right to renew her passport or to travel. In Iran, a woman's age and marital status dictate her ability to travel overseas, including travel for educational and professional purposes. Unmarried women under the age of 18 are required to have permission from their fathers (or custodians) to travel abroad. Unmarried women above the age of 18 are free to apply for a passport and travel. However, married women are required to have permission from their husbands to travel abroad. The only exception to this law is traveling to Mecca for hajj pilgrimage (a religious trip). In this case, women are provided with a one-time travel document even without their husband's approval. In 2017, the Rouhani administration

proposed a law to the Parliament to allow female athletes or artists to travel without their husband's consent; to date, the law is pending in Parliament (Sukic, 2019). Today, many Iranian women accept marriage proposals on the condition that their husbands relinquish such power to deny them the right to travel; this is typically done verbally or written and signed on their marriage document.

Ebadi's and Ardalan's stories are very few instances of numerous similar stories that happen every day in Iran. Most of the population taking part in protests against the government are university students, including women university students. The regime has a history of torturing and imprisoning many of the protesters who fight for their basic human rights and are against the government's mismanagement and corruption. Many educated female human rights activists, professionals, and athletes, who are the product of the increased access to higher education in Iran, leave the country and cite government pressure as the reason for their decisions. Lack of transformative leadership with social justice agendas (Shields, 2010) force the huge potential and human capital in Iran to flee to the West. Iran has reached the goal of gender equity in terms of access to higher education but inequities in the public spheres such as social life and employment opportunities are persisting (Rezai-Rashti, 2015; Rezai-Rashti & Moghadam, 2011). Now, it seems to be the time for the Iranian government to adopt a gender-inclusive approach, reform its laws, and learn how to support women's choices and their rights not only when accessing higher education, but also when re-claiming their social status and access to employment opportunities. This is of critical importance because today's girls and women are the mothers, educators, and leaders of the next generation of men and women who will build Iran.

The Canadian Educational and Socio-Cultural Context

Research studies in late the 1970's revealed the gender stereotyping issues in textbooks and learning materials (Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018). The learning materials provided thousands of years of history but there was little reference to women and the curriculum did not include female role models to encourage girls to pursue further education and employment. In the 1980's, there were efforts to address gender equity issues. For example, there were (token) references to women in textbooks, but change was slow. Beliefs that legitimize inequalities based on sex could slow changes towards gender equity. By the 1990's, feminist education scholars were exploring women as students as well as teachers. The scholars acknowledged that women's voices and identities were not unified but rather included an intersection of gender with other social constructs, such as race, class, and ethnicity. This resulted in recognition of the voices and experiences of marginalized women, including Black women (Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018).

With the Conservative party taking office in Ontario in 1995, and the changes to the *Education Act* and the *Employment Equity Act*, the equity officers were removed from Ontario's schools, resulting in the slowing down of the equity work in Ontario (Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018). Although this trend was observed in Ontario and may not be generalized as a pan-Canadian experience, there are often present subtle nationalist agendas for social studies education and learning materials (Sears, 1997). Gender and the power of the matrix of domination (i.e., the discriminatory power created at the intersection of gender and other social constructs) as contributing factors to educational success were neglected, and gender equity work was redirected.

With the change of the government in Ontario in 2003, the Liberals promoted gender equity work. Kirby (2011) reported that “Although, Canada has one of the highest levels of per capita educational attainment in the world, student access continues to be one of the most dominant policy areas in Canadian higher education” (p. 267). Despite the overall increase in women’s access to higher education, marginalized students (e.g., Black women) are still under-represented in higher education institutions in Canada. Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn (2018) argue that although there have been positive changes over the past decades, reforms to fully address women’s discrete experiences, such as experiences of systemic patriarchy and intersectional oppression, have not happened yet. Canadian higher education is focused on developing policies to address the issue of marginalized students’ (including Black women’s) access to higher education; however, studies found that despite the improvements in gender equity in Canada over the past four decades, the progress seems to have slowed down (Baker, 2016; Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018). According to the Global Gender Gap report (2020), North America (i.e., the United States and Canada) has closed 73% of its overall gender gap compared to 71% in 2006 and it will take 151 years for North America to fully close their overall gender gap, including gender gaps in educational, health, and economic participation domains. Although North America has closed its educational gender gap and has one of the smallest gender gaps in economic participation (having closed 76% of the gap), the figures have remained the same since 2006.

Under the Canadian constitution, higher education is regulated provincially, and there is no national government department responsible for higher education policies. Kirby (2011) asserts that because of the shared responsibility of the federal and provincial governments in economic development and the federal government’s spending power, the Canadian federal

government is involved in higher education policy in various capacities, such as funding according to unique needs of each jurisdiction and supporting initiatives that aim at helping “at-risk” students. For example, the federal government offers financial assistance to students that translates into increased access to higher education for more students, including women. To support a new generation of feminists (girls and boys), who will disrupt the misogynist ideologies, there is a need to maintain women’s increased access to education and integrate women’s historical experiences and issues in curricular reforms.

Findings

In this section, I discuss the similarities and differences between the Canadian and Iranian educational, employment, and socio-cultural contexts. The review of the literature revealed two similar themes and two different themes in the context of women’s access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran. Similarities include (a) women’s increased access to higher education over the past four decades and (b) women’s limited access to employment opportunities. Despite the similar trends of women’s increased access to higher education and limited employment opportunities observed in Canada and Iran, the degree of the increased access to higher education and the gender gap in employment opportunities varies in each country. The differences include (a) the intersectional impact of gender and religion on Iranian women’s educational and employment experiences and (b) the intersectional impact of gender, race, and immigration status on Canadian women’s educational and employment experiences.

Women’s Increased Access to Higher Education in Iran and Canada

Today, in many developed and developing countries including Canada and Iran, women participate in higher education in significantly higher rates than before (Parvazian,

Gill, & Chiera, 2017). In Iran, women's increased access to higher education is significant at the undergraduate levels, but the gender gap in graduate and postgraduate levels is still persistent. Ghorbani (2012) reports that despite the notable increase in the number of public and private universities in Iran over the past four decades, the fierce competition among students to get admission to free-of-charge public universities is still a concern. The competition is closer in the case of Master and Ph.D. Konkours as the supply of university seats does not correspond to the demands in the young Iranian society. According to the National Organization for Educational Testing of Iran *Sazman Sanjesh* (2019), the body overseeing Konkour at all levels, total admission rate of men and women who were admitted through undergraduate Konkour in 2019 was about 75%, with the female student admission rate reaching 60%. In Master Konkour, about 45% of admitted students were women (total admission rate of men and women was about 25%). In Ph.D. Konkour, about 43% of admitted students were women (total admission rate of men and women was less than 12%). In the 1978-1979 academic year, and on the eve of the Islamic revolution, only a total of 31% of women participated in higher education (Fereidouni, Mehran, & Mansourian, 2015). These statistics highlight the significant increase in women's overall access to higher education since 1979; however, more work needs to be done to increase women's access to higher education in graduate and postgraduate levels.

In Canada, Evers, Livernois, and Mancuso (2006) reported that gender imbalance has shifted from an imbalance in favour of men to an imbalance in favour of women. The education system transformed from elitism to a more democratic and egalitarian system to serve a larger proportion of the population (Kirby, 2011), and women were at an advantage during this massification of education (Christofides et al., 2010). The OECD report on

Education in Canada (2019) suggests that, in 2018, 70% of Canadian women (53% of Canadian men) aged 25-34 held higher education degrees compared to the average of 51% of women (38% of men) in 36 OECD countries. Similarly to the Iranian context, Canadian women are overrepresented in undergraduate levels in universities (56%) and underrepresented in Ph.D. levels (38%); however, in contrast to Iran, Canadian women comprise a slightly higher percentage (51%) compared to Canadian men in Master levels. It is also important to recognize Canadian women's significant underrepresentation compared to Canadian men in high-earning Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields in higher education (The Conference Board of Canada, 2018).

The Islamic Republic of Iran views education as an equalizer and a tool for social mobility that aims at closing the educational gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. As a result, the government has expanded educational opportunities to the most vulnerable populations, including girls, youth in rural areas, economically disadvantaged families, and the nomads. In 1980's, with the government's privatization efforts, private universities were opened in almost every city and town in Iran to reach a larger proportion of the population. In a short time after the Islamic revolution, university education transformed from being a privilege available to the elites of the society to "a social norm and an Islamic right for the majority" (Shams, 2016, p. 126). Fereidouni et al. (2015) assert that for Iranian women, pursuing higher education is the primary path to empowerment. The authors argue that female empowerment includes "social presence, the power to make decisions, autonomy, education, and building up a new value framework" (p. 366). Women's persistence—despite the limitations they face, such as gender roles and expectations imposed on them—has helped them navigate through the web of social and

educational challenges, and achieve higher education credentials, employment, and social status.

Renn (2017) highlights the temptation to believe that, in the 21st century, women's access to higher education is no longer an issue in need of resolution or discussion as women have been provided with access to higher education institutions including the most elite institutions. Research studies show that the changing aspects and dynamics of education and women (Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018) and the issue of access remain one of the priority areas in higher education policy (Kirby, 2011; Renn, 2017). In Canada, women account for the majority of university degree holders; however, women are underrepresented in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Statistics Canada, 2016). Education policies may vary across Canadian provinces; however, the recent trends collectively reveal common elements across the provincial educational policies. For example, in the last decade, there have been educational policy reforms in Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick that intend to increase access for all the under-represented groups in higher education who qualify and are willing to attend these institutions (Kirby, 2011).

Women's Limited Employment Opportunities in Iran and Canada

Fennell (2008) argues that to understand the transformative nature of education, we need to gauge its impact on employment outcomes. The roles and responsibilities of the leaders in diverse contexts in ensuring women's equitable access to employment opportunities are of paramount importance. The qualities of the decision/policy makers and their values and beliefs impact their practices (Shields, 2010). Today, women's increased access to higher education has not translated into women's increased access to senior

leadership, decision-making, and high-rank academic positions in the workforce in Canada (The Conference Board of Canada, 2018). In both Canada and Iran, there is a gender gap in favour of men in employment opportunities. Women are underrepresented in top-level administrative or decision-making positions in academia and other sectors. Although the same trend is observed in Canada and Iran, the issue is more pronounced in Iran. In Iran the percentage of women in top-level professional positions is relatively lower (less than 4%) and the gap in employment opportunities between women and men is larger than the gap in Canada. For example, The Global Gender Gap report (2020) ranked Iran 148 out of 153 countries in terms of gender equality and economic participation. Canada ranked 19 in the same report. To address this gender gap in employment opportunities, more women leaders with gender-inclusive perspectives, transformative leadership skills, and social justice goals are required in decision/policy making positions. Women in leadership positions have the potential to influence decisions that are more inclusive of all women.

According to Human Rights Watch (2016), 17% of Iranian women participate in the labour force compared to over 60% of men, while women's participation is significantly lower in senior public and private leadership positions. According to Statistics Canada (2020), in June 2019, 61.4% of Canadian women participated in the labour force compared to 70.1% of men. Women are underrepresented in the STEM fields in higher education institutions, and their participation in the STEM occupations is also lower compared to men. Women comprise a higher percentage in lower-paying STEM field occupations such as life sciences while men make up a higher proportion in higher-paying STEM fields such as engineering and computer sciences (Statistics Canada, 2016). The proportion of women in leadership positions in corporations that conducted business in Canada in 2016 was less than

20% (Statistics Canada, 2019). The greatest percentage of women in leadership positions was in the financial sector and the lowest percentages were in construction, manufacturing, and energy sectors. Canada ranks sixty-first in the world in terms of women holding political office (Fine-Meyer & Llewellyn, 2018). Moghadam (2009) reports that in Iran less than four percent of women are employed in senior executive or managerial positions and less than three percent in ministerial positions. About 33% of the total female labour force is concentrated in the fields of education, healthcare, and social services which are deemed to be feminine. It is observed that a large portion of the research studies in Iran are conducted by men which also highlights the absence of women in academic research positions as well as the absence of women's perspectives and voices in the literature.

Canada's gender-equity strategies and advocacy for women's rights have helped to narrow the gender gap in employment opportunities in recent years, although more work needs to be done to reach the ideal gender parity in senior leadership and decision-making positions. In the case of Iran, there seems to be a much greater need for the government's performance accountability, recognition of women's potential, and development of strategies and policies that support women's employment opportunities at all levels, especially in leadership positions. Transformative educational leaders, specifically, have the potential to advance an educational environment that focuses on academic excellence as well as social transformation (Shields, 2010). Transformative educational leaders can guide and inspire the next generation of educators and leaders to adopt gender inclusive and intersectionality perspectives and enhance women's educational and employment opportunities.

Women in leadership roles who embrace transformative leadership with an intersectionality approach will have more knowledge, skills, and agency to influence policies

that impact and empower women's lives. The lack of women leaders in decision-making positions in Iran and Canada can contribute to the persistence of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. The narrowing gender gap in education in Iran did not mean that women simultaneously benefited in other aspects of their lives, such as employment opportunities. For example, surveys indicate that about 70% of the Iranian public believe that when there are limited employment opportunities, men should be given more rights to employment than women (Moaddel, 2007) as men are traditionally considered the breadwinners in the family. Such a statistical result reflects the lack of a gender-inclusive understanding by the Iranian general public. Rahbari (2016) explored women's participation in academia and administrative positions in Iran and concluded that structural gender discrimination that is rooted in cultural (and religious) beliefs limits women's choices and, despite the increased participation of women in tertiary education, they are underrepresented in scientific and higher-rank positions. According to the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology of Iran (2019), about 27% of faculty members in Iranian universities are women while in Canada women constitute 49% of faculty members at the tertiary level (OECD, 2019). Tamboukou (2008) maintains that teaching non-adult learners is linked to women's natural nurturing capacities and it is, therefore, deemed appropriate for women. Such an understanding of women's capacities further limits women's roles and employment opportunities in higher education, which can further limit women's future roles as transformative leaders and educators.

Baker (2016) highlights the gender gap in university-based academic positions despite the development of gender equity and family-friendly policies in Canada. This gender gap poses challenges, especially at a time when the number of women attending higher

education institutions and gaining doctoral degrees has been increasing over the past decades (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, this does not mean that non-academic career paths may not be fulfilling, but rather highlights the glass ceiling (Pollock, Ryan, & Antonelli, 2009) or clogged pipeline metaphor for women who seek an academic career. In 2016, the University of Toronto's "The 10.000 Ph.D.s" project was conducted to determine the employment status of students who graduated with a Ph.D. from University of Toronto between the years 2000 and 2015. The research found that women (49%) and men (51%) comprised an equal percentage of Ph.D. graduates and "about half (51%) of the Ph.D. graduates are employed in the post-secondary education sector, 26% as tenure-track professors, with an additional 3% as adjunct professors and 2% as full-time teaching-stream professors" (Reithmeier et al., 2019, p. 8) However, the authors' findings revealed that women were overrepresented in teaching-stream professor positions with few or no research obligations, which can lead to truncated future career trajectories.

In the case of Iran, women's increased level of education does not always guarantee employment upon graduation because the fading (but still existing) cultural norms define a woman's role in the household rather than in the workplace. However, the growing pool of educated women is more likely to challenge the status quo and the second class-citizen status that is inscribed in discriminatory laws, such as family, divorce, custody, and inheritance laws. Education can transform women's understanding of gender and social consciousness and encourage them to rise for equal civil, political, and economic rights. If those Iranian women who manage to break the glass ceiling and secure decision-making positions work together with men to adopt a transformative leadership approach rooted in intersectional

perspectives and gender equity, there will be hope for reforms that embrace gender inclusiveness in all domains in Iran.

Grant and Drakich (2011) argue that although universities are “dominated by masculine principles and structures” (p. 62), if men and women who hold elite academic careers such as Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) are evaluated based on similar unambiguous criteria, gender will not have a notable impact on their experiences. According to the CRC website (2019), the proportion of women holding CRC positions has increased from 24.3% in 2009 to 33.5% in 2019. However, women are even a smaller minority in holding CRCs in the fields of health sciences, natural sciences, and engineering (Grant & Drakich, 2011). Research studies over the past four decades have documented the systemic discrimination against women, evaluation of their scholarship, and their career progress (Elliott et al., 2013; Fox, 2005; Xie & Shauman, 1998). This systemic discrimination is a burning equity issue in Canada today because women in key professional positions have a critical role in shaping educational and employment policies as well as acting as role models for the next generation of girls and women who will contribute to the economic development, overall well-being, and peace in a global world.

The Impact of Religion on Iranian Women’s Educational Experiences and Employment Opportunities

One of the notable differences between Canada and Iran in the context of women’s access to higher education and employment opportunities is the influence of religion on Iranian women’s experiences. In Iran, religion significantly influences women’s educational and employment experiences while Canada is a more secular society and research studies do

not find religion to have a significant impact on women's educational and employment experiences.

The review of the literature in the Iranian context revealed the complex and paradoxical nature of Iranian women's educational and employment experiences. The available literature is focused on the impact of religion on Iranian women's education and employment and it is evident in the literature that religion has had a significant (mainly positive) impact on women's increased access to higher education while having a significant (mainly negative) impact on women's social experiences and employment opportunities after the 1979 revolution. On the one hand, with Islamization of the educational system in Iran after the 1979 revolution, more traditional and religious families deemed the new educational environment appropriate for their daughters, sending their daughters to schools and universities and producing a significant increase of women's participation in education. On the other hand, the less traditional/religious women found some of the new policies and laws developed with Islamic ideologies to be restricting (Rezai-Rashti, 2015). One example is the family law in Iran which restricts women from travelling overseas without written permission of their husbands that includes restrictions in travelling for educational and employment purposes. This can also influence employers' decisions about employing women in positions that require travelling abroad.

Women's role in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a combination of tradition and modernity, which is also reflected in the *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. The constitution emphasizes the significance of women's role as mothers to maintain strong family relations and bonds and simultaneously highlights the importance of women's participation in social and economic activities. Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam (2011) argue

that women with higher education credentials experience “gender discrimination and an unfavourable economic system, one that is not conducive to employment-generation for women” (p. 419); women have limited access to employment opportunities and much less to decision-making positions in academia or other sectors due to gender bias, traditional-religious beliefs, and structural and socio-demographic factors. Additionally, Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam (2011) argue that women’s limited participation in the labour force is the result of gender ideology and political economy. For example, after the 1979 Islamic revolution, women were barred from becoming judges and those who were already appointed were dismissed. Many women who had high-ranked government positions were removed by forcing them to accept lower-level jobs or to retire. This practice contributed to the exclusion of women in high-profile decision making and leadership positions and reduced the diversity of perspective on high-stakes government-level policies and decisions that impact women’s lives.

Iranian women’s social and educational experiences are very complex and contradictory. Rezai-Rashti (2013) asserts that, since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently enacted gender-repressive policies; however, one of the paradoxical elements of these policies is women’s increased access to education in general, and higher education in particular. Despite the policies, laws, and regulations that reflect the Islamic ideologies and seem to be isolating women, many women have managed to navigate through the educational and employment system in Iran and thrive. In the case of higher education, Mehran (2009) argues that in Iran “female higher education has been characterised by a paradoxical combination of discrimination and exclusion, on the one hand, and increasing equality and empowerment, on the other” (p. 541). Women have been provided with increased access to

higher education; however, their role in education is strictly governed by the state policies. For example, the policies discriminated against women by introducing quotas on female acceptance in disciplines that are deemed masculine such as engineering or computer sciences and streamlined women to the disciplines often viewed as more feminine, such as education or nursing.

Over the past four decades, there have been discussions about women's education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Comparative studies have found the largest gender gap to exist in this region in addition to South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Global Gender Gap Report, 2020) where the dominant religion is Islam. One of the main messages of Quran (Muslims' holy book) is that "The pursuit of knowledge is an obligation of every Muslim [man or woman]"; however, there is a popular belief in the West that Islam excludes women from education, as it was the case in Afghanistan under Taliban rule (Mehran, 2003). Paradoxically, in the case of Iran, women's access to education, including higher education, has increased significantly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 (Mehran, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2015; Shams, 2016), and research studies have not been able to precisely explain this persistent phenomenon of women's increased higher education enrollment in Iran (Mehran, 2003).

To understand the complexities of Iranian women's lives and their increased access to education over the past four decades, the topic should be viewed and analysed within the specific social, political, religious, and cultural context of post-revolutionary Iranian society. Mehran (2003) emphasizes that the post-revolutionary religio-political leadership integrated religion and politics in Iran and attempted to Islamize all aspects of women's public and private lives by enforcing Islamic laws and regulations. The process of Islamization

contained authoritarian and misogynist features (Rezai-Rashti & Moghadam, 2011). At this time, the government attempted to use education to nurture an Ideal Muslim Woman who would, in turn, raise Muslim children dedicated to the cause of the Islamic revolution (Mehran, 2003).

In many countries, the purpose of public education is economic and social development. Authoritarian and religious states may, additionally, seek to control curriculum, students, teaching staff, and administrators. However, in the case of higher education, the intended purpose may not always be achieved because an expanded knowledge base encourages critical thinking that can lead to resistance and questioning of the authority (Rezai-Rashti & Moghadam, 2011). Based on anecdotal evidence, in the case of Iran, the majority of the protesters who fight for human rights and are against the Islamic mismanagement and corruption in Iran are university students, with women university students being an active part of this community.

As the unemployment rate grows in the Islamic State of Iran, the competition to find stable employment grows simultaneously among the educated population, including educated women, and individuals make decisions to take a further step to continue to graduate and postgraduate education with the hope of securing long-term employment. However, the postgraduate bottleneck prevents many students from accessing higher levels of education. The limited availability of seats at graduate and postgraduate levels has led to outbound mobilization of the Iranian students, both men and women, to Western countries. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2014), there has been consistent growth in Iranian students' enrollment in the American universities over the past years. Seventy-nine percent of these students are enrolled at postgraduate levels and roughly 80% in STEM

subjects. This has led to the emergence of another phenomenon called “brain drain” in Iran that, although very significant, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Intersection of Race and Gender and its Impact on Canadian Women’s Access to Higher Education and Employment Opportunities

In Canada, the intersection of race and gender impact women’s experiences to a greater extent than religion. Although there are research studies that explore Black women’s employment opportunities in leadership positions and academia (Henry, 2015; Tillman, 2018), the number of research studies that explore Black women’s university attendance (as students) are scarce. The majority of higher education institutions in Canada do not collect race-based data and much less data is available about those who reside in the margins of race and gender simultaneously, such as Black women. A CBC News investigation in 2017 found that more than 60 out of 76 Canadian universities do not collect race-based data from students and do not have a clear picture of racial diversity of their student population. Canadian universities proudly celebrate diversity and inclusiveness but fail to provide data about racial identity of their student populations. This can pose specific challenges to making evidence-based policy decisions that aim at facilitating racialized students, including racialized women’s, access to higher education. With the lack of data, the issue may not be fully understood and creating meaningful changes may become more challenging.

The available studies, however, demonstrate that in general, Black students, including Black girls, have more negative educational experiences in comparison to their White or other racialized counterparts (James & Turner, 2017; Robson et al., 2018). James and Turner (2017) highlight the experiences of Black female students who are subject to stereotypical views such as underachieving. James and Turner (2017) report that Black students, including

Black women, are underrepresented in medical schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and this reflects the overall poor outcomes for Black students in the Canadian education system.

In professional landscapes, women are disproportionately represented in positions of power and decision-making and dominate the perceived feminine positions, such as administrative support or positions in the service industry (Elliott, Leck, Rockwell, & Luthy, 2013). Research studies have documented the underrepresentation of visible minorities in top-level professional positions where the intersection of gender and race causes an amplified experience of oppression for racialized women (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Elliott et al., 2013). Padilla-Gonzalez, Metcalfe, Galaz-Fontes, Fisher, and Snee (2011) report an underrepresentation of women in academic positions in several countries including Canada. In North America, women are mainly assigned to lower-rank academic positions compared to men, and they account for about one-third of full-time university faculty (Fisher & Snee, 2011).

Despite the overall increase in women's access to higher education in Canada, Agosto and Roland (2018) argue that Black women are negatively impacted by the power generated at the intersection of their gender and race and remain underrepresented as students and academics in educational institutions compared to non-Black women. Robson et al. (2018) found that Black women are less likely to attend higher education institutions compared to non-Black women, even though their university participation has increased between 2006 and 2011. The theory of intersectionality argues that while race and sex impact the individuals' life experiences, the intersection of race and sex has a differential impact on individuals who belong to various social categories simultaneously. Collins (2015) upholds

that multiple social categories such as gender, race, and class can overlap/interact to create educational or social outcomes that cannot be understood in isolation but should, rather, be studied as the interaction of sexism, racism, and classism. Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda (2015) assert the need for leadership at all levels of the hierarchy of social and educational structures to ensure that Black women are provided with equitable opportunities.

Educational institutions do not operate in isolation and are oftentimes a reflection of the society within which they are located. Research studies have documented systemic discrimination against Black populations (James & Turner, 2017) as well as Black women (Tillman, 2018) in Canada. Therefore, it is not surprising if Black women, who simultaneously belong to two oppressed categories, are double burdened in educational institutions and workplaces in Canada. The impact of gender on whether a woman will attend higher education is different for racialized women and White women. Black women are about one and a half times more likely to attend universities compared to Black men, while they are nearly one and a half times more likely to attend colleges than universities compared to White women. Although Black women are more likely to enroll in universities compared to Black men (similar to the trend observed among White women and men), Black women are underrepresented in universities compared to White women. Robson et al. (2018) found that Black students' overall high school grades are still lower, and they are still streamed into applied courses more than other student populations. This can hinder Black students', including Black women's, opportunities to access university education. However, Robson et al. (2018) also found that in 2011, Black students', including Black women's, university enrollment increased slightly. The reason for the slight increase in Black women's participation in higher education, despite the unchanged institutional structures, can be that

Black women have learned how to navigate through the structural obstacles. These obstacles often “tend to stream them into lower-ability groupings and curtail their late-life academic choices” (Robson et al., 2018, p. 51).

In employment domains, it is similarly important to ensure equal opportunities and access to leadership positions to all members of the society who qualify. Black women are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions and in academia, and they face challenges to access promotion opportunities and mentorship relationships that affect Black women’s future career trajectories (Tillman, 2018). Transformative Black women leaders have a key role in promoting racial and gender equity in university campuses and other workplaces, acting as role models, and educating the next generation of leaders who will continue to challenge hegemonic power and status quo (Henry, 2015).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In this Major Research Paper, I explored how the Canadian and Iranian governments have increased women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran over the past four decades. Through the findings of this study, I aim to inform readers in Canada and Iran about the complexities of women's past and present educational and employment opportunities in both countries and present recommendations for leaders and policy/decision-makers for future improvements. I argue that bringing an intersectional perspective to transformative leadership can assist leaders and policy/decision-makers in enhancing educational and employment policy and practice, providing all women with equitable access to higher education and relevant employment opportunities. In this chapter, I discuss the answers to my research questions, present the study implications for policy and practice, and make recommendations for future research.

Discussion

In this section I discuss how intersectionality and the matrix of domination (Collins, 2015) shape women's experiences in higher education and employment realms. I also consider Shields' (2012) argument that transformative leadership is focused on educational institutions as well as society. This implies the importance of not only providing access to education for all but also to employment opportunities as a form of social involvement and well-being. The findings of the study suggest that increasing access to higher education while providing limited access to employment opportunities means that leaders at various levels of society are not practicing transformative leadership in its full capacity. To address inequities in educational institutions and society, governments must provide access to higher education and meaningful employment opportunities for women.

How are Canadian and Iranian Governments Facilitating Women's Access to Higher Education?

Canadian and Iranian governments have increased women's access to higher education in the last four decades (Baker, 2016; Rezai-Rashti, 2015). The findings of the study suggest that the main strategy in both countries has been massification of education to increase access to higher education (Christofides, 2010; Ghorbani, 2012). However, the dynamics of the massification process have been different in the two countries. Shields (2012) argues that transformative leadership aims at effecting change in educational institutions and the broader society. In the case of Iran, research studies have not identified or discussed leadership styles employed to increase women's access to higher education. However, the government's and the educational leaders' practices partially embody transformative leadership principles in terms of providing equal access to higher education to all students regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity. In Iran, religious ideologies were the main driving force to provide women with equal access to education. The religion of Islam does not withhold education from women and encourages both men and women to seek learning and education throughout their lives. Therefore, the Islamic government in Iran was committed to paving the ground for participation of more women in education. For example, the leader of the Islamic revolution encouraged active participation of women in the revolution and in other public spheres including education.

In Canada, research studies did not find religion to be a contributing factor to women's access. Canadian governments employ human rights perspectives to provide equal access to all individuals regardless of their gender or other social constructs, such as race. Shields (2004) pinpoints the complexity and challenges of educational leadership and argues

that transformative educational leaders may engage in a moral dialogue that “grounds educational leadership in some criteria for social justice” (p. 109). Transformative educational leaders are expected to ensure academic excellence as well as social justice. The Canadian authorities overseeing education policies and educational leaders have attempted to incorporate the tenets of transformative leadership (as well as the transforming aspects of transformational leadership) in their practices of providing access to higher education for women. Equity and inclusive education policies that promote human rights and prohibit discrimination are demonstrative of Canadian government’s meaningful efforts. At a macro level, Canada has reached gender parity in education (Global Gender Gap, 2020); however, at a micro level, racialized women such as Black women do not have equal access to higher education (James & Turner, 2017). Collins’ (2015) matrix of domination/intersectionality argues that the intersection of gender and race double disadvantages Black women. That is, the intersection of racism and sexism has an amplified effect on Black women. Shields’ (2012) transformative leadership provides a single axis analysis of racism or sexism separately. I propose that incorporating an intersectionality perspective in transformative leadership can help address the issue of marginalized women’s (e.g., Black women’s) experiences of intersectional sexism, racism, and/or immigrant status in accessing higher education institutions in Canada.

What are the Societal and Employment Outcomes of Women who Graduate from Higher Education Institutions in Canada and Iran?

The review of the literature revealed that men are provided with more employment opportunities in academia and top-level administrative and decision-making positions in both Canada (Baker, 2016) and Iran (Rahbari, 2016). However, this gender gap is more

pronounced in the Iranian context due to the cultural beliefs in Iran that define women's role in households rather than in workplaces. The lack of mandated family-friendly policies in the private sector to protect women can be another reason. The struggling economic system in Iran also contributes to high rates of unemployment that lead to discrimination against women in finding professional placements. Women's disadvantaged position in finding employment is reinforced by the cultural beliefs that prioritize women's roles as primary agents of strengthening family units and men's role as the primary source of financial support for the family.

Women's limited employment opportunities are part of their unfavourable social experiences but their increased access to higher education has contributed to increased awareness of their rights and activist movements to pursue the advancement of their social and legal rights. This is evident in the progress women have made to secure—although a limited number of— high-rank positions such as executive directors, MPs, and advisors to the President. In the case of Iranian women's employment opportunities, a transformative leadership approach (Shields, 2010) seems to be the most promising as it starts with questions of democracy and social justice and aims at addressing social inequities. A transformative leadership approach, on the part of Iranian employment policymakers, can inform their policy decisions to ensure women's equal access to employment opportunities. This will have micro (individual) and macro (societal) level benefits. By reducing the barriers to women's employment, governments can empower women (individual benefit) to contribute to the economic growth of the country (societal benefit). The policy/decision-makers' transformative leadership practices can also reinforce women's understanding of transformative leadership and shape women's practices as leaders and decision-makers

themselves. Such an approach can help reduce, or eventually eliminate, social inequities throughout society.

Due to the diversity and multicultural nature of Canadian society, Canadian women can have more diverse experiences. In general, there is a gender gap in favour of men in employment opportunities in Canada and women are disproportionately represented in leadership and decision-making positions (Baker, 2016). The underrepresentation of women is more alarming in the case of marginalized women such as Black women or immigrant Black women. Collin's (2015) matrix of domination and the concept of intersectionality can be used as analytical tools to protest against social injustice and to address social problems of women who simultaneously belong to multiple social categories. An intersectional perspective (Collins, 2015) can complement transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) to expand the scope into addressing not only sexism or racism separately but also the effects of a combination of sexism and racism. Employing transformative leadership with an intersectional perspective has the potential of supporting marginalized women and providing equitable access to employment opportunities for women regardless of their social locations.

What is the Purpose of Higher Education in Canada and Iran?

In Canada, women pursue higher education for personal benefits as well as improvements in their employability and income (Fenesi & Sana, 2015; Kirby, 2011). The case of Iran is more complex and there are limited research studies that particularly explore the actual motivations of Iranian women to pursue a university education. Despite this gap in the literature, the question of why many Iranian women choose to pursue higher education seems to be valid and important. A few research studies in the Iranian context have reported women enrolling in higher education for personal and financial benefits (Rezai-Rashti, 2011)

and some Iranian women enrolling in higher education institutions to delay marriage (Rezai-Rashti & Moghaddam, 2011). Gaining a higher education degree can potentially solidify women's social standing and act as a lever to improve their marriage chances. Anecdotal evidence confirms that, for some women, particularly those from more traditional/religious families, the options after high school graduation include accepting low-wage employment such as a secretarial position, marriage and starting a family, or going to university. The majority opts for higher education. The reason for this phenomenon of Iranian women's desire to pursue higher education may also be due to the increased influence of social media illustrating women's roles in domains other than domestic ones, such as leadership positions. This can motivate other women and girls to follow the same paths as women leaders.

In general, there is a correlation between levels of education and employment rates in both countries. According to Statistics Canada (2019), the unemployment rate for students with a higher education degree is the lowest among the overall population and the average earnings increase by education level from a bachelor's degree to a doctorate. In 2019, 3.9% of Canadians, who were 25 years old or older and held a university degree, were unemployed while the unemployment rate was 5.8% for high school graduates. Fensi and Sana (2015) argue that pursuing higher education is like investing in stocks to gain future benefits. More than 80% of high school graduates enter higher education to increase their future employment opportunities and income (Fenesi & Sana, 2015) in addition to the personal benefits of receiving higher education (Kirby, 2011). On a global scale, there is an estimated return of \$4 for every \$1 that is spent on higher education (Canadian International Development Platform, 2018). According to the Council of Ontario University's employment report (2015), each graduate from Ontario universities earns on average \$1.5 million more

than the average Canadian high school graduate over a forty-year period. The same trend is observed across Canada. Although educated men are more likely to be employed compared to similarly educated women, OECD (2012) reports that overall “women enjoy a greater earnings premium than similarly-educated men” (p. 3). In other words, the earning gap between women with and without higher education degrees is larger than the earning gap between men with and without higher education degrees. This means, in general, women benefit more from investing in university education than men, and this benefit can act as a source of motivation for women to pursue higher education.

Implications

In the process of carrying out this study, I investigated equity of access to higher education for women in Canada and Iran and their employment outcomes. There are limited research studies that focus on comparative perspectives in educational leadership between the developed and the developing countries (Sider, 2014) and I intended to contribute to the literature by examining the contexts of Canada and Iran, identifying the strengths and limitations of each educational and employment system, and informing future policies. The accountability of educational policymakers and leaders should aim to make higher education more inclusive. Adopting Shields’ (2010) transformative leadership principles with an intersectional perspective (Collins, 2015) can ensure diverse women’s equitable access to higher education. More importantly, the accountability of employment policymakers should promote equitable access to employment opportunities for women, who comprise a large proportion of the population and have a great potential of positively contributing to economic growth of the country.

The so-called developed and the developing countries can both benefit from international collaborations. Sider (2014) highlights the benefits of such partnerships as “collaboration and problem-solving, adapted leadership practices, and local and cross-cultural learning” (p. 75). In the case of Canada and Iran, on the one hand, forming university partnerships between Canadian and Iranian universities can provide increased access to higher education for Iranian students arriving in Canada (e.g., international and landed immigrant students), particularly in graduate and post-graduate levels where there are limited seats in Iranian universities. On the other hand, it can provide the opportunity for Canadian students and faculty to travel internationally via exchange programs between partnered universities and develop cross-cultural skills and understandings. If Canadian educational policymakers adopt a transformative leadership approach with a global view, it can benefit Iranian students by increasing their access to higher education in graduate and postgraduate levels. Iran is the third fastest-growing market for Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018) and the fourth top country of birth of recent immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016). Therefore, international collaborations can further enhance Canadian universities’ marketing success in Iran as they will better understand the Iranian culture through their partnerships. Enhanced international collaborations between Canada and Iran can provide both Canadian and Iranian women and men with the opportunity to study and work in an international capacity in a globalized society. I believe these statistics reveal the interest of both nations in educational partnerships and the potential of more benefits for both countries if formal relations are improved and educational and employment collaborations are facilitated.

Since 2012, Canada and Iran have no diplomatic relations, which hinders the international educational cooperation opportunities between the two countries. In 2015, with the Liberal party taking office, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his plans to restore the relations between the two countries (as one of his campaign promises) (The Globe and Mail, 2015), but these plans have not been realized to date. Global dynamics are changing constantly, and international communications are becoming easier. It would be beneficial if scholars and experts from developed and developing countries, such as Canada and Iran, would collaborate more closely to learn more about one another's educational and employment access issues and support each other in addressing those issues through transformative leadership with social justice agendas. More collaborations at the policy and decision-making levels of the countries within a transformative leadership framework that focuses on equity, justice, and democracy within and outside educational settings can help eliminate inequities that marginalized populations such as racialized immigrant women face on a global scale. Once women are more educated, employed, and rewarded for their contributions, they will realize their rights and their potential, as well as become agents of educational reform and social change. They can claim their rights and pursue their true position in educational, employment, or social spheres as transformative leaders, educators, and agents of change.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study only touches on a very important issue that is multifaceted and complex. There is a need for ongoing and more in-depth research. I believe further research is required to fully understand the complexities of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in Canada and Iran. The current research studies mainly focus on women's

access to higher education in undergraduate levels in these two countries; however, women's access to higher education in graduate and postgraduate levels are under-researched. A large-scale mixed-methods research study is needed to explore women's access to higher education in undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels and further exploration of how their education has shaped their employment opportunities. That would include collecting and integrating quantitative data from surveys with qualitative data from interviews or focus groups, drawing results from the voices of women pursuing higher education and their employment opportunities in Canada and/or Iran.

Most of the available educational leadership research studies on the topic of women's access to higher education and employment opportunities provide a single-axis analysis of women's access issues. However, it is equally important to widen the scope and study the complexities of how the intersection of women's multiple identities such as gender, religion, age, class, ethnicity, racialization, and/or immigrant status can impact their experiences of access to higher education and employment opportunities. The dynamics of women's lives and their challenges can vary when they are positioned at the intersection of two or more of these social categories. Future researchers can explore diverse women's groups and the intersectionality of their multiple identities to inform educational and employment policymakers' decisions in the process of addressing the needs of diverse women. Research studies can explore how embedding this intersectionality perspective into Shields' (2010) transformative leadership can help understand diverse women's experiences and address the inequities they face in educational and employment spheres.

Due to increased global mobilization of women and men for educational and employment purposes in many countries including Canada and Iran, many Iranian women

immigrate to Canada and it would be beneficial to explore their role in empowering other women across cultures. Such studies can explore the experiences of women being educated and/or employed in both Iran and Canada to find out how their educational and employment experiences across cultures can enhance their critical consciousness and understanding of their roles, legal rights, and responsibilities as well as their ability to influence social change in both Iran and Canada.

Conclusion

In the last four decades, Canadian and Iranian governments have implemented some great policies and strategies to facilitate women's access to higher education; however, there is still the need to further increase women's access to higher education and financially rewarding employment opportunities. This can be accomplished through developing international collaborations, educating educational and employment policymakers about transformative leadership and intersectionality, creating more gender-inclusive and family-friendly policies, and developing strategies that meet the needs of diverse women groups in terms of age, class, racial identity, immigrant status, and/or religious affiliations.

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