RESEARCH ARTICLE

Glass hearts?! Successful visible ethnic minority women migrants at work in Iceland and New Zealand

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Abstract

In the diversity arena, women and their heterogeneity as visible ethnic minority migrants at work are under researched. Our qualitative empirical research reveals, and compares, how visible ethnic women migrants (VEWM) experience their journey to professional success in Iceland and New Zealand. These island nations rank in the top six of the Global Gender Gap Index, have women Prime Ministers, and increasing demographic diversity. The findings reveal that for VEWM success is a continuous journey with many different challenges. VEWM reject the notion of success as accumulation of things or titles, emphasizing instead *how* success is experienced. For VEWM in Iceland, success means independent hard work and aligning with other women. VEWM in New Zealand experience success through religion and giving back to the community. These differences are explored and theorized, contributing to an expanding literature of migrant complexities, beyond monolithic representations of gender at work.

Keywords: Diversity; Iceland; New Zealand; religion; success; visible ethnic minority women

About the authors

A vital driver of diversity is the dynamic, diverse and contextual migrant flow of people globally. Understanding the role of women in migration involves disaggregating data by sex, and understanding the involvement of gender, ethnicity and religion (Essers, Pio, Verduyn, & Bensliman, 2020; Fleury, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Petrozziello, 2011; Pio, 2014). In the diversity arena, a deep analysis of women and their heterogeneity as visible minority migrants at work is often lacking, as there are monolithic representations of these women based on their source and receiving countries (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Carastathis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991). Although numerous studies have examined ethnic minorities in low-skilled jobs (Kristjánsdóttir & Christiansen, 2017), except for a few studies (Pio & Essers, 2014) less is known about professional, educated, visible ethnic women migrants (VEWM) and their experiences of achieving success at work. The etymology of success can be traced to the 16th century.

A derivative of the Latin term *successus*, a masculine noun first associated with the term victorious –primarily a war term – and hence with the notion of ascending to power after a battle – the same root was used for the term succession, and the increase in wealth and power associated with such victories (Glare, 2012; Morwood, 1998). The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2019) reveals a similar dual meaning; first, as a degree or measure of the verb 'succeeding,' and second as a favorable or desired outcome associated with the attainment of wealth, favor or eminence. The Business Dictionary (2020) has a more intricate interpretation, describing the term as the

achievement of an individual's personal goals, commonly encompassing subjective elements such as career development, workplace acceptance or belonging and interestingly, a higher accumulation of 'objects' in relation to others inside or outside the organization. It is in the subjectivity of this construct that the term success lacks the universality that often, transnational and multicultural organizations seek. Our working definition is: success consists of a range of positive nuanced experiences which enhance the life trajectories of an individual. The construct is subjective and depends on the vantage point of the viewer regarding what constitutes success. In this paper, success is scrutinized from the viewpoint of our participants who are all skilled visible ethnic minority women who have migrated from developing to developed countries.

Success is still much of a conundrum in migration scholarship and interrogating its sedimented realities involves the interplay of macro and micro dynamics linked to economic, cultural and social capital. Therefore, we actively sought women who were in senior management, who are working in Western countries, in order to build on the traditional or generally accepted Western ways of viewing success and further add nuance to the construct of success. We acknowledge that there are middle and lower level managerial positions where the conventional Western notions of success may be incorporated, but we believe that focusing on senior management can pave the way for future studies on various levels of management in organizations and their views of success. We focus on VEWM in two countries, Iceland and New Zealand, their work experiences and how they negotiate gender, ethnicity and religion. Both countries are island nations, have women Prime Ministers, women in senior government roles and increasing demographic diversity. Despite Iceland ranking number one and New Zealand six on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020), women in these countries still experience barriers to career advancement (Einarsdóttir, Christiansen, & Kristjánsdóttir, 2018; Júlíusdóttir, Rafnsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2018; Pio, 2005). Many migrants originate from source countries where there is less gender equality and face negative stereotypes and discrimination from colleagues and employers in the host-country (Kristjánsdóttir & Christiansen, 2017; Pio, 2007, 2008, 2010; Tariq & Syed, 2018). For example, Pakistan ranks 151, Nigeria 128, India 112, Kenya 109, China 106, Indonesia 85, Chile 57, Barbados 28 and the Philippines 16 (World Economic Forum, 2020). Although much has already been written on gender and ethnicity, the focus tends to be on women who are in care-giving, au pairs, agricultural workers and undocumented migrant workers (Cortés, Rebello, & Barbosa, 2020; Hellermann, 2006; Oliveira, 2019; Patel & Chakraborty, 2020); our contribution is to highlight successful professional VEWM and their experiences.

Our phenomenological research approach foregrounds the essence of experience and seeks to reveal, explain and compare the meaning of success for professional VEWM in Iceland and New Zealand and what aspects on their work journey emerge as significant. Our core guiding research question is: How do professional visible ethnic women migrants (VEWM) in Iceland and New Zealand experience success at work? Glass hearts, as used in the title of this paper, epitomizes the experiences of the women who participated in this research and their grit to ensure that irrespective of the challenges they face, they will not allow their hearts to be shattered like glass. Our contribution to the management literature is to interrogate how VEWM experience success at work in relation to gender, ethnicity and religion. We highlight the importance of disaggregating traditional analytical categories to reveal noteworthy differences. Thus, we contribute to an expanding literature on migrant complexities of gender at work.

Theoretical and contextual backdrops

This section reviews scholarship on success, migration, religion and gender and provides perspectives from Iceland and New Zealand, to offer backdrops for our phenomenological empirical study on VEWM.

Success

The evolution of the term success is clear, yet surprisingly stable assumptions lie at its core. Probably the most common is the one associated with the notion of accumulated objects following a positive result in performativity. A Bourdieusian analysis of the 'objects' employed in this definition points to numerous interpretations of how diverse collections and attributes (wealth, public recognition, position in the organizational ladder, networks, etc.) may shape specific forms of symbolic capital assisting people in achieving personal or individual goals. But, as scholars in language, culture and hegemony, from Gramsci (1971) to Spivak (1988), have historically noted, non-dominant groups – subalterns as they are called by Gramsci – inhabit a world in which the major conceptual structures available to them bind them to the hegemonic assumptions and narratives of the dominant groups (Crehan, 2016).

This is the case when exploring the meaning of success at work. Indeed, as a fundamental social construct, remunerated work has historically been an arena dominated by groups with shared characteristics. From this perspective, one could hardly understand the notion of success in Western societies apart from the many shared traits of the dominant groups that created such common language. Being men, white, of European descent, sole breadwinners of the household, heterosexual, Christian and physically able are just some of the most obvious traits. Not surprisingly, in most Western economies, symbolic measures of individual success in the workplace traditionally include salary, salary growth and promotions. Indeed, Heslin (2005, p. 115) describes these as 'the most widely used and readily accessible indicators of career success.'

The sense of individual competitiveness embedded in these markers gives evidence of a continuous battle for dominance that is implicit in the Gramscian concept of hegemony. These have been thoroughly explored in feminist and gender literature and are most obvious in the work of scholars such as Acker (1990), Cockburn (1991), Hearn (2004) and Mumby (1998). A recent article from Ely and Kimmel (2018, p. 628) reveals the deeply emotional nature of men's gender-identity constructions at work: 'men qua men feeling threatened and insecure and thus compelled to prove their manliness in survival-of-the-fittest competitions.' Indeed, there is something profoundly masculine in these markers but also something resembling the convoluted canvas on which such assumptions of success were created from some of the other traits. Hence, an individualistic competition to ascend a ladder of hierarchy in which power is increasingly given to those able to follow a predetermined script of performativity in which local gender hierarchies and local cultures of masculinity are expected but where other elements of religion, physical ability and race are also inscribed.

An increasing interest in workplace diversity and inclusion has led researchers to explore alternative notions of 'being' and 'being successful.' Exploring the multiple meanings of success for a group of top women at the University of Cambridge, Bostock (2014) found important differences in how success is conceived:

> We know of course that success means many different things to many different people. It may therefore seem futile to attempt to redefine it to give it more meaning and efficacy; but we must try if we are serious about creating more inclusive workplaces (p. 9).

Bostock furthermore identified the importance of self-understanding of gender and how this shapes relations to other groups; an ability to work collaboratively was strongly linked with a more meaningful definition of success among these talented women. Similarly, Smitheran (2017) challenges the assumption that success is experienced by everyone in the same way. Elaborating on the topic of the traditional markers of career success, such as salary growth, project involvement and promotions, she attributes such markers to historical assumptions of masculinity upon which the workplace was created. She proposes that one cannot understand prevailing notions of workplace success outside shared intelligibility of the workplace as a

male dominated arena. Cheung and Halpern (2010) interviewed 62 female leaders and found alternative notions of success such as work–life balance, successful redefinition of societal roles to integrate notions of motherhood and alternative models of leadership. These concepts are aligned with similar studies in the West portraying success constructed on elements different than competition and wealth accumulation (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Lynn, Cao, & Horn, 1996; McKeen & Bu, 2005; Smitheran, 2017).

Interestingly, narratives of women in some countries seem to agree with these gendered views of success emphasizing societal goodness and collectivism. For instance, Cho et al. (2017), with regard to Korean female leaders, and Chinyamurindi's (2016) exploration of female leaders in South Africa, and Lewis (2017) in the context of young female entrepreneurs in New Zealand, found that ideas of success are influenced by ingrained conceptions of family, society and work–life balance. In her study of Lebanese female entrepreneurs, Tlaiss (2019) added to this discussion on societal goodness as a marker of success by demonstrating how building progressive change in traditional circles gives women a sense of success in terms of contributing to women's increased freedoms and growing participation in economic activity. The issue of agency in the face of deeply rooted societal and cultural norms is thus fundamental to understand notions of success.

In a non-Western approach, Sharma, Rastogi, and Garg (2013) proposed an alternative notion of workplace success through the exploration of spirituality as a key component of Indian culture. From this perspective, spirituality relates to intrinsic motivation through notions of community feelings intricately interwoven with individual aspects of the self and its position in the world. Although this work focuses more closely on the notion of workplace effectiveness, it is worth noting that such effectiveness is indeed key to cultural notions of success. On a similar note, Osei-Tutu et al., (2018) found that although wealth and traditional markers of class are important components of perceived career success among Ghanaians, so are spirituality, religion and family care. In fact, a small body of literature had previously explored notions of spirituality, work and sense of success or satisfaction (Gupta, Kumar, & Singh, 2014; Pawar, 2014; Pio, 2010; Pruzan, 2011).

Another line of research has investigated notions of career success among indigenous groups. Mrabure (2019) studied the views of Maori entrepreneurs, finding that although there is not one fixed and straightforward meaning for the term, most meanings and views are connected to the wider community, relationships and predominant values. Explorations of the relationships between success and indigenous groups in the Australian context (Foley, 2006; Lituchy, Reavley, Lvina, & Abraira, 2006) found similar results.

This has been a brief exploration of a highly complex discussion. These studies reveal that success is not a fixed, universally shared category but a fluid concept deeply rooted in contextual subjectivity.

Migration, religion and gender

Migration can be conceptualized not as a one-off event, but as a continuation of broader life course experiences across time and space, including a desire for upward movement on the social ladder (Botterill, 2017; Merelo, 2018). These movements are impacted by power structures linked to class, history, geography, gender and politics (Davis, 1981; Massey, 1993; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010), which serve as catalysts influencing aspirations for a better life, while promoting, regulating and constraining global mobility.

Yet, migration is squishy and indeterminate, not necessarily straightforward, with numerous intergenerational challenges to keep up, adapt and avoid severe dissonance. According to Bourdieu (1991), language is the key component of social capital, and language proficiency is paramount in social, economic, cultural and political integration (Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012).

Together, all forms of capital create symbolic capital upon which people can construct an image of class and be perceived by society in various terms, although various types of capital

are unevenly distributed (Bourdieu, 2004). Thus, two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall amount of symbolic capital can differ in how such overall capital is accumulated, as the amount of economic and cultural capital can vary. Furthermore, one form of capital could be converted into another, creating fluidity and flexibility (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Van Hear (2014, p. s104) observed how Bourdieu's proposition is useful 'to explain how someone with little economic capital may be able to convert their social capital (via networks, for example) so as to be able to advance their life projects after migration.'

Religious diversity at work is also part of the migratory influence surfacing diversity challenges, particularly when adherents of various faiths choose to express their religion at work through diverse symbols and rituals, which may involve prayer breaks, certain garments and ritual washing (Pio, 2008, 2014, 2018). Organizations may reinforce, privilege or disadvantage individuals based on their religious affiliation, with possible consequences for visible minority migrant women at work (Pio & Pratt, 2017), as they may have ideologies and practices (Gebert, Boerner, Kearney, King, Zhang, & Song, 2013) different from practices in the host-country.

Timmerman, Martinello, Rea, and Weas (2015) note there is still need for gender-sensitive, theory-driven migration research. Women, in particular migrant women, are constructed as cultural symbols of the collectivity and its boundaries, and considered to be carriers of collective honor, responsible for the intergenerational reproduction of culture (Bhattacharjee, 1992; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Expressions such as fragmented families and transnational motherhood put women at the center, adorning female migration with an aura of sacrifice and devotion (O'Reilly, 2008; Pustułka, 2015). Female migration is generally described as 'involuntary' or 'forced' by mainstream literature (Piper & Withers, 2018; Urbanska, 2016). Following this logic, women migrate because they have no choice, not necessarily because they wish to start a new life somewhere else (Lutz, 2008); Tyldum, 2015). However, men's decisions to migrate are portrayed as adventurous, risk-taking and opportunity-driven, aligning with socially accepted archetypes of masculinity (Portes, 2010; Stark & Bloom, 1985).

But, women are increasingly moving as independent or single migrants rather than as wife, mother or daughter of male migrants, for educational and economic opportunities (Fleury, 2016; Oishi, 2002; Oliveira, 2019). Interestingly, migrant women send back a higher proportion of remittances when compared to male migrants, they show more stability and frequency while doing so, and are likely to send more resources whenever an emergency occurs in the source-country (Fleury, 2016).

Geographical context

The geographical context of the study are two island nations: New Zealand, population 4.7 million, and Iceland, population 350 thousand; two countries that emphasize gender and social equality. Despite the focus on equal opportunities and no aristocracy in either country, the claim of classlessness is a myth, with a number of social hierarchies, based on property ownership, prestige, different occupations and location in urban and rural regions (Oddsson, 2010; Phillips, 2018; Torfason, Einarsdóttir, Rafnsdóttir, & Sigurðardóttir, 2017).

Women lead the governments of both countries and New Zealand was the first country in the world granting women's suffrage (Ministry for Women, 2018). Women's rights are highly valued, yet inequalities still exist in both countries (Austin, 2016; Ólafsdóttir, 2018). Icelandic women's labor force participation rate is the highest in the OECD at 79.6% (OECD, 2018); however, women hold executive positions in only 22.1% of companies, and in the country's largest companies, women hold only 9.2% of CEO positions (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). In 2010, Iceland was the second country in the world, after Norway, to enact gender quota legislation for corporate boards and by 2017, the ratio of women on corporate boards was 32.6% (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). In New Zealand, the gender pay gap of 9.2% is one of the lowest in the world (Ministry for Women, 2018), yet relatively few women have reached senior positions in organizations (Austin, 2016).

Women are most heavily represented in clerical occupations and over-represented in sales and service, professional and technical and associate professional occupations (Statistics NZ, 2015). Women are almost as likely as men to work in managerial roles, but tend to be concentrated in female-dominated industries such as health, education and community services (Statistics NZ, 2015). Occupational and industry segregation contribute to the gender pay gap and indicate low labor market flexibility (Statistics NZ, 2015) exacerbated in the case of migrant women (Pio & Singham, 2018).

Both countries have seen a rapid increase in immigration in recent decades. The largest group of migrants in Iceland is Eastern European, or over 40% (Registers Iceland, 2018a). In New Zealand, the Asian ethnic group is the third largest ethnic group making up 15.1% of the population, with the majority of recent migrants from Asia, especially India and China (Statistics NZ, 2018a, 2019). Furthermore, 27% of the population is overseas born with the People's Republic of China and India among the top five overseas birthplaces. English continues to be the most spoken language at 95% (Statistics NZ, 2018a). The Icelandic census does not collect data on race or ethnicity, but with Northern European origins of settlers and limited immigration over many decades, the population had remained homogeneous and 'whiteness' part of the national identity (Loftsdóttir, 2013). The Icelandic language is the foundation of Icelanders' cultural identity and played a significant role when Iceland gained independence (Kristjánsdóttir, Bjarnadóttir, & Saphiere, 2015). Protectionist language policies are set to limit foreign influences on the Icelandic language (Kristjánsdóttir & Christiansen, 2017) and Icelanders expect migrants to learn Icelandic to be included in social activities (Kristjánsdóttir, 2017). This can have negative effect on migrants and exacerbate the possibility for them to be included in social activities, but according to Lauring and Selmer (2012), openness to linguistic diversity has positive relationship with group trust.

With increased immigration, religious diversity has increased in Iceland. Around the start of the millennium, membership in the National Evangelical Lutheran church was around 90% but has fallen below 60%. The second largest and fastest growing religion is Catholicism, with most of its new members from Eastern Europe (Registers Iceland, 2018b). Buddhists are around .3% of the population and Muslims around .2%. The most prominent trend is increased secularism, with growing numbers electing not to affiliate with any religion or joining non-religious organizations such as the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association (Registers Iceland, 2018b).

In the 2018 New Zealand census, 48.2% identified as having no religion, Christianity continues to be the largest overall grouping, and minority religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism are the fastest growing religions, with around 6% of the population affiliated with religions other than Christianity (Statistics NZ, 2018b). The New Zealand Government released a statement on religious diversity, emphasizing that the country holds no official religion (Human Rights Commission, 2007). Thus, all residents are entitled to freedom of religious belief and expression, all faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security and all reasonable steps should be taken to accommodate religious belief and practices in education, work and public service. Laws concerning religious diversity are covered in New Zealand: Human Rights Act (1993), which forbids discrimination related to sexual orientation, marital status, religious belief, color, race, ethnic or national origin, disability or impairment. Section 28.3 of the Act requires employers to accommodate religious/ethical observances so long as the practice does not unreasonably interfere with the business.

Methodology

Our focus is on examining VEWM's lived experiences of success using phenomenology. Phenomenological research studies the essence of lived experience, to systematically uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of experience. van Manen (1990) maintains that essence can only be gained through study of instances as discovered in lived experience. The

research question is: How do professional visible ethnic women migrants (VEWM) experience success at work?

Twenty-four semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in offices, homes and cafes, 12 in each country. Our selection criteria were based on five aspects. We wanted to ensure that each participant was legally resident and working in the host-country, so that they were not on a benefit system and there was no stress regarding residency status. As both Iceland and New Zealand are highly egalitarian countries with high rankings on the Global Gender Gap Index, we wanted to investigate how women who looked different and were born out of these two countries would experience success. This was also the reason we selected migrants who came from source countries where the global gender ranking was lower than that in the host-country. Additionally, as there is already much literature on low skilled women migrants, our aim was to focus on highly skilled professional migrant women; hence, we selected women with university education and who were in middle/senior management. We advertised in migrant groups on social media platforms for migrant women who are successful in their professional life and also used snowball sampling to recruit successful VEWM using the following criteria:

(1) Voluntary migrants, legally resident and working in host-country
(2) Visible ethnic minority, first generation migrant, born out of source-country
(3) Source-country global gender ranking lower than host-country
(4) University education
(5) Level in organization (middle/senior management)

As researchers, we wrestled with the categorization of participants to preserve confidentiality, while also providing information on ethnicity and religion. For ethnicity, as there are small numbers of VEWM in Iceland and New Zealand who fall within the ambit of our criteria, we decided on broad geographical regions. For religion, we specifically chose to differentiate between Catholic and Protestant for the Christian religion, as Iceland is primarily Protestant (Registers Iceland, 2018b), and New Zealand was primarily Protestant until 2013, when Catholics became the largest Christian majority (Registers Iceland, 2018b). We are aware that these differences can further contextualize differences that may arise in how success is viewed by the participants, based on their source and receiving country. However, as our overarching aim was to investigate how professional VEWM view success, we believe that differences can further fragment monolithic understandings of VEWM. It is pertinent to mention the positionality of the authors. We kept in mind the interviewer gender aspect which may impact the richness of information (Liu & Wang, 2016; Nahari & Pazuelo, 2015), but the ethnicity aspect differed. The first author is a visible minority migrant woman from South Asia residing and working in New Zealand. The second and third authors are white women, born and working in Iceland. See Table 1 for participants' profile.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Indicative questions included, 'what does success mean to you,' 'how have you navigated to create success' and 'describe specific events/persons that helped/hindered you in achieving success.' Some participants were contacted multiple times for information and clarification. The three authors read and re-read the transcripts separately and together to identify key themes. The objective of phenomenological studies is to reveal the essence, or essential structure, fundamental to experiences (van Manen, 1990) of success for VEWM. The only evidence that this is accurate will be in the judgment of others who have also experienced the phenomenon (Martinez, 2000). According to van Manen, phenomenology is scientific because it is 'a systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of its subject matter, our lived experience' (1990, p. 11).

The data were analyzed using three phases of phenomenological research: description, reduction and interpretation (Lanigan, 1988; Orbe, 1998; van Manen, 1990). In *description* the interview and transcription take place and description of the women's experiences is synthesized into a cohesive narrative being aware of our biases and subjectivity regarding VEWM by bracketing our

Table 1. Participants' profile

	Iceland	New Zealand
Participant number	12	12
Age range	33–58 years	30–55 years
Education	University education	Minimum Bachelor's degree
Ethnicity	African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern	Asian (all from South Asia) – the New Zealand census classification includes individuals from India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries, under the category of Asian
Industry sector	3 Professional Services	4 Education
	2 Finance	2 Finance
	3 Hospitality	4 Health
	2 Information Technology	2 Media
	2 Manufacturing	
Marital status	3 Single	4 Single
	9 Married	8 Married
Nationality	9 Icelandic/3 other	12 New Zealand
Religion	1 Atheist	6 Hindu
	1 Buddhist	6 Catholic
	7 Catholic	
	2 Protestant	
	1 Muslim	
Years in host-country	7–26 years	5–25 years
Interview length	60–95 min	45–90 min
Language of interviews	English	English
	The participants' first language varied, but all of them were competent in written and spoken English	All participants were competent in written and spoken English as this was the medium of instruction for their university and professional studies

presuppositions. In *reduction* we examined the narratives for essential themes to determine 'which parts of the description are essential, and which are not' (Lanigan, 1988, p. 10). Lanigan (1988) states that for reduction to be obtained, *imaginative free variation* is crucial and thus we reflected on the participants' description of their experiences and compared these descriptions to determine significant experiences. In the *interpretation* phase, we thematized women's lived experiences in 'an attempt to specify the "meaning" that is essential in the reduction and description of the conscious experience being investigated' (Lanigan, 1988, p. 10). We sought to interpret the meanings of the lived experience of VEWM not immediately manifest in the transcripts such as the wider context, concealed and conscious meanings. This is important because lived experiences are not grasped in their immediate manifestation, but only reflectively as prior experience (van Manen, 1990). Finally, we developed two categories, each with three themes, focusing on the research question. Table 2 presents an overview of the analysis.

Table 2. Categories and themes

Category	Themes	Interpretation	Quote
Success	Feeling successful	Success is subjective and personal; communal and not based on material gains	'Success is giving back to the community'
	Experiencing success	Experiencing success is a process of constant hard work and focus on improvement, fulfilling one's duties	'not necessarily what you have achieved, but *how* you have come to it'
	Fluidity	Success is remaining strong and adaptable to ever changing circumstances in the workplace	'you cannot have a heart made of glass'
Visible ethnic minority woman migrant	Visible ethnic minority	Addressing discrimination due to skin color appears differently in the two countries	'If not white, this equates with inferiority'
	Woman	Different experiences of being a woman in the workplace surface in the two countries	'Men are the ones who decide'
	Migrant	A new language and different accent are a constant reminder of migrant status	'I do find obstacles every day, language will always be one'

Findings

Our analysis reveals two overarching categories each with three themes discussed below: the first category is Success, encompassing the themes: *Feeling successful*, *Experiencing success* and *Fluidity*; the second category is Visible ethnic woman migrant, encompassing the themes: *Visible ethnic minority*, *Woman* and *Migrant* (see Table 2).

Category 1: success

This category refers to how VEWM in Iceland and New Zealand experience their work journey toward professional success. Despite VEWM experiencing many different challenges and hindrances, they all achieve and experience success, but the meaning of success for the women is nuanced.

Feeling successful: 'Success is giving back to the community'

VEWM in both countries discussed the importance of family and community for their experiences of success but religion appeared significant only for the New Zealand participants. Kashmira said, 'I have the freedom of choice… we continue to be in the top echelons of society. Success is giving back to the community…focus on the family… bringing up good human beings…this is what our religion emphasizes' (New Zealand: Asian, Hindu, Education). Despite different religious ideologies as a Hindu woman in a Christian majority country, Kashmira does not feel disadvantaged but enjoys her freedom in the receiving country.
The focus on the communal aspect of success is evident in the words of Ruth:

> I always have high aspirations and goals, promise them to organizations and then achieve them – I work hard on the details… always set high goals and do the background work – that is how we maintain our standard of living…be transformative for yourself and others…we pray daily to follow the gospel (New Zealand: Asian, Catholic, Media).

Her hard work and goals enable her to achieve success despite her ethnic minority status being embedded in multiple micro and macro layers.

The experiences of VEWM reveal how they may be motivated by progress and growth, but to feel successful, they needed to share the success with others. Belinda explained: 'when you…come as far as you can…success is one of the motivations, to go forward, to grow…I can share also my success to other people, that's success for me' (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, Professional Services).

All VEWM emphasized that success is not embedded in material gains or fancy titles. Success is personal, based on feeling that they are doing the right thing or as stated by Sara: 'I think success is something that is really personal. As long as you can go to bed every night and you're happy…with what you are doing and you are at peace with yourself – that's success' (Iceland: Americas, Catholic, Finance).

Although success is personal, the interactions with supervisors and colleagues played an important role in VEWM's experiences of success. They were very aware of their exceptional status, and many expressed gratitude for having opportunities. The feeling of having been granted trust resonated strongly with many of them as Sofia explained: 'I feel like I've been given immense trust to do my work and also that when I have input or suggestions, they're taken seriously and taken into account' (Iceland: American, Protestant, Professional Services).

Experiencing success: 'not necessarily for what you have achieved, but how you have come to it'
Just as success has a deeper meaning for VEWM beyond material gains, it mattered greatly to them *how* success is experienced. Emilia's words indicate how she experienced success as the effort she is making, independently and on her own:

> It was not given to me; I actually have to work hard for it. No one in my family has put me like, talk to this person and ask for a job – nobody. I have to do it on my own. And for me, it is success for me (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, Finance).

Like most participants in Iceland, Helena relied on personal strength and being independent: 'success is being in a position where you are able to live a decent life and withstand challenges and manage to overcome them, as independently as possible' (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, IT).

VEWM also emphasized experiencing success not as an endpoint or destination, but as a process or journey. They were prepared to work very hard and felt that constantly looking for ways to improve is essential. Mina stated:

> Success for me is to be satisfied with what you have until you reach something better. So, you don't stop, you keep on… you are always thinking that, yeah, I can do this, but maybe you will do it better…So, you are looking always to do better. That's success. There's no relaxing (Iceland: Middle Eastern, Muslim, Professional Services).

The notion is clear although that they focus not only on working hard, but on *how* they progress. This was exemplified by how Miriam explained success: 'when you can be a role model to others, not necessarily for what you have achieved, but how you have come to it' (Iceland: American, Catholic, Hospitality). It is important to them to have worked hard and not compromised on their principles.

Similarly, most of the VEWM in New Zealand, exemplified by Meera, emphasized spirituality in how she experienced success:

> Vision is important and helps me negotiate my work environment and how I want to live my life…our Hindu scriptures encourage *seva* [service] and *dharma* [duty]… success is the ability to have choices and then choose the one that best suits one's circumstances (New Zealand: Asian, Hindu, Education).

Fluidity: 'You cannot have a heart made of glass'

VEWM in both countries demonstrated remarkable resilience and accessed many different sources of strength. A notable source of strength was fluidity, or willingness and ability to adapt to challenging situations. Through challenging experiences VEWM appreciated what was under their control; their own attitude toward those challenges. For example, being different can feel like a weakness, but as Vivian explained, she made a conscious decision to change her own attitude, resulting in taking charge of how others saw her:

> I think you just change your attitude…you cannot have a heart made of glass…are you going to compete with Icelandic people on Icelandic market? No…maybe after 20 years. You have to find your strong point and use that…when you do that…it's very difficult for people to dispute your ability and your authority (Iceland: Asian, Atheist, Manufacturing).

Being able to go with the flow emerged as an important capability for VEWM, especially the ability to turn adversity into motivation as Tara described:

> Being a foreign woman, sometimes you know, people don't take you seriously…it shouldn't bother you, of course. But it does. But it depends on how you take it. I mean, are you going to take those things and just to put you down? Or are you going to use it as a fuel to do better and just to keep on? (Iceland: African, Catholic, Hospitality)

Religion was a vital source of strength to give VEWM in New Zealand a different mindset, more accepting of their situation and willing to place their trust in a higher power. Bharati stated, 'We have to adjust, accommodate and be flexible – after all we chose to migrate, and life always has ups and downs…God has a plan for our lives' (New Zealand: Asian, Hindu, Finance). Christine said:

> leaving oneself in God's hands – I do not prepare with great plans as I know that he is the one who has plans for me, so I wait upon the Lord – and then I see miracles occurring I could never dream of (New Zealand: Asian, Catholic, Finance).

Category 2: visible ethnic minority woman migrant

This category refers to the barriers VEWM face due to gender and visible minority status. This is an important category as it highlights how visible diversity discriminators can have a major impact in how a woman is viewed, irrespective of her professional status. These women derived strength from fighting their way through inequality to senior roles in organizations in the host-country. Sofia acknowledged various hindrances but stated: 'I have the power' referring to her feeling of agency and ability to keep pushing the obstacles out of her way (Iceland: American, Protestant, Professional Services).

Visible ethnic minority: 'If not white, this equates with inferiority'

VEWM in both countries are ethicized and as a result, face prejudice and disrespect from colleagues and clients. Rosa noted how strenuous it could be to attend meetings with host-country nationals, especially men: '… I feel discriminated because of the color of my skin. When we have a meeting with Icelanders who are men…It feels challenging. It feels sad … whether you like my skin or not, I am here…' (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, Manufacturing).

Similarly, Ritu stated 'there are many difficulties, even at a senior level, color is big in terms of being visibly different from the majority community…there is tacit discrimination, I have to keep proving myself regularly, despite my stellar record' (New Zealand: South Asian, Hindu, Education sector). Beryl articulated: 'If not white, this equates with inferiority… I don't like it and resist.

White members in my team now grudgingly accept my competence…all in God's own good time' (New Zealand: Asian, Catholic, Finance).

Woman: 'Men are the ones who decide'

VEWM in Iceland perceived challenging being a woman in the workplace, a sentiment that did not surface with the participants in New Zealand. Sara said: 'like it or not, still today, men are the ones who decide whether a woman will get a better opportunity or high-level position' (Iceland: American, Catholic, Finance). They sought out women supervisors or mentors to overcome this obstacle and some had been influenced by host-country women. Helena said: 'Icelandic women are very tough women…It's an inspiration to see, you know…you can do this. She did it, I can do it' (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, Information Technology).

VEWM in New Zealand compared their current situation favorably with the source-country where there is less gender equality and felt content. Lena said, 'It is fabulous to be a woman in this country – colored or not, we are treated much better than in the country where I was born, and I am grateful…' (New Zealand: Asian, Hindu, Health). Abigail remarked 'as a woman my goals change for my work dependent on my family – my children, elders and my husband… we are church goers and I encourage family prayer…this has facilitated our work and acceptance in society…I enjoy the gender equality in this country' (New Zealand: Asian, Catholic, Media).

Migrant: 'I do find obstacles everyday…language will always be one'

Typically, the most conspicuous aspect of being a migrant is one's mother tongue and accent is different from the host-country language. VEWM in Iceland faced the challenge of having to learn a complex and unfamiliar language, while VEWM in New Zealand were highly proficient in the language but spoke with a foreign accent. Most of the VEWM in Iceland are fluent or quite fluent in Icelandic and all underscored the necessity of proficiency in Icelandic. They were aware that their social capital is to a great extent reliant on their language proficiency (Bourdieu, 1991). Miriam stated: 'language is such an important key factor…I do find obstacles everyday…language will always be one…even though I speak that all day' (Iceland: American, Catholic, Hospitality). Some women experienced being ignored and interrupted because of their accent, undermining their self-confidence. Belinda explained her insecurity: 'I prefer everything in writing…because … there could be misunderstanding' (Iceland: Asian, Catholic, Professional Services). Their struggle with the Icelandic language has been the greatest barrier in their professional pursuit, but VEWM have found ingenious ways to cope, like inviting an Icelandic colleague along to conferences so they can later verify their understanding of the proceedings.

Even though the participants in New Zealand are fluent in English, they find their accent stigmatized. Beth said: 'I have been educated through the English medium and speak, and write it fluently…there will always be accents, but who is to say which has the best accent…we were part of the British Empire, but yes, sometimes there is the assumption that we cannot speak English' (New Zealand: Asian, Catholic, Media sector). Savita noted, 'Language is not an obstacle for me as I was brought up reading Shakespeare, Dickens and Wordsworth…we all have accents…but the divine spark exists in each of us' (New Zealand: Asian, Hindu, Education).

Discussion

Our research findings reveal that the VEWM experience multiple challenges and hindrances, yet they all achieve success, although the meaning of success is nuanced. Our main contribution is to enhance the understanding of how skilled migrant women in this study experience success. We theorize how and why experiences and understandings of success might differ for professional migrant women specifically. We advance the diversity literature in redefining how success is viewed for skilled migrant women, thus challenging existing findings in this space.

Our discussion braids the two main categories of Success and Visible ethnic minority woman migrant to theorize the how and why of success for professional VEWM. VEWM are vulnerable, fragile, strong, constant learners, determined to prosper through hard work, self-discipline, strategic goal setting and alliance with host-country women. They are agentic, cloaked in their history and migration experiences, as they seek to uncloak constraints to prosperity (Essers et al., 2020; Holvino, 2010; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010; Pio & Essers, 2014). VEWM are aware that they must not break under constraints, and in striving for success, they cannot afford to have glass hearts. For VEWM, success constitutes nuanced meanings such as being able to do what is expected of them, overcoming barriers, living a decent life and being at peace with themselves (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). Success is a journey rather than a destination and is not experienced by everyone in the same way (Smitheran, 2017). Moreover, success is not fixed but is connected to the wider community, relationships and predominant values (Mrabure, 2019).

In feeling successful, VEWM give back to the community, and share their success with others (Chinyamurindi, 2016; Lewis, 2017). Success was made more meaningful when they experienced being trusted by supervisors and coworkers. Furthermore, success is not an end goal, but has a deeper meaning beyond material gains and does not represent an accumulation of things or titles (Heslin, 2005). Here, the emphasis is on *how* success is lived. Additionally, the women were able to adjust to numerous situations, such as racial discrimination and disrespect from colleagues and clients. They experienced challenges based on the intersectionality of their gender, ethnicity and language, and despite being in senior level positions, colleagues perceived them as inferior. But, in displaying fluidity, they continually negotiated their context to achieve senior roles in the host-country organization. These perceptions pose challenges to professional success and social mobility and substantiate Merelo's (2018) findings of how being a visible minority is a powerful influence on success at work.

Despite Iceland and New Zealand leading the world in gender equality, VEWM in both countries experienced barriers to career advancement (Einarsdóttir, Christiansen, & Kristjánsdóttir, 2018; Pio, 2005), but these VEWM were agentic and created opportunities for experiencing success at work. Our research uncovers differences in how women in the two receiving countries experienced power asymmetries and their responses in sourcing strength, highlighting that VEWM are not a homogeneous monolithic group as often represented in migration studies (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Carastathis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991; Pio & Essers, 2014). These findings corroborate Smitheran (2017) who states that not everyone experiences success in the same way.

For VEWM in New Zealand, despite being fluent in English, they were very conscious about their accent and felt that this leads to ridicule at work. They discussed racial prejudice openly, possibly due to widespread social and academic discussion of the issue. They appreciated the gender equality in New Zealand, and generally experienced better treatment than in their source-country. This could be due to the high global gender ranking of New Zealand and the egalitarian nature of the country as compared to the traditional religious views of VEWM who are devoted to their families, elders, husband and children. These findings corroborate research on female migration where motherhood features as central to women, including migrant women (O'Reilly, 2008; Pustułka, 2015).

Religion appeared significant for VEWM in New Zealand, and encouraged them to do the right thing, with spirituality related to intrinsic motivation and feelings of community (Sharma, Rastogi, & Garg, 2013). Their religious practices were not seen as intrusions at work (Pio & Pratt, 2017), but served as a source of comfort as did advice from family and other women. Their religious background appeared to enhance their sense of security and flexibility in accepting their situation. This affirms the non-Western approach by Sharma, Rastogi, and Garg (2013), indicating that workplace success is discovered through the exploration of spirituality.

Conversely, VEWM in Iceland appeared to avoid addressing racialization, possibly due to the sociocultural characteristic of 'whiteness' prevalent in Iceland, as discussion of racism and racial

prejudice surfaces minimally. The issue was complicated for them to address in a society where 'whiteness' is so ubiquitous as to be rendered invisible (Loftsdóttir, 2013). VEWM in Iceland also perceived being a woman in the labor market challenging; they experienced exclusion and devaluation from Icelandic men. This concurs with research that Icelandic women still face barriers at work (Einarsdóttir, Christiansen, & Kristjánsdóttir, 2018; Júlíusdóttir, Rafnsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2018) and sheds light on the intersectionality of race and gender in their experiences. The VEWM were inspired by Icelandic women's fight for equality and turned to women for career support. They rejected traditional values and gender roles and did not accept being put in second place as women or as a minority.

Independence, agency and increased freedom to participate in economic activities emerged as important aspects of success for VEWM in Iceland (Tlaiss, 2019). They must work harder and do a better job than white women in the host-country or risk experiencing workplace discrimination. This confirms research on skilled migrants in the labor market and their experiences of negative stereotypes and discrimination from coworkers (Kristjánsdóttir & Christiansen, 2017; Pio, 2008, 2018; Tariq & Syed, 2018). Similarly, not being completely fluent in the language is the downside of being a migrant and emphasized how language proficiency is the key to integration and success (Kristjánsdóttir, 2017; Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012).

Our findings illustrate that VEWM do not experience success as a competition and wealth accumulation (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Lynn, Cao, & Horn, 1996; McKeen & Bu, 2005; Smitheran, 2017), but as a continuous journey that grants independence but requires hard work and responsibility. VEWM overcome and interpret various provocations in the host-country, and experiencing success in their work trajectories did not come effortlessly. VEWM in New Zealand foreground religion, spirituality and family as a source of strength and a key to acceptance. VEWM in Iceland foreground independence and align themselves with other women. Religion did not feature in the trajectories of VEWM in Iceland. This may be due to the secular nature of Icelandic culture or because VEWM may not have wanted to talk about personal aspects such as religion to 'white women' interviewers (Nahari & Pazuelo, 2015) thus glossing over these aspects. Despite Iceland's top ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index, or more likely also because of it, there is widespread and vocal discontent with the state of gender (in)equality in Iceland (Ólafsdóttir, 2018; Rúdolfsdóttir, 2014). This may have made VEWM more at ease in addressing their experiences of inequalities stemming from being women in the Icelandic labor market.

To respond to the research question about how VEWM experience success at work in Iceland and New Zealand, the findings indicate that VEWM in both contexts experience being successful, but in somewhat different ways. VEWM in Iceland experience success through agency, hard work and their ability to align with women coworkers and supervisors. This corroborates Bostock's (2014) findings of the importance of collaboration and self-understanding of gender to feel successful. Moreover, according to the Business Dictionary (2020) interpretation of success, VEWM in Iceland are successful in their career, have moved up the corporate ladder, become managers, achieved their individual personal goals and compared to employees inside their organization they experience a sense of belonging in the Icelandic labor market. VEWM in New Zealand experience more gender equality and freedom in their host-country than their source-country; religion, family and giving back to the community are a source of strength. These findings add to Tlaiss's (2019) emphasis on giving back to the community as a marker of gender success by making progressive changes contributing to women's increased freedoms and Chinyamurindi's (2016) research of female leaders in South Africa found that doing good in society is an indicator of success. Furthermore, the findings reveal that different challenges and solutions surfaced in the journey toward success and VEWM still face multifarious barriers. They all experienced success as a continuous challenging journey, but the meanings of success for the women varied.

By gaining insights into how these women, who have achieved material success, define and experience success for themselves, we believe we have managed to enhance the understanding

of how limiting the Western/masculine focus is on the construct of success. Our research contributes to the way in which the career experiences of professional migrant women with visible diversity discriminators are viewed, and challenges existing findings in this space.

Conclusion

We have illuminated the complexity of gender, ethnicity, religion and work from the perspective of VEWM in Iceland and New Zealand. The findings foreground VEWM's awareness that they must deploy every ounce of their capital to gain acceptance and social status; that despite having achieved professional success (Glare, 2012; Morwood, 1998), their position is constantly challenged by individuals who see them as inferior.

Not surprisingly, VEWM in Iceland perceive the requirement of flawless Icelandic language skills to be the greatest barrier that undermined their social capital and accentuated their foreigner status. More notable were the findings about their experiences of gender inequality and devaluing by men in a host-country that excels at gender equality, indicating avenues of further research into the intersectionality of gender, race and migrant status in different social contexts. The key to overcoming this barrier and gaining status was development of solidarity with other women, both native-born women and fellow migrants. This gendered aspect did not appear in the New Zealand interviews and this difference warrants further research.

Generally, VEWM in New Zealand felt they had a better deal than in their source countries, particularly in terms of gender equality. The language was not an issue for them, however, accent did play a role as did skin color in their experiences of being perceived as inferior. Religion was a strong guiding force in the lives of the women, and they emphasized service and being available for their family. Traditional values helped them gain acceptance and be accepting of their situation. Through interrogating success, religion emerged as important in New Zealand but not in Iceland – this requires further research and delving into the majority–minority continuum.

Limitations of our study include the ethnicity and host/migrant status of the researchers; we cannot refute the possibility that what appear to be differences between VEWM may indeed stem from differences between the interviewers. Although it may be easier to discuss religion, ethnic or racial prejudice with a fellow migrant, it may also be easier to discuss gender inequalities in a context where the topic is high on the social agenda. This is an area for further investigation. It might be instructive to interview host-country women and men to seek their perceptions of what they consider as successful VEWM and how ethnicity and religion may create challenges and/or accolades in their experiences.

In this paper, we have illuminated heterogeneity among professional visible ethnic minority women migrants and the importance of disaggregating traditional analytical categories. We underscore the need to trouble fixed homogenous categories such as migrant and visible minority as these are complex interlocking systems fused with gender, religion and ethnicity in achieving success for ethnic minority migrant women at work, whose lived experiences are burnished in crucibles of fire, which may or may not create glass hearts!

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