THE CAREER RE-TRAINING EXPERIENCE OF PROFESSIONAL IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA:

AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Master of Arts, 2012

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ABSTRACT

New professional immigrants, who come to Canada with significant education and work experience, often find themselves underemployed after immigration. As a result, many immigrants undergo some form of re-training post-immigration. This study was a sub-study of a larger Canada Research Chair project exploring the career development and re-training experiences of new professional immigrants to Canada. This particular study focused on exploring such experiences from an existential perspective. Within a qualitative research framework, 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with new professional immigrants to Canada. A grounded theory approach was adopted for data analysis. Several themes emerged and key findings, including participants’ relationship with the core existential concepts of death, freedom, and meaning are introduced. Results also compare how existential considerations were related to participants’ level of career satisfaction in Canada. Results have theoretical implications for career and vocational psychology and implications for practice, including professional and self-helping.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my research supervisor, Dr. Charles P. Chen, for his unwavering support and guidance throughout my master’s program. You were always open to my many questions and concerns and provided thoughtful and genuine comments, suggestions, and encouragement.

To my family. Throughout the years, you have been my anchor in a turbulent world. Because of you, I feel safe to explore and move forward.

To Igor. You were my constant companion throughout this process; my friend, my support, my home, my sapatinho.

To my friends and colleagues. Thank you for making this a time, not only of learning, but of laughter and love.

To Tara. You are truly an inspiration, in this, and in life. Existentially, you encouraged me to take responsibility for my freedom and being-in-this-world. Your support, understanding, and most importantly, your friendship, are appreciated more than you know.

And finally, to the participants of this study. I feel privileged to be the keeper of your stories and I thank you for your willingness to share your experiences with a stranger. You are all courageous, inspiring, and beautiful individuals and I wish you much meaning in life.
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that new professional immigrants often struggle to find equivalent work in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). For example, although many immigrants come to Canada with significant education and work experience, only 42% are working in their area of expertise within two years of immigration (Canadian Labour and Business Centre, 2003). Others find themselves working in “survivor” jobs for which they are over-qualified. This crisis of “underemployment” results in a significant loss of resources in the labour pool and in personal and psychological difficulties for the individuals involved (Galarneau & Morisette, 2004, 2008). While research has identified several barriers that new immigrants face in terms of career development including language issues (Statistics Canada, 2004), accreditation and credentialing (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007), and recognition of past professional experience (Bauder, 2003; Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010), less research has examined the re-training experiences so often required to address these barriers. Moreover, little is known about the subjective experience of those immigrants who actually encounter these barriers and who pursue re-training as a result. This study aimed to shed light on these matters through an in-depth analysis of immigrant participants’ re-training stories.

The purpose of this research was to elucidate, from an existential perspective, the career and life experience of new immigrant professionals to Canada who undergo vocational re-training. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants and were analyzed for existential themes including, but not limited to, Yalom’s (1980, 1998) concepts of death/nonbeing, freedom/responsibility, isolation/connectedness, and meaning/meaninglessness.
The relationship between existential themes and career and re-training experiences, perceptions, and outcomes were of particular interest.

**Background**

Immigration is a crucial part of Canadian society today. Immigrants are needed to address shortages in the labour force caused by a low domestic birth rate coupled with a growing economy. Indeed, immigrants accounted for 70% of labour force growth in Canada between 1991 and 1996 and were expected to account for 100% by 2011 (Human Resources & Skill Development Canada, 2002). Immigration is also a central part of the Canadian national identity—the country prides itself on diversity and acceptance of peoples of all kinds. For immigrants themselves, Canada is often viewed as a tolerant country that will provide economic and political security, career opportunities, and a high quality of life for individuals and their families (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007).

Many immigrants come to Canada with an expectation, hope, and motivation to succeed in career and work life (Blythe, Baumann, Rheume, & McIntosh, 2009; Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). They often possess many strengths upon immigration and anticipate that such strengths will help them secure gainful employment. New immigrants are often highly educated, possess extensive work experience, and are in very good health. In 2006, twice as many recent immigrants had a university degree as compared to native-born Canadians (Galerneau & Morissette, 2008). Additionally, immigrants often exhibit what has been termed the *healthy immigrant effect* (HIE). The HIE is the demonstrated phenomenon whereby recent immigrants have better health as rated on various measures than their Canadian peers (MacDonald & Kennedy, 2004; Newbold, 2006). Despite these strengths however, immigrants often face
extensive difficulties upon arrival in Canada. Indeed, although immigrants continue to bring higher and higher levels of qualifications, their success in the Canadian labour market is on the decline (Wald & Fang, 2008; Chen et al., 2010).

According to Canada’s first Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007), 54% of immigrants are still looking for work between two and four years after arrival and of those who are employed, 60% work in careers for which they are overqualified (Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, 2003). Research has identified several barriers that new immigrants face in terms of career development including accreditation difficulties (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007) and language problems (Statistics Canada, 2004). Moreover, immigrants are entering an increasingly uncertain labour market (Meijers, 1998; Trevor-Roberts, 2006) and must deal with cultural, social, personal, and philosophical adjustment issues (Lee & Westwood, 1996).

Professional immigrants face a unique situation upon arrival in Canada. Many of them are admitted through the Federal Skilled Workers Program (FSWP)—a program that is designed to recruit immigrants based on their ability to become economically established in Canada and therefore uses level of education and work experience as key criteria. According to preliminary data, 48,815 immigrants were given permanent residency in Canada through the FSWP in 2010—more than any other principal applicant class of immigration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010a). When the spouses and dependents of Federal Skilled Workers are included, this class accounts for just under half of the total number of immigrants to Canada from 2002 to 2008 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010b). Professional immigrants, educated and skilled as they are, are often surprised, disappointed, and upset when they
encounter significant barriers to their career development in Canada (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Chen et al., 2010).

**Study Rationale**

Given the many documented challenges immigrants face in terms of career development, the pathways immigrants pursue to confront such challenges warrant additional research. One such pathway is re-training. Re-training, for the purposes of this study, includes a broad spectrum of activities including, but not necessarily limited to, the pursuit of additional degrees or diplomas, the pursuit of re-accreditation with an appropriate regulatory body, ad-hoc coursework to improve standing or fill gaps, and co-op training programs. Re-training can be in one’s original career or, by choice or necessity, in a new career, industry, or role. While a handful of studies have examined the re-accreditation process for specific kinds of immigrant professionals (Shuval, 2000; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Blythe et al., 2009) or the pursuit of post-secondary education after immigration (Park-Saltzman, Mikhail, & Wada, 2011; Rollin, 2011), to the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined the re-training process on a broad and encompassing level.

The present study is one component of a larger Canada Research Chair (CRC) project aiming to create a more comprehensive picture of the immigrant career re-training experience. Existing career development theories (e.g., Holland, 1966; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Super, 1953; Savickas, 1997; Miller-Tiedeman, 1988, 1989, 1997) can inadequately account for the complex career experience of professional immigrants and have little, if any, mention of re-training processes. This larger project is directed by the principal investigator (PI), Dr. Charles P. Chen. Under his direction, several graduate students (i.e., at the doctoral and M.A. level) worked
together as research assistants on various aspects of the project, and individually, are examining more focused research questions within the larger project. The present research aims to contribute to this overall picture of the immigrant re-training experience by elucidating the subjective realities of professional immigrants through an existential lens. Only a handful of studies to date have applied existential theory to career development (Cohen, 2003; Schultze & Miller, 2003; Maglio, Butterfielded, & Borgen, 2005) and none have focused on the immigrant experience.

Many tenets of existential theory play out in the career arena, thus making it a relevant and potentially very informative model. For example, the collapse of external value and role systems upon immigration to a new country and the subsequent necessary career transition, result in a search for internal values; the internal construction of meaning is a central principle of existentialism. A second example is the struggle faced by immigrants who have high career expectations but who encounter barriers after immigration; existentialism deals thoroughly with the disparity between human aspirations and human limitations (Maslow, 1960).

Existentialism is an ideal theory through which to view the re-training experiences of immigrants as it deals with the ontological givens of living and can be used to frame a person’s experience at both macro (social, cultural, institutional) and micro (individual thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours) levels (Maglio et al., 2005). Moreover, existential theory is in a unique position to account for cultural differences in career experience as it emphasizes an individual’s personal search for and responsibility toward meaning—a responsibility that could be expressed in a myriad of ways, from the religious to the secular, from the individualistic to the collectivistic (Schultze & Miller, 2003). Examining how existential themes interact with and
affect career development and the re-training process will help us better understand the full career experience of new professional immigrants to Canada.

The research question was examined using a qualitative methodology. Existential questions and concerns are deeply personal and complex phenomena, and, some would argue, impossible to quantify. In this regard, qualitative methods, widely acknowledged as allowing for rich and contextual exploration of subjective phenomena by providing access to underlying emotions, perceptions, meanings, value systems, and other layers of experience (Thomson, 1981), are ideal for research into existential questions. Moreover, as the re-training experience of immigrants is a relatively new field of research, a qualitative stance was additionally warranted in order to investigate, without assumptions, the participants’ stories and subjective existential experiences.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive theory of career development with respect to professional immigrants by elucidating the existential, subjective aspects of their re-training experience. Moreover, this research may be of use in delineating intervention strategies for career counselors working with immigrants both within Canada and in pre-immigration settings.

The following chapters explore the immigration, career, and re-training experiences of new professional immigrants to Canada from an existential perspective. Chapter two, literature review, provides an overview of existing literature on the immigration and career development experiences of new and professional immigrants. More specifically, this chapter offers a brief introduction to the Canadian immigration system and outlines documented barriers and challenges faced by immigrants in relation to career and vocational development. Additionally, it
reviews the limited research available on immigrant re-training experiences and examines the relevancy of existing career developmental theories. Finally, it provides a brief introduction to existential theory and examines the existential aspects of career and work life. Next, the methodology chapter outlines the rationale for utilizing a qualitatively methodology and reviews the grounded theory approach to data analysis. It then describes the procedures used for recruitment, selection criteria, research interviews/data collection, and data analysis. To provide a clear context for the findings, chapter four presents an overview of participant characteristics as well as brief summaries of each participant’s history, story, and experiences. Following this background information, chapter five, the findings chapter, examines emergent themes that arose from the data analysis. Findings are presented in relationship to Yalom’s (1980) four main existential concerns. This chapter also compares different experiences of meaning and relationship to existential concepts between those individuals who were very satisfied with their career development in Canada with those individuals who were less satisfied. Lastly, the discussion chapter discusses the theoretical and conceptual implications of the primary findings of the current study. This chapter also reviews implications for practice and both professional and self-helping.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a context for the experience of new professional immigrants to Canada. It offers a brief introduction to the Canadian immigration system and outlines documented barriers and challenges, including language difficulties, skill-discounting, limited social and cultural capital and acculturation challenges, faced by immigrants in relation to career and vocational development. It then explores the frequency and consequences of underemployment among highly skilled immigrants and reviews strategies used to further career development with a particular focus on re-training. This chapter then examines the relevancy of existing career developmental theories within the immigrant population. Finally, it provides an existential perspective on career development by providing a brief introduction to existentialism, outlining Yalom’s four main existential concerns, and reviewing the limited literature on the existential aspects of career and work life.

Overview of the Canadian Immigration System

In many ways, Canada is a country founded by immigrants. From the wave of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when English, Scottish, European and American settlers were given free land in exchange for settling the West, to the more recent recruitment of skilled workers to address a Canadian labour shortage (Human Resources & Skill Development Canada, 2002), immigration has driven Canadian growth and development. The total number of immigrants to Canada has topped 200,000 per year since 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2008a). In 2008, almost half of all immigrants came from Asia and the Pacific, 20%
from Africa and the Middle East, and the rest from Europe, the United Kingdom, South and Central America, and the United States of America (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

Canada’s immigration system has been regulated by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2001) since 2002. The act defines three basic categories for immigration: 1) Family Class—designed to reunite families, 2) Economic Class—designed to contribute to the Canada’s economic development and 3) Refugee class—designed to protect refugees and vulnerable persons. In 2008, 63.9% of immigrants were Economic Class, 22.5% were Family Class, 9.3% were Refugee Class, with the additional 4.3% comprising an “other” Class. Comparable ratios between classes have been documented for the previous ten years. Of those within the Economic Class, the vast majority were Skilled Workers (versus Investors or Entrepreneurs) (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Skilled Workers are those immigrants who meet certain criteria, including education, work experience, and knowledge of French and/or English, among others, that are known to be important in helping them become economically stable in Canada.

People choose to immigrate to Canada for many reasons, the top three being to improve their family’s future, to reunite with family or friends, and for better educational opportunities (Statistics Canada, 2007). Despite career and work opportunities not being a top reason for immigration, career obviously plays a crucial role in overall adjustment after immigration, providing economic stability and freedom as well as other benefits. In an interesting analysis, Schellenberg and Maheux (2007) investigated settlement in terms of immigrants’ subjective perceptions four years after arrival. In this study, immigrants cited finding an adequate job as the most important difficulty they faced since arriving in Canada and nearly 40% of all immigrants
and over 45% of economic immigrants cited this difficulty. Along this same vein, *lack of employment opportunities* was cited second only to climate when asked about things that immigrants’ disliked most about Canada. It is thus readily apparent that new immigrants to Canada consider career and employment to be significant challenges in the immigration process.

**Barriers to Career Development**

**Language**

Immigrants face many barriers to their career development in Canada. A first barrier is language. Language plays a key role in the cultural adjustment of immigrants to their new country (Nimmon, 2007; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007; Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2009). Immigrants with limited proficiency in English struggle with cultural adjustment and are repeatedly misunderstood and inconvenienced in their interactions with others (Chen, 2006). This may lead to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (Chen, 2006).

In a recent study of immigrant students’ experience of post-secondary education in Canada, all participants reported experiencing language-based discrimination in their daily activities (Park-Saltzman et al., 2011). A participant in a study of Latin American graduates of Canadian MBA programs (Hakak et al., 2009) provided a strikingly succinct yet meaningful description of this phenomenon: “Someone told me that some people think that because you have an accent you think with an accent as well” (p. 166). Moreover, there is evidence that accent and ethnicity interact to affect job interview outcomes. Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes and Ferris (2006) manipulated accent and ethnic or non-ethnic name of a ‘job applicant’ across multiple conditions of a filmed ‘interview’. The most unfavourable ratings were given to the applicant with both an accent and an ethnic name. All other factors were held constant (e.g., ‘education of
the applicant’, attractiveness, tone of voice, understandability) thus demonstrating some sort of ethnicity bias at play centered around language and accent.

Beyond adjustment and reception by others, language difficulties are often cited as a primary barrier to employment and career development of immigrants in their own right (Bratsberg & Ragan, 2002; Neault, 2005; Suto, 2008). Language difficulties are compounded in professional settings where high-level proficiency and command of the language is required (Neault, 2005). Some professional positions require mastery of complex or technical language (for example, engineer, doctor, scientist), while others require a great deal of skill in verbally expressing nuanced or precise observations, suggestions, or criticisms (for example, psychologist, lawyer, managerial/supervisory positions). A higher level of language proficiency is thus required for success in professional settings than for success in social situations or more labour oriented work settings (Suto, 2008).

**Skill Discounting: Recognition of Qualifications and Work Experience**

Immigrants are often faced with what has been called skill-discounting (Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006; Reitz, 2007; Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). Skill-discounting refers to the devaluation of immigrants’ education and work experience when compared to that of Canadians and is often cited as a primary barrier to immigrant career development (Esses et al., 2006). Skill-discounting is thought to be a result of several interacting processes including a belief that foreign education is of lower quality than a Canadian education (Sweetman, 2004) and/or a belief that the relevance of foreign education or experience is limited in a Canadian context (Reitz, 2007). While this reasoning may be true in some cases, it is generally considered to be a discriminatory practice (Reitz, 2007).
Among new economic immigrants to Canada who have had difficulty finding employment, a lack of Canadian experience was the number one difficulty experienced, followed by no connections in the job market, foreign experience not being accepted, and foreign qualifications not being accepted. Moreover, these difficulties persisted as the top four difficulties cited at 0-6 months, 7-24 months, and 25-48 months in Canada (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). Skill-discounting can be particularly frustrating for professional immigrants as they were selected for immigration precisely because of pre-immigration education, qualifications, and work experience.

Moreover, many professional immigrants work in professions that are regulated in Canada and so must apply to regulatory colleges for equivalency or re-accreditation. For example, immigrant nurses to Ontario must seek equivalency from the College of Nurses of Ontario and immigrant psychologists from the College of Psychologists of Ontario. Foreign engineers must have their degrees reviewed by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board, and then meet additional criteria set by their provincial association. These processes can be extremely stressful and often require additional coursework, equivalency examinations, meticulous documentation of experience, internships, or other upgrading of credentials (Reitz, 2007; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Blythe et al., 2009). In many cases, the process is so daunting or difficult, requiring a significant amount of time and/or money, that professional immigrants pursue alternate careers or lower-prestige positions within their original industry (Shuval, 2000; Suto, 2008).
**Limited Social and Cultural Capital**

Social and cultural capital refers to tools that help one navigate a social and cultural environment (Peixoto, 2001; Syed, 2008). For example, social networks and personal contacts offer capital in the form of access to inside job postings or access to important people within an institution. Similarly, such contacts can act as references to potential employers and guides on particular hiring processes. Knowledge of socially and culturally appropriate norms towards career-seeking behaviour, for example, shaking hands, thank-you cards, or handing out business cards, act as capital in helping an individual to stand out to potential employers. Immigrants often arrive in their new country with limited social and cultural capital (Syed, 2008; Zikic et al., 2010). They must face the challenge of negotiating a foreign labour market without inside knowledge of the system. These challenges range from the more concrete requirements of learning how to best format a resume for Canadian employers and how to prepare for a job interview to the more elusive challenge of developing social networks (Salaff, Greve, & Li Ping, 2002). Many immigrants underestimate the importance of networking to career development in Canada or find it difficult to develop such networks (Bagchi, 2001). Immigrants often cite weak social networks as barriers to finding employment (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007) and Friedman and Krackhardt (1997) found that a lack of social connections negatively influences both employment success and return on investment of education for Asian immigrants. Strong social networks lend credibility to an individual’s education and experience. Moreover, specific connections can both pass along information about potential employment opportunities and act as references for an individual’s job search efforts (Salaff et al., 2002).
Acculturation and Work Culture Differences

In addition to barriers in securing employment, new professional immigrants confront unique challenges when in the workplace. Immigrants undergo a process of acculturation both in general and in respect to their career and on-the-job experience. There are different definitions of acculturation: Earlier research conceived acculturation as the process by which individuals new to a society eventually give up the identity of their original culture to adopt that of their new society (Gans, 1979). Newer models conceive acculturation as a bi-directional process whereby an individual can identify with both his or her original culture and the culture of his or her host society at the same time (Berry, 2005). The process of acculturation is a back-and-forth between one’s original culture, attitudes, and values and those of the host society. New professional immigrants must negotiate this process of acculturation within the workplace.

For example, Blythe et al. (2009) found that even when foreign-trained nurses successfully completed the re-accreditation process in Canada, they still encountered challenges in the workplace due to differences between their personal expectations and values toward nursing and those of the Canadian nursing system. Differences in doctor-nurse and patient-nurse relations were cited alongside differences in communication styles. Another study (Calderwood, Harper, Ball, & Liang, 2009) found that immigrant social work students in Windsor, Ontario experienced discomfort and conflict when the professional behaviours they were taught in Canada conflicted with their fundamental family values. Conflicting values included the role of the mother in the family, the primacy of the family system over the rights of any one member of the family, family members’ obligations to the elderly, and the strict professional boundaries in the Canadian system between social worker and client. Participants explained how they adapted...
their behaviour to fit the Canadian system yet felt disturbed, embarrassed, discriminated against, and uncomfortable as a result. Over half of the participants in Hakak et al.’s (2009) study of Latin American graduates of highly-ranked Canadian MBA programs cited ‘not fitting in’ to the dominant Canadian culture as a hindrance to their professional development and well-being.

**Underemployment of Highly Skilled Immigrants**

As a result of the barriers to career development reviewed in the previous section, underemployment of highly skilled professional immigrants is pervasive in the Canadian labour market (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2009). Between 1991 and 2006, the proportion of immigrants with a university degree holding jobs with low educational requirements (for example, taxi drivers, factory workers) increased from 22 to 28% for men and from 36 to 44% for women (Galerneau & Morissette, 2008). During this same period, the proportion for native-born Canadians remained stable around 10% for both men and women. A recent study of over-qualification in new immigrants to Canada found an even greater discrepancy: Fifty-eight percent of participants who had post-secondary education were employed in occupations below their educational qualifications (Chen et al., 2010). This underemployment can also be presented in economic terms. One study (Reitz, 2001) estimated that $2.6 billion was lost annually in Canada due to the underutilization of immigrant skills. Additional research suggests that it takes a minimum of ten years for new immigrants to realize their economic potential and to achieve similar labor market outcomes as Canadian-born workers (Beiser, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2008b).
Mental and Physical Health Effects of Underemployment

In the general population, employment is correlated with positive health effects (Beland, Birch, & Stoddart, 2002; Frankish, Moulton, Quantz, & Carson, 2007) and unemployment with negative health effects (Kraut & Walld, 2003; O’Campo, Eaton, & Muntaner, 2004). The direction of these correlations is debated however: For some researchers, employment is thought to foster health through various pathways such as increased income and social status (Ross & Mirowsky, 1995; Beland et al., 2002). For others, healthier individuals are more likely to find and maintain employment in the first place (Mathers & Schofield, 1998; Breslin, 2003). Highly skilled immigrants to Canada are thus a very interesting population to study in terms of unemployment and underemployment as they are often well educated (Galerneau & Morrisette, 2008) and demonstrate above average health upon immigration due to the immigration selection process (Newbold, 2006).

Dean and Wilson (2009) found that new highly skilled immigrants living in Mississauga, Ontario showed exasperated health problems as a result of underemployment after immigration when compared to the general population underemployment literature. A decline in mental health was the most widely referenced impact of underemployment in their sample. Participants experienced high levels of stress, depression, irritability, anxiety and feelings of loneliness in response to underemployment. The authors identified three main pathways from underemployment to mental health issues: 1) loss of income, 2) loss of employment related skills, and 3) loss of social status and personal identity. Participants also noted a decline in their physical health including rising blood pressure, increased muscle tension and physical strain, and weight loss. Two main pathways were identified from underemployment to physical health.
issues: 1) stress-induced physical symptoms and 2) the strenuous working conditions, such as hot and poorly ventilated work areas, common to survival jobs.

Similarly, Chen et al. (2010), using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, found that immigrants who were over-qualified for their positions had poorer mental health than other immigrants four years after arrival in Canada. Over-qualification has been defined as a chronic work stressor caused by an individual’s inability to exercise control over deficiencies in their employment status (Scott-Marshall, Tompa, & Trevithick, 2007). In their study, over-qualification and unmet employment expectations, especially given participants’ education and work experience, resulted in greater risk for mental health issues within a relatively short period of time. In this study, the deterioration in mental health in immigrants was linked primarily to job dissatisfaction.

Underemployment and over-qualification may be particularly troubling for highly skilled immigrants as they are granted immigration precisely because of their occupational identities, education, and work-experience. These identities are often central to immigrants’ sense of self and the collapse or decline of these identities as a result of underemployment after immigration leads to enormous distress and frustration (Neault, 2005; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Sinacore et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2010).

**Strategies to Further Career Development**

There is an unfortunate paucity of research examining coping strategies that immigrants use to overcome barriers to their career development. While studies have documented several coping strategies for dealing with the challenges of immigration in general, such as social support from friends and family (Hovey, 2000), preventative health practices such as exercise or
yoga (Ahmad et al., 2004), and religious or spiritual activity such as mediation or prayer (Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & Diaz-Perez, 2005; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008), there has been less research into how immigrants cope with career challenges. The studies that do exist usually speak of coping in terms of capital. Immigrants cope with career challenges by acquiring local career capital through the pursuit of additional training or education in the host country (Chiswick & Miller, 2008).

One recent interesting study (Zikic et al., 2010) examined how qualified immigrants to Canada, France, and Spain manage the relationship between objective barriers to career development with their own subjective responses and strategies in response to such barriers. The authors identified six themes reflected in immigrants’ subjective interpretations of career barriers: 1) maintaining motivation, 2) managing identity, 3) developing new credentials, 4) developing local know-how, 5) building a new social network, and 6) evaluating career success. Different responses to each of these themes were reflected in three distinct career orientations. Twenty-four percent of participants exhibited an Embracing career orientation and viewed objective barriers as personal challenges and as ways to reinvent themselves. They demonstrated high motivation, proactivity, and perseverance and viewed most experiences, even bad ones, in a positive light. Forty-eight percent of participants exhibited an Adaptive career orientation. These participants, while making efforts to cope with career barriers and to adapt as necessary, were focused more on surviving than on thriving. Finally, 27% of participants exhibited a Resisting career orientation. These participants demonstrated limited psychological flexibility in response to barriers and suffered from low self-confidence and motivation. The barriers to career development were considered insurmountable. One must be careful however, in assigning too
much power to career orientations alone, as each immigrant will encounter different kinds and levels of barriers and will be dealing with varying levels of financial or familial obligations which may impede the implementation of career development strategies. Below, we will review one strategy in particular, the acquisition of local career capital (Chiswick & Miller, 2008) through re-training.

**Immigrant Re-training**

Research has demonstrated that around 30 to over 40% of new immigrants pursue at least some kind of re-training during the first few years after their arrival (Banerjee & Verma, 2009; Girard, 2010). Girard’s (2010) analysis of The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada—a study following a cohort of new immigrants who arrived between 2000 and 2001 for four years—found that immigrants who pursue re-training are more likely to be university graduates, to have studied education or the arts (versus science or engineering), to have studied in a country with a low Human Development Index, to be young, to have planned to work in Canada upon arrival, and to be economic immigrants (as opposed to family class or refugee). Additional factors that increased the likelihood of immigrants pursuing re-training included proficiency in either English or French (Anisef, Sweet, Adamuti-Trache, & Walters, 2009; Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010) and having one’s foreign work experience or education not recognized in Canada (Banerjee & Verma, 2009; Anisef et al., 2009).

There are clear objective benefits to re-training. Research has demonstrated better employment outcomes for immigrants who pursue post-secondary education in Canada. Gilmore and Le Petit (2008) found that immigrants who arrived more than five years ago and who were granted their highest degree from a Canadian institution had an employment rate comparable to
native-born Canadians. This is in line with previous findings that education attained outside of Canada offers a lower return in the Canadian labour market than education attained in Canada (Schaafsma & Sweetman, 2001; Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005). Studies have demonstrated that post-migration education is correlated with a rise in employment rate (Anisef, Sweet, & Adamuti-Trache, 2010), occupational status (Banerjee & Verna, 2009), and income (Rollin, 2011). Moreover, immigrants who pursue other forms of post-migration education such as language courses (Renaud & Cayn, 2006) or vocational training for unskilled individuals (Stewart & Hyclak, 1984) also have better employment outcomes and earn higher wages than those who do not pursue such training (Bratsberg & Ragan, 2002).

**Existing Career Development Models**

Early career theories, such as Holland’s theory of types (1966), Dawis and Lofquist’s work adjustment theory (1984), and Super’s life-span life-space theory (1953, 1990) deal primarily with issues surrounding initial career selection and adjustment. Super’s theory is more encompassing than others and examines career development across the life span. His life-career rainbow model demonstrates how life role (e.g. student, worker, citizen, etc…) and life stage (e.g. exploration of career, establishment of career, maintenance of career, and eventually disengagement of career near the end of the lifespan) interact and influence career development (Sharf, 2010). New professional immigrants to Canada, however, may find themselves thrown out of previous life roles and stages and have to negotiate their career development anew within a completely novel work and personal environment.

While several emerging theories, such as Savickas’s career construction theory (1997) and Miller-Tiedeman’s lifecareer theory (1988, 1989, 1997), have diverged from more traditional
approaches to emphasize social constructivist and holistic perspectives of career, they do not sufficiently capture the subjective realities of professional immigrants—a factor crucial to an understanding of their career experience. For instance, immigrants may find it difficult to adopt Miller Tiedeman’s (1997) view that life is career when they are struggling in a new country, away from a familiar culture, family, and friends and are unemployed or underemployed. Moreover, new professional immigrants may not have the flexibility or mind-set to actively begin constructing a new career out of their basic values and major life themes as suggested by Savickas’s career construction theory (1997) if they find themselves in survival jobs in order to make ends meet.

While existing career theories offer informative angles from which to conceive career, additional research and theory-building is necessary to more fully account for the unique and complicated career development experience of immigrant professionals. Career re-training will be central to any new theory of immigrant career development. Research needs to determine in what ways immigrant re-training is a unique instance of career training in general and define and examine its core concepts, elements and effects on the career development experience of new immigrant professionals.

**An Existential Perspective**

**Existentialism**

Existential thought is rooted in the philosophy of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. It wasn’t until the end of the Second World War, however, that the term *existentialism* itself came into formal use. The central premise of existentialism is that *existence precedes essence* (Sartre, 1970). As people, we find ourselves thrown into the world—we just *are*, here in the world, and only after we *are*, do we decide *what* we are through our choices and actions.
This is in stark contrast to other worldviews in which essence precedes existence—wherein we are put on this world with a unique and predetermined purpose, are a small but important part of some other greater essence, or have an innate ability to study, learn and discover the inner workings and meanings of the universe. In the aftermath of the chaos and destruction of the two world wars, Europeans were questioning these other worldviews—religious and scientific alike—and people across the continent were experiencing feelings of profound grief, confusion, and disillusionment (Reynolds, 2006). They were trying to make sense of the atrocities that had occurred, to understand how these awful events could happen, and were attempting to deal with a new sense of meaninglessness to life. These existential questions permeated the shared consciousness of the day. Existential philosophy arose in response to this questioning.

Existential philosophy, emerging through the works of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Viktor Frankl and others, was a reaction against the Age of Reason (May, 1958b; Breisach, 1962; Roubiczek, 1964)—a reaction against the dehumanization of society arguably caused by a preoccupation with, and a glorification of, science, technological progress, and materialism. Existentialism arose within the meaning vacuum following the world wars. The philosophers recognized a growing split between truth and reality in Western culture; truth being the findings of an objective and empirical science and reality being life as it is actually experienced by human beings (May, 1958b). They felt a need to bring philosophical thought back to existence itself, back to an examination of subjective experience, and to the belief that before one can deal with what one is, one must first deal with the fact that one is at all (May, 1958b).
Existential theorists believed that the person could not be understood solely through objective measures such as physical drives, instincts, bodily functions, assessment tools, or concrete behaviours. While studying drives, dynamisms, and behaviours is undoubtedly useful in that it provides a framework in which to understand certain elements of experience, these elements can only be understood in the context of a person’s complete being (May, 1958a). The word being here is most accurately understood as a verb, akin to a continuous becoming (Pfaffenberger, 2007). We are becoming anew in every moment, and at every moment face choices and possibilities for future selves. Existential philosophy deals with this continual becoming, with this quest and search for meaning, with the fact that we exist, here in this strange world and have to make something of ourselves within it.

Irvin Yalom’s Givens of Existence

To investigate the existential aspects of the immigrant re-training and career development experience, this study makes use of Irvin Yalom’s (1980) existential framework. Irvin Yalom is an existential psychotherapist and currently Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at Stanford University. According to his framework, individuals are in constant confrontation with the givens of existence and it is through these confrontations that individuals become who they are and define their lives. Everyone, inescapably, must confront the four ultimate existential concerns: 1) Death: One day, we will die. There exists a conflict between our desire to live and the inevitability of death. 2) Freedom: There is no guide or intrinsic structure to life. There exists a conflict between our unlimited freedom of choice, responsibility for correct choice and our desire for structure or our confrontations with limitations beyond our control. 3) Isolation: No matter how close we become to an other, we can never share our consciousness with that other.
Existentially, we are absolutely alone. There exists a conflict between this sense of isolation and our desire for connectedness with others. 4) Meaninglessness/ Meaning: It is difficult to find meaning in a life where we confront death, isolation, and a seemingly indifferent universe. There exists a conflict between our innate desire for meaning and the lack of any inherent meaning to life.

**An Existential Perspective on Career Development**

A handful of authors to date have applied existential theory to career development (Cohen, 2003; Schultze & Miller, 2003; Maglio et al., 2005). In the inherently meaningless world of existentialism, individuals must take responsibility for creating, realizing, and actualizing their own meaning and purpose (Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 1980). Career and work represent an important potential source of this meaning and fulfillment, occupying as it does one of the most important roles in an individual’s overall experience of life. When one’s work is not fulfilling, one may find oneself in an existential vacuum and experience feelings of depression, emptiness, boredom, apathy, and lack a sense of purpose or direction (Cohen, 2003; Frankl, 1984). The relationship between career and other sources of meaning (e.g., family, culture, religion, art, etc.) is also relevant as it can help individuals make responsible choices and prioritize values surrounding their career development.

Cohen’s (2003) four-stage career decision-making model uses an existential perspective. He first describes career choice or career transition as a boundary situation. According to Yalom (1980), boundary situations are those that make the individual more aware of existential concerns and often involve life-changing decisions. In Cohen’s first stage, *Responsibility*, the existential concerns of responsibility and freedom emerge. Individuals become aware of their responsibility
for vocational choice and development or they avoid this responsibility. During the second stage, *Evaluation*, individuals search for meaning and evaluate what conditions are needed to be their authentic selves. In the third stage, *Action*, individuals pursue a career choice, ideally an authentic one. Two existential concerns can derail this stage however: impulsivity, whereby individuals act prior to truly examining their preferences and values, and compulsivity, whereby individuals act according to the desires of others. In Cohen’s fourth and final stage, *Re-Evaluation*, individuals re-evaluate themselves and their career as sources of meaning. If meaning is absent, they may feel an existential vacuum or existential guilt at not fulfilling their authentic self. These feelings may or may not lead them back to first stage, to begin the process of career-decision making anew.

Maglio et al. (2005), in an oft cited article on existential considerations for career counselling, acknowledges the macro-level relevance of theories like Cohen’s four-stage model (2003), and goes beyond to address micro-level subjective existential concerns of career development. Maglio et al. (2005) uses Yalom’s four existential givens as a backdrop for subjective existential experiencing of career development. Firstly, in many ways job loss and unemployment are akin to death, and job transition akin to a journey towards rebirth (Herr, Gramer, & Niles, 2004). Especially in the Western world, where identity is so intimately linked with career, job loss can result in a loss of identity and sense of self (Herr et al., 2004). Job loss and unemployment may also make people reflect on their own eventual physical death as they are forced to deal with the disruption to the routine of their day-to-day life or with financial or familial obligations affected by their work situation. Secondly, several stages of career development, including initial career choice, job loss, or job transition can be extremely isolating
for an individual (Borgen, 1999; Gowan, Riordan, & Gatewood, 1999). Those in-between stages are often extremely lonely and stressful. Individuals are without a community of colleagues and are instead competing with others for limited positions. Both this real isolation and the existential isolation it evokes is a profound part of the career development experience (Maglio et al., 2005). Thirdly, the freedom inherent to career development in the modern day is staggering. There are countless career options available and one must balance this freedom with a responsibility to make a choice and with the unique barriers and limitations of one’s own circumstances. This freedom and accompanying responsibility can evoke numerous unique emotional reactions ranging from excitement and motivation to dread and apathy (Maglio et al., 2005). Fourthly, inherent meaninglessness and thus individuals’ unique approach to meaning-making is central to career development. For example, work can be meaningful in very different ways—whereas one person may be fulfilled by the specific work he or she does, another may find meaning in working solely as a means to support his or her family, and another in the social status a particular line of work brings. Personal value systems and subjective perspectives on what career means affects career development in deep and essential ways (Maglio et al., 2005).

The Present Study

The object of the present study is to explore the career re-training and career development experience of new professional immigrants to Canada through an existential perspective. Though a handful of studies have applied elements of existential theory to career development, none have focused on the immigrant experience. The central research question in this study was to examine: “How do existential considerations, guided by Irvin Yalom’s (1980) four existential concerns, influence new professional immigrants’ experience of immigration, re-training, and career
development?” Secondary research questions were: (a) What existential themes are most prominent for professional immigrants who undergo re-training? (b) Do different relationships with existential themes differentially influence re-training experiences and career development? (c) How do existential concerns impact career satisfaction of professional immigrants?

It is anticipated that these research questions will lead to empirical findings that will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive theory of career development with respect to professional immigrants by elucidating the existential, subjective aspects of their experience. Additionally, a more thorough understanding of the existential aspects will be of use in delineating intervention strategies for career counselors and immigration consultants working with new professionals immigrants both within Canada and in pre-immigration settings.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized a qualitative methodology in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. A grounded theory approach was then used to analyze the data. This research methodology was chosen in order to allow for a thorough and comprehensive exploration of participants’ career and re-training experiences from an existential perspective. This chapter presents the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and briefly outlines the grounded theory approach to data analysis. The study procedure is then described including recruitment, selection criteria, research interviews/data collection, and finally, procedures for data analysis.

Qualitative Methodology Rationale

The research question was examined using a qualitative methodology. The phenomena being explored, the existential elements of immigrants’ career and re-training experiences, are rich, subjective, and deeply personal phenomena of unknowable depth. Both immigration and career experiences are unique to each person and each person relates in unique ways to existential themes and questions. Such experiences are difficult to measure from outward, objective observation and some may argue that they defy concrete quantification (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). To fully explore and understand such phenomena, one must access the deeper and underlying emotions, meanings, value systems, and other processes at work during the moment of experiencing. Qualitative methods are widely acknowledged as tapping into these additional layers of experience (Thomson, 1981).
Indeed, with regards to career research, it has been suggested that the use of traditional quantitative methodologies before exploring participants’ subjective experiences may risk hindering the researcher’s ability to access and understand the multiple and dynamic realities of individual participants and thus lead the researcher astray in their theorizing (Young, 1984). More recent career researchers have also encouraged the use of qualitative methodologies and maintain that they provide vital exploratory information that is lacking in purely quantitative methods (Chen, 2006; Chen & Lee, 2011). Career is an ever-changing, dynamic life process and interacts with contextual factors including, but not limited to, the economy (Wang, Adams, Beehr & Shultz, 2009), family responsibilities and values (Hall, 2004), and one’s idea of personal fulfillment (Power, 2009). The fluidity and dynamism of career is only compounded by the immigration and re-training experience. Qualitative methods embrace such complexity, regard research participants as subjects rather than objects of study (Outhwaite, 1986), and work toward a goal of mutual understanding of experience rather than experience that is measured and controlled only by the researcher (Outhwaite, 1987).

Qualitative methods permit the researcher to delve into the subjective world of the participant and thus grants access to the complex contextual information that influence the participant’s experience, perception, and acts of meaning-making. This in-depth and intimate level of analysis avoids simplifying elements of a participant’s story (Slife, Yanchar, & Reber, 2005). Qualitative methods guide the researcher in analyzing and integrating content, context, and process into a fuller understanding of how people perceive the world. Moreover, qualitative methods provide access to first-person narratives. For example, narrative inquiry (Chen, 2006;
Cochran, 1990) encourages participants to openly express and give life to their unique life narrative—in the present study, it encouraged the sharing of in-depth, candid, and personal narratives of career and re-training experiences. Open-endedness and an informal, dynamic interviewing procedure permitted the addition of crucial contextual information to existing interview questions.

The emphasis on meaning in qualitative research—how meaning for individuals is contextualized within many layers of experience and how meaning within a research question cannot be isolated from the story in which it arises—is particularly suited for research into existential frameworks. Indeed, existential questions are a driving fuel of both conscious and unconscious attempts at meaning-making. The search for meaning is an integral part of confrontation and interaction with the givens of existence: death, freedom, isolation, and meaningless (Yalom, 1980). Qualitative research works toward situating and understanding meaning within infinite parameters. This approach can thus not only accommodate existential inquiry but also seems to share a basic philosophy around the centrality of meaning to people’s lives and experiences, and the complexity and embeddedness of meaning-making within lives and experiences.

Qualitative research is a broad framework that comprises an array of methods. The following section will outline the grounded theory approach, one of the major research methods under the larger umbrella of qualitative research design.

**Grounded Theory Approach**

The present study uses the grounded theory approach, which is one of the major branches of qualitative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory approach, first
developed by Glaser and Strauss, aims to derive theory from data within social research (1967). It was developed as a method to explore the contextual factors that influence individuals’ lives (Crooks, 2001) and to allow for the “discovery of theory” from data itself instead of imposing preconceived hypotheses and theories onto data. Grounded theory makes use of semi-structured phenomenological interviews in order to explore meaning beyond conjecture and preconception with the goal of discovering the underlying processes behind any given phenomenon (Glaser, 1978). Moreover, grounded theory is recommended, over other methods such as phenomenology for example, when the researcher is investigating social problems or situations within which and towards which people must adapt (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and when the researcher’s goal is to move beyond a description of the process to uncover an understanding of the process by which this occurs (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As the re-training experience of immigrants is a new field of research and is an incredibly complex social experience for the individuals involved, a grounded theory approach was warranted in order to investigate, without assumptions, the participants’ stories and subjective existential understanding of their immigration and re-training experiences.

The original grounded theory approach was defined by strict procedural guidelines in terms of analysis stemming from its positivistic assumptions (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). However, various models of grounded theory have evolved over the years and recently, a new cohort of researchers have re-conceptualized grounded theory around a constructivist paradigm which allows for more contemporary methodological approaches (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). Constructivism maintains that all data are the result of interaction between individual perspective, contexts, and situations (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Modern
approaches to grounded theory thus recognize the role of both researcher and the researched in data analysis and allow for multiple possible explanations for what emerges from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach allows the researcher’s priority, in terms of the present study an existential perspective, to anchor the exploration of the phenomena being studied. The researcher approaches the data, analysis, and themes as generated from an interactive and collective experience between the researcher and the researched (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). This approaches recognizes that interpretations are derived through the lens of the researcher and that generated theory, “depends on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130).

Finally, modern approaches to grounded theory are inherently flexible and interactive and interpretations are continually re-created through multiple levels of analysis (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). This multi-leveled, dynamic form of analysis allows themes to emerge along with an understanding of individual participants reactions to their experiences and circumstances (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This former understanding enables the researcher to group participant narratives into categories and to ascertain the existence of any prominent themes within and across categories. In the present study, this approach will permit the researcher to explore any relationships between emergent existential themes and immigration, career development and re-training experiences of individual participants.

Procedure

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through advertisements placed on subway trains in the Toronto, Ontario subway system as well as online advertising sites including Craigslist
Toronto and Kijiji Toronto. Word of mouth recruiting was also encouraged and interviewers asked participants to share details of the study with eligible friends, family, and colleagues. The advertisement poster (See Appendix A) detailed the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria and requirements, and contact information. The posters ran in the subway trains from July through September 2011 and the online advertisements were added to the recruitment strategy in August 2011 outlining the same information.

Potential participants responded to advertisements by e-mailing the research e-mail address or by calling the research study voicemail box. They were asked to leave a brief message, a phone number, and the best time to reach them. The individual members of the research team were each assigned a day of the week to check the e-mail and voicemail and to respond to participants. Potential participants were screened using an official telephone script (See Appendix B) which introduced the study, went through the criteria, and reviewed the interview process and what to expect as part of participating in the study (benefits, risks, etc.). Information from all potential participants was recorded in a secure spreadsheet and individual researchers then contacted eligible participants to book research interviews.

Selection Criteria

The targeted sample for this study was new professional immigrants who underwent re-training in Canada. Participants had to have immigrated to Canada between January 1, 1999 and December 30, 2006. Participants who first came to Canada on an Immigrant Student Visa and who then immigrated were excluded from the study. Professional immigrants were defined as those who had a university degree that was earned outside of Canada and who had worked full-time in a professional occupation for a minimum of three years before coming to Canada.
Participants had to have completed re-training in Canada, defined broadly as a university, college or professionally certified degree, diploma, certificate, or other accreditation procedure. Proof of re-training was required. Moreover, participants had to be at least 25 years of age or older and have held employment for a minimum of one year after completing their Canadian re-training.

Selection criteria were determined by discussion and consensus in meetings with the research team. Criteria were selected to recruit participants who came to Canada relatively recently and who could remember and reflect on their re-training and career development experience. Moreover, the aim was to recruit participants who both re-trained in their original profession and those who re-trained, by choice or circumstance, in an alternative career. Re-training was defined broadly in order to capture the many re-training experiences of new professional immigrants.

Research Interviews / Data Collection

The 10 research interviews included in this study were conducted between July and September 2011. As mentioned above, eligible participants were contacted to arrange an interview date and time. All interviews took place in comfortable and bright rooms in the OISE Counselling and Psychoeducational Clinic and lasted between one and two hours. Participants were told to block off two full hours. Participants were financially compensated $35 for their participation. Participants were asked to bring proof of their re-training (in the form of transcripts, diplomas, letter from the training institute, etc.), which were reviewed prior to commencing the interview. Interviews began with the researcher reviewing the process, answering any questions, and obtaining informed consent from participants, as per the official research ethics protocol. All interviews were audio-taped with consent of participants. Audio-
tapes were then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber hired for this research project. Identification numbers were assigned for each participant to maintain confidentiality and tapes, transcripts, and notes were coded as per the identification number for identification purposes.

Research interviews began with simple demographic questions and then proceeded to the semi-structured interview questions. There were 76 questions in total spanning the participant’s experience before coming to Canada, initial experience in Canada after immigration, vocational adjustment and transition in Canada, re-training experience in Canada, vocational development in Canada post-re-training, and current vocational and career experience and future plans and goals (See Appendix C). Questions were purposively open-ended to allow participants to expand on and share their own personal stories. Questions were designed to probe for the general career development, transition, and re-training experience of participants as part of the larger CRC project aiming to create a more comprehensive picture of the immigrant career re-training experience. Additional questions were designed specifically to elicit reflection on existential themes, as per the focus of this sub-study. Examples of such questions include, “How central was your career to your sense of self?”; “Did you find your career meaningful or fulfilling?”; “Did you find the re-training process meaningful?”; “Did your sense of career identity evolve during your re-training experience?”; “How much control (or lack of control) did you feel you had in terms of your re-training experience (e.g. choice of institute, choice of program, voluntary re-training vs. forced re-training)” ; “What is your understanding of why it became necessary for you to pursue re-training in Canada?”; “How did you feel about having to take this re-training?” These questions, along with participants’ spontaneous elaboration on experiences, provided a wealth of data from which the present study was able to examine existential concepts.
After the interviews were completed, the majority of participants mentioned how much they enjoyed the interview and that they were grateful for the opportunity to share their stories. They mentioned how important the research was to all immigrants and were hopeful that their stories would benefit new immigrants coming to Canada. Many participants spontaneously shared suggestions for making the immigration and career transition process easier, more efficient, and less alienating and felt empowered knowing that the researcher had heard their suggestions. The researcher was deeply touched at the openness, candidness, and warmth exhibited by the participants and felt privileged to be the holders of their stories.

**Data Analysis**

The initial phase of analysis involved a preliminary in-depth reading of each interview transcript. This was done to re-familiarize the researcher with the participant narratives and to begin the delicate process of researcher reflection regarding the stories within. During this phase, the researcher made notes regarding her thoughts and impressions in the form of annotations. In the second phase of analysis, transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 8, a specialized qualitative research software program. Each transcript was then read line-by-line and emergent provisional themes were analyzed and coded using the software features. This initial coding provided a preliminary number of codes and themes, which anchored subsequent analyses. In the final stages of analysis, each transcript was reviewed and coded a second and then a third time. Throughout the analysis, coding was guided by Yalom’s four existential concerns, namely, death, freedom, isolation, and meaningfulness (1980). Highlighting these existential themes and concepts in relation to participants’ immigration and re-training experiences was prioritized. Once saturation was achieved, central themes and subcategories emerged.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS: PARTICIPANTS

Interviews of 10 new professional immigrants to Canada were conducted and comprised the data for this study. These interviews provide a rich narrative from which to explore each individual’s immigration and career transition experience including their re-training experience. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 55 with a mean age of 43 at the time of interview (31, 35, 37, 39, 43 (2), 47, 49, 52, 55). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 46 with a mean age of 35 at the time of immigration to Canada (22, 30 (2), 31, 33, 37, 38, 39, 45, 46). There were six males and four females. Two participants emigrated from South Eastern Europe (Albania, Turkey), one from Africa (Uganda), two from South America (Colombia, Brazil), two from the Middle East, (Pakistan, Dubai) and three from Asia (China). Four participants had Master’s level degrees from their home countries and six participants had undergraduate degrees. Six participants were married upon immigration, one of whom got divorced after immigration but who has since re-married. Four participants had children upon immigration and three participants had children once in Canada. The following section provides a brief description that outlines the basic building blocks of each participant’s experience including their education and career development prior to immigration, reasons for immigration, initial career experiences post-immigration, re-training pursued, and current state of employment.

Participant Summaries

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a 55-year old male who emigrated from Colombia in 2001 with his wife and three children. His children were between the ages 9 and 17 when they immigrated to
Canada. He has a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering and owned his own engineering company in Colombia. P2 described being very satisfied with his career in Colombia and found his work important, challenging, and fulfilling. P1 decided to immigrate to Canada to escape the violence in Colombia and to provide his children with more opportunities in life. While career and work were important, family was of higher priority. Although P1 thought his limited English might make his initial job search more difficult, he didn’t expect to have to pursue re-training in order to find a good job. Upon immigration however, P1 struggled to find engineering jobs in Canada and reported working several survival jobs to get by. Eventually, P1 decided to pursue a design software certificate to aid in his search for a job more related to his previous career as an engineer. P1 now works as a Technical Designer. He is not satisfied with his career but is glad to be able to provide for his family.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 (P2) is a 37-year old single male who emigrated from China in 2004. He holds a Bachelor of Engineering in computer science and worked for several years in the banking industry. P2 decided to immigrate to Canada to gain experience and knowledge in his field in a developed country. P2’s initial job search in Canada was very difficult and he decided to pursue a master’s degree in his field after about one year. He had anticipated having to re-train after having heard stories from classmates who came to Canada earlier and he looked forward to furthering his education. P2 cited difficulty with English and communication as a central barrier to his experience in Canada. P2 now works as a computer programmer and one day hopes to break into the consulting business.
Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is a 47-year old female who emigrated from Albania in 2001 accompanied by her husband and two children. Her children were both under the age of 13 when they immigrated. P3 has a Master of Arts degree in business from Albania and had developed a satisfying and prestigious career combining teaching, editing, and consulting in the energy industry prior to immigration. The decision to immigrate to Canada was a compromise for P3—she didn’t want to give up her career and personal success in Albania but her husband felt that Canada would be safer and offer more benefits for their children. P3 did not anticipate having to re-train in Canada and felt confident that the transition period would be quick. Family became a priority for P3 upon immigration and initially, she took a job that allowed her spend more time with her children as they adjusted. A few years later, P3 decided to pursue a Master of Business Administration in Ontario. P3 found the job search to be frustrating and struggled to adjust to the different academic and professional culture in Canada. P3 now works part-time as a college instructor and continues to strive for additional career growth.

Participant 4

Participant 4 (P4) is a 43-year old male who emigrated from Brazil in 2006 along with his fiancée. P4 has a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering and worked as a civil engineer for many years in Brazil. Indeed, looking back, P4 reflects that career-wise, it likely would have been a better choice to remain in Brazil as there are many jobs for civil engineers in the country’s booming economy. P4 always dreamed of immigrating to Canada. He felt it would offer a higher quality of life and also wanted to escape the violence in Brazil. P4 anticipated that once he improved his English that it would be fairly easy to get a good job. However, P4 job’s search
was significantly more difficult then expected and he has worked various survival jobs since immigrating while also taking several kinds of courses and re-training—for example, in construction and building codes. P4 hopes to eventually find a career in one of several avenues, possibly engineering, that will offer security and stability in Canada.

**Participant 5**

Participant 5 (P5) is a 52-year old female who emigrated from Uganda in 2005 along with her husband and four children. Her children were between the ages of 10 and 19 upon immigration. P5 holds a Master of Education from Uganda and worked for many years as high school teacher and then as a professor in an institute for teacher training. P5’s decision to immigrate was fuelled by her family’s desire to provide access to more stable and better quality higher education for their children. Additionally, P5 wanted to pursue doctoral training. P5 enrolled in an early childhood education certificate program in Canada and then proceeded to work in a day care centre. She also enrolled in a PhD program in Fine Arts that she has pursued alongside working full-time for the past three years. P5 identifies strongly with her role as an educator and researcher and hopes to continue doing research and publishing her findings. She wishes to return to Uganda for several years to share the knowledge she has acquired in Canada with her homeland.

**Participant 6**

Participant 6 (P6) is a 43-year old male who emigrated from Pakistan in 2001. P6 came to Canada first and then his wife and young son joined him some months later. P6 had a law degree from Pakistan and had worked several years in his father’s company before working as a lawyer as well. P6 decided to immigrate to Canada to provide his son with opportunities, but also
because he wanted to achieve a similar level of “status” of his brothers, all of who were working abroad. He was motivated by a drive to prove himself. The initial immigration transition was difficult for P6 but things improved once he enrolled in a university to take 10 courses the government advised him were needed for equivalency here in Canada. P6 now works as a lawyer in Toronto and is very satisfied with his career. He is motivated to achieve even greater levels of professional success.

**Participant 7**

Participant 7 (P7) is a 49-year old female who emigrated from China in 2001 with her husband and daughter. Her daughter was under five years of age when they immigrated. P7 has a Bachelor of Science in material science and engineering from China and worked as an engineer in the field of industrial design for 17 years. P7 and her husband decided to immigrate to Canada in order to offer their daughter better education. P7 enrolled in a career planning course here in Canada and then completed additional re-training through a co-op program that allowed her to gain Canadian experience. P7 cited difficulty communicating in Canada as a primary barrier and that she still struggles with English and works to learn and improve. She is now working in research and development for a large office furniture company and anticipates completing some additional re-training to update her technical software skills.

**Participant 8**

Participant 8 (P8) is a 39-year old woman who emigrated from China in 2002. She came to Canada along with her husband at the time, who had previously been in Canada for about a year and who returned and convinced her to join him. They are now divorced and P8 is remarried to a Canadian man and they have a young daughter. P8 has a Bachelor of Arts from China and
worked for three years in a high-level management position for a logistics company prior to immigrating. She was extremely satisfied with her career and felt a strong sense of achievement in her work and position. After struggling for a few months finding work in Canada, P8 returned to China, and then returned to Canada to pursue a Bachelor of Commerce and her Chartered Management Accountant (CMA) designation. She now works in accounting for the government but finds that her current job does not compare with her career back in China. She strives for additional professional challenges and success here in Canada.

**Participant 9**

Participant 9 (P9) is a 35-year old male who emigrated from Turkey in 2006. He was a trained civil engineer and also completed a Master of Business Administration in the United States. P9 had worked in various positions before immigrating to Canada. Just prior to immigration, he was a project manager for the European Union in Turkey. Several months after immigration, P9 found a business management position in the health care industry. P9 has since pursued several additional designations including Project Management Professional (PMP) and Certified Health Executive (CHE). He viewed these designations as necessary for further professional growth in Canada. P9 looks forward to growing his career in Canada and hopes to one day be an executive in health care or perhaps a consultant.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 (P10) is a 31-year old man who emigrated from Dubai in 2002. P10 immigrated under his father’s immigration application along with his mother and a younger brother. P10 had a Master of Business Administration in banking and finance from Dubai. He had worked for 3.5 years in a bank prior to immigration. P10 anticipated an easy transition to
Canada and expected to be working in a bank, at least as a customer service agent, almost immediately. His expectations were not met and he was unable to find a position in the industry—to survive, he began working at a convenience store. P10 then decided to pursue re-training and completed courses at an Ontario University to complete a Bachelor of Commerce (some of his training in Dubai was recognized and credited to his BComm degree). After graduating, P10 found a job in financial services within months and has continued to grow professionally since then. He hopes to become a manager in the industry within the next five years.
Chapter V

FINDINGS: EMERGENT THEMES

The present chapter reviews emergent themes and findings. Themes are grouped by main existential concern following Yalom’s (1980) conceptualizations of death, isolation, freedom, and meaning. It should be noted that within the emergent theme of meaning, it became apparent that there were two distinct groupings of codes and that these groupings corresponded to specific individuals. After a thorough reading of the transcripts and the codes within this theme, the researcher distinguished between participants in terms of satisfaction with their career development. Six participants were defined as being very satisfied with their career development in Canada, and four participants were defined as being less satisfied with their career development. Findings within this theme are thus divided by participant category. Finally, no coherent themes emerged within the existential concern of isolation.

Death

Threat to Pre-Immigration Identity

Seven participants described some level of loss of their previous identity upon immigration. This loss was described as a change in social status, a lack of recognition of previous education and experience, and a loss of confidence or faith in one’s abilities. From an existential perspective, these feelings reflect a kind of death or existential loss. It would seem that this loss is an initial hurdle after immigration, as individuals inevitably compare their new life to the life they left behind.
P6 reflected on his life prior to immigration:

I thought to myself, “How am I going to do two jobs at the same time? Oh, my god. I was living such a luxurious life in Pakistan. Now what’s going to happen to me?”...I was actually going amongst the Muslim community, just getting to hear about more despair and more despair and crashes and more bad life of Pakistani foreigners coming to Canada. Sometimes I would actually get underneath my pillow and cry so nobody would hear me. Loudly (P6).

On reflecting on her life prior to immigration, P8 shared:

I don’t want to recall those days, it was just excellent. I had all the respect, full authority, and I’m a person that really needs a sense of achievement. Financial is one issue, but achievement is the one I really want to get. I was fully satisfied and I just felt great that I got everything established. And suddenly, [after immigration] I was crazy (P8).

She continued to reflect on her loss of status and the difficulty this created:

I was very frustrated and depressed, to be honest, because suddenly [I went] from a very high rank of social status to an extremely low social status. We were living in an apartment and our friends came from the U.S., looked at our apartment and they couldn’t believe we stayed there.

Several participants bemoaned the lack of recognition once in Canada. It seemed as though their identities prior to immigration were non-existent. P8 shared, “I felt my life, my past life was totally wasted, including my education because they didn’t work here at all. You have to start from scratch. What you have done means zero, nothing.” P1 expressed similar frustration, “Your factor from Colombia doesn’t count here, your bank account doesn’t count here, your work history doesn’t count here, your student record doesn’t count…” P4 echoed these sentiments:

You have to start like a baby. You have to get your driver’s license again. Even if you have more than 20 years of experience, you have to start like a teenager in terms of insurance, everything. You have to start everything again; it’s very difficult (P4).

P10, a banking professional from Dubai, shared, “Coming to Canada, I realized the fact that our degrees, our experience, anything outside of Canada, is of value zero. The expertise and
competencies that we bring in from our countries were not recognized at all.” P10 worked in a convenience store for several years after immigration due to difficulty in finding employment in the banking industry. He describes the struggle of this loss:

Although I was working, making money, it was not in my profession at all. I was not growing myself as a professional. I was killing the confidence I had. I was killing myself, in all terminologies, because I was not able to get into the market and that led me to believe “you know what, maybe the people here appraised me and I’m really not worth much” (P10).

P5 reflected on the body’s connection to place and country and the sense of not being fully alive in Canada:

Whether I made the right decision was key in those first months that I spent here. I didn’t feel my body here. Even up to this moment, sometimes I feel my soul is there, although my body is physically here (P5).

She then shared her struggle after immigration in adjusting to her new life in Canada where she wasn’t yet working and how she reflected on what would be her new existence and reality:

I was so much used to going to work, and now here, I was [waking up everyday] and there was no work. I said, “am I coming to reality with life and what it should be, or should I think of maybe looking for some kind of training which is related to what I was doing, so that I can earn money instead of relying on my brother and sisters?” (P5).

P3, an energy consultant and writer in Albania enrolled in a co-op program for immigrant business professionals, and was told by the teacher to “tone down your expectations and be grateful for anything that’s given to you because in Canada, they’re looking for experience and you don’t have experience and no one cares about your education.” P3 was shocked by this advice but she took it to heart and put her ideas for a professional career out of mind. She decided instead to take a position with her husband as property managers. She reflected on the new career, “I thought that wasn’t something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It just took away the image I had for myself.” She later continued:
My sense of identity was wrapped into my professional life. I’m learning to lessen the importance of it. If I kept it the same way, I probably would have committed suicide or be locked in an institution, so I learned to lessen the importance of that (P3).

**Awareness of Mortality**

Six participants referenced, in their own words, an awareness of their own mortality and of the passing of time as prompted by immigration and re-training. Immigration can be considered in some ways, as “time lost.” There was a sense among participants of “lost time”, having to “make up for lost time,” or “not having enough time.” This manner of thinking, existentially speaking, stems from the knowledge that we do not have infinite amounts of time to be alive.

P1, an engineer by training and the oldest participant, spoke of possibly pursuing additional re-training:

Maybe to find a different job, a job more related to the things I used to do before. But to find that job is not easy. It takes a lot of time and effort, and maybe I am getting too old to go through that (P1).

P4, also an engineer by training, has tried several careers since in Canada, but reflected:

I think I can’t try different plans, I can’t start forever because I’m 43 and should be there very fast, quickly…This country is totally beautiful, but I can’t just live with nature. I have to pay my bills. This is another point. You have to find a good job. You can’t stay earning as a survivor job for the rest of you life (P4).

P8 described her frustration with having to do re-training in terms of time lost:

I had to waste another 4 years to do training when I already had tons of experience. I even had international experience. And I already had a university degree; however when I came here, it was useless. I had to restart the training. I basically went back to my highschool stage…but you don’t have the advantage of your age because you already passed that stage. I always think, “if I’m in China, I don’t need to do anything, I don’t need to repeat anything, and today I would be absolutely at a very high position. I don’t need to start from scratch” (P8).
P8 then advised to new immigrants, “If you want to do something, when you come here, do it earlier. You can catch the time.” P2 also spoke of catching time, “If I spend 2 years in school than usually I will be less, like 2 years experience than other people. But I think I can catch up that [time].”

P3 spoke of needing to remove “age” from the equation in evaluating one’s success after immigration:

Forget what position you were holding back home or forgetting what age you’re at because one of the problems I had was, I was thinking, “I don’t want to have a receptionist’s position at the age of 41. So that became a limited belief for my progress because if I said, “Well, forget about the age; that your new life is here. Take the age part away and say, “Okay, how do you grow here and talk more with people and be open to see the reality as it is…(P3).

P10 had a similar reflection:

If I minus out the number of years I’ve spent recreating myself, I’m right on my plan because I was expecting myself to be touching the manager’s position within a 5 years span and 5 years it is, and I’m pretty much there (P10).

Of the time P10 spent before re-training he reflected on regrets:

The time I spent between [the year I came here and the year] I made the decision to retrain myself, I wasted that time. I go back in time, think and think again, “Is there anything I added into myself during that time?” I still come back to zero…and that is the only time in my life I can think of which I have wasted. I really wasted that, thrown away. Those number of days and time I can never get back (P10).

When one thinks of death, one often thinks of time. For example, the thought of death can inspire such questions as: “How much time do I have left?” “When will I die?” “Will I have time to accomplish what I want to accomplish?” An awareness of time and of what must come at the end of one’s time (awareness of mortality) is a powerful and daunting confrontation with the existential concern of death. For many participants in this study, the process of
immigration and re-training resulted in a personal reflection on time and an acute awareness of how immigration “paused” or “slowed” their own life timeline in terms of career development.

**Freedom**

**Responsibility in the Face of Existential Anxiety**

Three participants described feelings of responsibility for growth or beliefs of committed action towards personal development in the face of existential anxiety. This existential anxiety, the deep questioning of self and life and choices, seemed to prompt, in some participants, a renewed commitment to take responsibility for their life (to the greatest extent possible within their particular circumstances). To take this responsibility is to make use of one’s freedom. For example, P6 reflected on the initial despair and anxiety that preceded a renewed energy to persevere:

> And eventually, after shedding tears, after going through the bad phase of culture shock and all those things, I came to realize, “Hey, listen. I’m having too much pity on myself. I’m considering myself as somebody always on the losing end. So what should I do? Should I continue to pity myself, or should I look at my son and my wife who are going to follow me in a month. And eventually it’s not going to be summer; it’s going to be winter and I’m going to have to keep them somewhere…So, stop it; get out and do something” (P6).

He later continued:

> The only thing that made other things look difficult [were] the fears inside me. As soon as I got over those fears, as soon as my brothers told me, “Listen, either establish yourself as a loser, or prove yourself to your own satisfaction, that yes, you can do it,” there was nothing to be afraid of. I just went for everything. I just pounded into it and I got it (P6).

P6 described this inner strength as the force behind his taking initiative with regards to his career development. For example, when he found out that he needed a reference letter from a real lawyer to be accepted to a law school to complete his equivalency courses, he sought out a lawyer and begged him to hire him. No positions were available so P6 offered to volunteer—he
was willing to do anything to have a real reference letter. Once accepted into law school, he volunteered at a firm when no one would hire him and through his determination and hard work, showed his boss that he was more useful than the hired students—his boss ended up giving him the most difficult briefs to complete. When speaking of these steps, he often referred to an inner drive:

> I also wanted to satisfy myself that yes, I’ve got my own luck which if I use is actually going to convince the world and me. I was like a loser in Pakistan. My family members, when they compared me with my brothers, all of them were abroad, and they thought I was loser. I wanted to get out of that vicious circle. And I wanted to prove to myself—not to anybody else… It was just the anger in me, the desire to be what I was. I was not able to swallow the fact that I am putting shoes on peoples’ feet. I wanted to be a barrister, which I am now (P6).

P8 spoke of how her confidence diminished after trying to find work in Canada: “Well, my confidence dropped to zero. I felt everywhere I was just not right. I had no confidence at all. From I was so confident to having no confidence at all. I remember those days.” Later she reflected on how despite the initial difficulty succeeding and finding work, she became determined to persevere:

> I was frustrated. Obviously I was stressed. I have to mention my mother here because she was the one encouraging me. She was always saying, “You try it, if you don’t like it, you can always come back. The door is always open for you.” But my personality is very strong, I don’t want her to think that I just failed. I still want to be successful. That’s my motivation. I just [knew that] someday I would finish my study and I would be okay. I don’t want to be a loser and say, “I couldn’t do it” (P8).

Like P6, P8 then spoke similarly about an internal motivation and drive, which helped her overcome the challenges of re-training:

> First thing is my motivation. As I said, I’m a pretty stubborn and pretty strong-willed person. I’m trained that way, based on my position and my past experience. I just feel I’m very disciplined and self-motivated as a person. If I want to reach that goal, I try every way to reach it. Yes, I do have ups and downs as well, I’m not saying that I always think that way. When I want to quit, I always ask myself what the pros and cons of quitting are,
and if what I have done is going to be totally wasted. But if I keep doing it, I ask myself, “well, 20 credits. I have done 2, I have 18 left. If I do 10, I have 10 left.” It’s not going to be more, it’s always going to be less and less (P8).

P10 also described his initial despair and then his renewed drive to succeed in his new life. His father had worked in Dubai for many years, but was not treated well in retirement as he was not a citizen. P10’s resolve to succeed strengthened when contemplating the experience of his father:

Because when I was sweeping the floors, I was pretty much weeping to myself, crying, “Why did I make a decision to come to Canada? Why did I screw up myself? My career was right up front, it was inclining.” But then I used to tell myself “You know what, this is probably the place. Look at your father. He was kicked right out after 35 years. What if you are? Do you want to be kicked out?” And then I used to say, “I don’t want to be kicked out, I want to work here, I will survive here, it’s just a matter of time, it’s just a matter of time” (P10).

He later elaborated on renewed determination to remain and succeed in Canada even amidst family support for returning to Dubai:

My parents went back, and my mother used to call me and she used to say, “Why don’t you just come back? We’ll have a lot of fun here, we’ll be together as a family, we’ll take care of each other, why not just come back?”...If I come back, I’ve lost the battle. And I don’t want to be a loser in my life. If I had made a decision to go back to Dubai, I would never be able to convince myself that I’m a winner. I’m not a loser. I [would] always have this thing within myself that, “You know what? You lost the battle. You ran away from the battle. You couldn’t fight it out. You are not worth as much as you are called for. Your people pay you because you get work done, not because you are worth that much.” And that is not something I ever wanted to feel was in myself. I knew I could battle it out; I knew it was just a matter of time (P10).

P10 later reflected on his inner drive to prove himself, “I want to show this place, and this environment, [that] if given the opportunity, I can break through anything, and I have proved it myself.” This drive was also reflected in his comments about the need for continual growth:

The searching never ends for the person who wants to keep on growing. The searching ends for a person who feels like, “Okay, I have reached the level I wanted to reach. I want to probably stay here for 5 years.” I never have that approach. I have this approach:
if I am growing in my current role, I don’t mind staying here longer. If I’m not growing, I’m going (P10).

These participants experienced intense existential anxiety after immigration and the initial difficulty with career development and re-training. They found themselves unsure of their abilities and were questioning their decisions. In the face of this struggle, however, each of them eventually found a renewed sense of self, energy, drive, and responsibility that was stronger than before. In this sense, they were able to harness their existential anxiety around their situation and take responsibility to use their freedom for positive and determined growth.

**General Responsibility**

When asked to reflect on their re-training experience in general and on advice they would give to new immigrants, five participants spoke of the need to take responsibility for growth, to keep learning and developing. From an existential perspective, this is the responsibility we all have to exercise our freedom to create meaning, taking responsibility for making choices, and committing to meaningful action for ourselves. P9 shared:

I think the main lesson is, unless you do something, you won’t achieve anywhere. You have to take control of your life. You cannot expect anyone to come and knock on your door and say, “Here you go. This is a new job for you. This is the salary we will give you. You can buy this car and whatever.” That doesn’t happen. But it doesn’t matter if you’re an immigrant or not; it’s the same thing. If I were living in Turkey, no one’s going to come knock on my door and say, “Here you go. Here’s a job for you.” You have to actually show something, and you have to prove yourself that you can do something for these people so they will give you money. That’s the biggest thing I learned: regardless of where you live, you have to do something to get somewhere (P9).

P5 echoed this sentiment:

Everything depends on you. The decisions you make, how you carry out those decisions, and what you eventually become, are very important. For instance, for me, I said “I’m a teacher by profession. Let me go into early childhood education and see how it works.” When I qualified, I started working as expected. So, those actions are on me. I’m the one to…Nobody else should tell me what to do, because I know. I know what I’m supposed
to do. So, I’m responsible for my actions and I should ensure that whatever I’ve been trained to do, is what I do. I take full responsibility for my actions (P5).

Both P9 and P5 thus described the need to take control of your life and to take responsibility for accomplishing things and for your own actions.

P4 advised:

You have to study, you have to improve everything. If you stop your career, it will be good for you—you’ll have time to improve, to get more knowledge. You have to update every time. Not like: I have my degree, am I going to stay like this? No more. You have every time to update (P4).

P7 reflected:

I think the most helpful is your personal motivation, your personal serious commitment. I did the research and I made a serious commitment, and I managed to reach my goal. It’s not an easy process, for sure, but your motivational commitment; it’s a long term commitment. It’s absolutely not an easy process. However, if you commit, you will reach the goal, I feel (P7).

P8 also spoke about the need for a commitment:

Make a commitment. I know it’s so easy to say, it’s so hard to do. I went through the process. However, you always need to find a way to motivate yourself in order to reach your goal. That’s the most important. And do believe that someday you will reach the goal. Today, when I think about it, I was struggling with immigration. Today, I have a wonderful family, I have so cute and lovely a daughter, a wonderful husband...A much higher standard of life than when I first came here. But I did go through the difficult process. I didn’t get as much luck as anyone else. I just feel that I, step by step, I didn’t jump anywhere, I wasn’t that lucky, I did it step by step to become who I am today (P8).

These participants all shared the sentiment that taking responsibility was the single most important thing one could do post-immigration towards furthering career development. They acknowledged that, despite the barriers they faced, they had the freedom to make change and to take action.
Re-training as a Tool Toward Increasing Freedom

Many participants reflected on the value of re-training in terms of increasing freedom. Re-training was seen as key or as a tool towards greater development, employability, and career success. Once one had the key in hand, greater opportunities, choice, and ability to exercise freedom would result. For example, P9 shared, “As soon as I started my new job I said, “If I want to stay in the country, I have to have something from Canada written on my resume.” P8 agreed about the importance of Canadian re-training: “Oh that’s 100% how I feel. I don’t get a degree here, I won’t get employed here, or I’ll just have to get a labour job, and probably earn $10 minimum wage.” When speaking of enrolling in a Canadian Master’s degree, P3 shared that “I was hoping that getting a job was going to be automatic, so I was hoping it would be my trampoline to the professional field.” P10 shared his thoughts on the importance of his re-training in this way: “I cannot stress the level of importance. It was the key, unlocking the door. I was in a room by myself, I could not open the door until I had the key, and the key is your Canadian designation.” P5 shared a similar sentiment, “It’s important we retrain because our standards and our situation in the countries that we come from are very different from what Canadians have. So in order to be at par, or at the same table with them, retraining is key.”

Participants also spoke of the value of re-training in terms of new skills, new approaches to learning, and new understanding of people. In this sense, re-training provided additional tools to facilitate the exercise of one’s freedom toward meaningful goals. P9 shared, “I enjoyed the fact [that] I’m learning something new, I’m working with the teams, I’m learning not only networking but I’m learning something new and I’m actually building up something for my career.” P8 spoke of her Canadian university training as teaching her how to approach matters:
I feel university really prepares you. Not for a job, but they do prepare your career because they teach you how to think things through, how to deal with things…They teach you how to approach a thing. That’s the value there (P8).

She later commented on social and cultural value of her retraining as well:

Through this few years training, you start to know the culture. Basically school is a small society. You start to learn the different culture, interacting with your professor, students, all those things (P8).

P7 had a similar reflection:

I would say I’m more focused on how to learn because here, everything is new. The language is different, so you have to be aware of everything to learn. It’s a different culture, different work style, different people (P7).

P2 spoke of learning practical technical skills in his computer programming degree in Canada as well as less tangible things like time-management and new ways to interact with Canadian people. In reflecting on all this he shared, “Whatever I learned from retraining, it’s like a shadow following me. These skills will be always in mind.”

**Meaning**

Within the emergent theme of meaning, it became apparent that there were two distinct groupings of codes and that these groupings corresponded to specific individuals. After a thorough reading of the transcripts and the codes within this theme, the researcher distinguished between participants in terms of satisfaction with their career development. Six participants were defined as being very satisfied with their career development in Canada, and four participants were defined as being less satisfied with their career development. The narratives of those in the very satisfied category were generally positively reflective and demonstrated a sense of pride and meaning in their immigrant and re-training experience. The narratives of those in the less
satisfied category demonstrated greater ambivalence and resignation towards re-training and career development and greater negotiation for meaning within the experience.

**Very Satisfied Individuals**

**Deeper meaning.** Those participants identified as being very satisfied with their career development in Canada seemed to have had experienced a deeper meaning in immigration and re-training. For example, when asked to reflect on the meaning of their re-training experiences, these participants described deep shifts in their perceptions of themselves. Participants spoke of meaning in terms of increased confidence, shifts in self-identity and other personal growth.

P6 reflected how on the need to have pursued re-training offered more personal growth and development that had he been able to walk right in and begin working:

It made me more of a brave person, made me more of a man. I came to learn what problem-solving skills are, like how I should face my own problems as opposed to just hiding under a pillow and crying. If I hadn’t gone through the re-training process and somebody just hired me as a lawyer and the Bar would have accepted me, “Oh, yeah, you’re fantastic. Welcome to Canada. We were actually waiting for you. This is a red carpet. Walk over it, you can start practicing in the [Supreme] Court,” I would be standing like a goof there. It gave me a lot. It gave me courage to actually lock my eyes with others and tell them, “Dude, I’m no less than you are” (P6).

When asked to reflect on his career now, he responded, “I LOVE my work…Everything revolves around it…I think I’m utilizing all the skills I had there and the additional skills that I acquired here.” He later continued, “I’m the same person that was a massive loser back home, where I was born and raised, and look at me in Canada. Like a shooting star.”

P9 described a strengthened sense of belief in himself as a result of having gone through the immigration and re-training process:
One thing I learned... It doesn’t matter if I have a family or not, I can survive. That’s a survival thing. I don’t need any support from my family or loved one or whatever. I can go somewhere and I’ll be okay... I think I can survive wherever I go (P9).

P7 described her growth in the face of re-training as increased self-confidence. Re-training was challenging for her at the beginning and her hard work and eventual success were extremely validating:

Initially, I was not confident, because I didn’t know how to do it. Given the time, given your own efforts you have made, you start to gradually get used to the system. Especially when you start to do very well and get more confidence back. As I said, as soon as I started, I was excited, now I see it as just the way it is. You get more confidence, and you know lots of things you didn’t know, and that’s the best part (P7).

P2 shared a similar reflection, if more succinct, on how re-training increased his confidence to learn new things; in teaching his brain to think in new ways and to adapt, he realized that “It’s never too late for me to learn, and I found out that I can learn more than I thought.”

P5 spoke of her re-training experience, not only in terms increasing her self-confidence or belief in herself, but in terms of a greater ability to reflect on herself, others, and the world in a deeper way:

Maybe believing in myself now is really very important because I know I know so much and I can do so much. So, it’s just waiting for an opportunity where I can showcase it... I no longer feel... You know, before, there was that fear that because I’m a in minority, therefore people will say, “I don’t think she knows much.” I had that, but now I don’t... It’s me, you take it or leave it. ... Now I’m trying to understand people more than I [ever did] before, and I think that is a very important lesson in life. Especially given my experience and my age. I’m looking at things more deeply than I used to. I think this retraining has given me a lot of... not confidence, what can I call it? To be able to reflect on. It has given me that space where I can sit and reflect and if I’m reflecting, I can share this with so on and so on... which is very rewarding for me (P5).

P5 also spoke of the value of her re-training as helping her to realize her full potential. She shared, “I think my full potential as an educator is now being realized. There is so much to do, now I see there is so much.” P5 was a professor at a teacher’s institute in Uganda and is now in
her final years of a PhD here in Canada. She identifies as an educator and a researcher and reflected on her academic career:

I would say, if I may, that my passion is in this. That’s where my passion is. I want to do this, and, ultimately, because I’m a writer as well, ultimately I have to make a contribution, it’s not just to have a PHD and go, I have to make a contribution in terms of literature that is lacking in our field (P5).

P10 described immigration and the re-training process as strengthening and broadening his self-identity:

I just didn’t know that I had skills around accounting and management science. When I started looking at accounting courses, I was like, “Wow! That’s interesting.” And I got to explore management science and said, “Wow! That’s another something interesting which I love.” So, it’s something I didn’t know about myself. I thought, “I love finance. I love investment. I love doing analysis. But you know what? There’s a lot more behind that as well. There’s something which I have never explored within myself. And again, it’s just toward [my interest] in numbers. That is the seed, and this is planting many and many things (P10).

He later continued:

I have found my identity back which I lost for several years, and I find myself actually modifying that identity now because I’m not what I was; I’m way more than what I thought I was. So it’s the exploring opportunities around you and adding back into yourself and telling yourself, “You know what? You can do this. You can do that as well. Wow! You can do that as well” (P10).

These participants, who were identified as being very satisfied with their career development, embraced the immigration and re-training process and experienced profound personal growth as a result. They spoke of becoming more than what they were, of becoming confident in their ability to survive, of fulfilling their potential. All of these reflections describe deeply meaningful experiences.
Less Satisfied Individuals

**Struggle for/negotiation of meaning.** Those participants identified as being less satisfied with their re-training and career development experiences shared moments, both specific to re-training but also within the immigration process as a whole, where they struggled to make meaning for themselves in the midst of obstacles. Participants also shared moments where they had to negotiate meaning by balancing conflicting values and priorities. This negotiation of and prioritizing of values is an existential exercise of meaning-making within one’s own unique world.

P3, a professional woman with a successful career back in Albania shared how her priorities shifted after immigration to Canada. When her two children showed difficulty adjusting to Canada and when she herself encountered resistance to career development when previous experience was not recognized, she consciously chose to put her family’s needs ahead of her career goals:

> I totally neglected that element. I thought that when the kids would have the mom and the dad with them, that’s all they would need but actually it wasn’t like that. So they were actually feeling the culture shock very strongly, so it became very obvious to me that we had to be tight as a family and settle with objectives that make all of us feel good, secure, and safe...So I wasn’t having expectations to get to a managerial position and actually, as we’re kind of only a 4-people family here and not anymore the big, supporting family, I totally made a decision to spend time with my family and be around my children and be support for them. So, I wasn’t looking for managerial positions. I wanted a job that is professional and I can do it without [making] huge sacrifices to the kids and the family life (P3).

Eventually, P3 pursued a Master of Business degree. P3 struggled to find meaning in her re-training; while she acknowledges it taught her some practical skills, she found it grueling and constrictive in terms of timelines and assignments. When she did not find it all that useful in securing employment afterwards, she reflected:
It affected my career greatly because it became a struggle. Having the degree became a struggle because I was into—I don’t know if you could call it identity crisis—it would probably be too much to call it identity crisis, but I don’t know in what degree you can call it identity crisis. But definitely part of it or in that category because you think, “Okay, now I have a Masters which I cannot even apply. I’m probably never going to apply it, so then who am I professionally? So it did affect my identity but not in a positive way because the struggles with the job market and finding a job (P3).

Later she reflected on struggling with deciding what to pursue as a new career in that she didn’t want to give up on a certain idea of herself as a professional, successful woman that she forged in Albania:

I knew that many people in my community were also becoming bookkeepers and so on, and I actually had bigger dreams for myself, so I didn’t sign up for those kinds of jobs. So it was very, very difficult and it still is very difficult (P3).

Presently, P3 works part-time as a college instructor and volunteers in her spare time. She is constantly negotiating the meaning she finds in this balance:

I’ve been volunteering quite intensely…it’s meaningful to me because I can make a positive change to someone’s life and so that’s a meaningful piece. But at the same time, it’s the dissatisfaction that comes with feeling I’m being taken advantage of. It’s like, talents are not given for granted, right? I need to give, but I need to get too (P3).

When describing her difficulty in securing full-time employment, sending off cover letter after letter and not receiving responses, P3 shared:

I learned not to be very frustrated so I learned to say, “People have different reasons why they do things, so that’s okay”. But definitely my patience is coming to … it’s becoming very, very limited with this thing.

P1 spoke frequently about finding meaning in family life instead of his individual career development:

So we had to stay for 3 years and get Canadian passports for the kids [so that] the world is open for them. So, let’s try to do that. And if we can survive that, let’s try to stay. So, after 3 or 4 years, we got the passports and now we can stay here any day. The career is not as important as other things. There is no Paradise; there are both good things and bad things. There are more opportunities for them here than there (P1).
In reflecting on balancing career and family life, he shared: “I’m happy with what I’m doing because I’m able to survive. My goal is to keep myself and my family in good shape and we are surviving. Our standards are lower than we used to have before.” He later continued:

To be honest, I’m not satisfied with my career. And yes, using the career as a way to obtain enough to survive. And if I can have the other half which is being in peace with my family and having them together, I’m satisfied because of that (P1).

Despite his satisfaction with family life, P1 also reflected on whether immigrating was the right decision. One factor is his ambivalence was the comparison between what he had back home and what he had in Canada:

If I knew all the process I have to go through after immigrating to Canada, maybe I wouldn’t apply…The people who are really keeping this country moving are the immigrants, and there are many immigrants that have to do whatever; they have to adjust to survive. I sold my house back home for nothing compared to the money, but the house here could cost, I think, more than $1 million. When you compare and you’ve made this change and it was maybe 1/10 of that (P1).

P8 exhibited mixed feelings around the need for re-training. For her, meaning was a negotiation between experience gained and time lost; in existential terms, meaning was a negotiation between the growth that came with re-training, the freedom and responsibility it gave her, and the anxiety regarding time lost, the time that is so precious because of the inevitability of death:

I gained a lot, obviously. I gained experience, opportunity, the values that they teach you, how to approach…Even today I feel that is the best. Now, if you give me anything, even if I’d never encountered it, I know how to approach it. Virtually anything. I feel that’s the best part. The losses are you lose your time, you have to study everything, you’ve got all the frustration, all the difficulties, the process was up and down. You’ve got emotion because you’ve lost the time as well. You cannot go back (P8).

P8’s level of satisfaction with her current job is, “Not very high, I would say, because there’s still no comparison with the position I used to have.” She reflected, “I just think it’s a waste
with that job, a high school student could do it.” For her job to be more meaningful for her, P8 needs to be challenged:

I think the job I want to be more meaningful means, I don’t want a job just as a clerical… that’s why they offered me another job in Ottawa, and I didn’t take it. I don’t want to do something with no challenge. I like to be challenged. I’d like to find out… a bit more difficult, not difficult… I’d like to think of something, not at the lower level, any dummy can do it, you just click any clerical work, just click it and that’s it. I don’t want to do that. I want to do something that needs your analysis, needs you to think about it, needs you to do research and analyze, then you find out the thing. So that’s more challenging than the clerical work, anyone, even a computer can do it.

P4 described several instances where he felt depressed due to a discrepancy between his education and experience and his status in Canada. He describes one experience where he needed to defend his job at Home Depot:

Like, couple months I was in Home Depot and stuck with some customers and I say, “Oh, yes, I’m an engineer”. “Oh, you’re very intelligent.” “Yes, I’m engineer”, and I have to explain some different stuffs. “But, what are you doing here?” First of all, I live 5 minutes from here, and it’s part time; I can return to study if I want (P4).

Later, he described a confrontation with a teacher in a course for building renovation where his knowledge was not respected or believed:

Some guys are black guys, but just one more guy, he’s engineer from Mexico, but nobody knows I’m engineer, even the teacher. One teacher knew, but another teacher didn’t know. And during the program, he started to confront with me… But I talk with the manager of the program. She invited me and the teacher, and she explained: “Yeah, he knows. He is engineer” and the guy was very surprised. And I felt that I was superior [to] him because he was a simple carpenter, and he was teaching there. In terms of math knowledge, not much of math. Everything like this, I’m higher, like 100%, and another guy, was very difficult to make small calculations. But in terms of experience working, they had more experience than me (P4).

For P4, these situations were very stressful and emotional. Although it was difficult for him to express fluently in English, these situations seemed to prompt a reflection on his own
value as a person and of the meaning of certain jobs or re-training. P4 remains ambivalent regarding his desire to stay in Canada:

If I can decide now, I prefer to come back to Brazil. Not because my family is there, but in terms of my field, what I have today, is not [tolerable]. The economy in Brazil is booming now like in India, China. But in my field as a civil engineer, if I go there now, I think in less than one week I can find a job and earning much more than here. I remembering at home the times I almost start to cry, and no, is very difficult to … then I think my mind, “Okay, I’m here. I’m not in Calgary, I’m in Toronto. In Calgary I can make more money than here”. But very difficult. And now my fiancé, she will start a master degree at University of Toronto. She will have to stay here 2 years. Difficult.

When prompted to share his ideal scenario for staying in Canada, he expressed the need for security. He has tried several career paths since being in Canada and it seems that security has been elevated in importance and in meaning for him, perhaps because it would ease his anxiety:

Can even be as a TTC; I will be totally happy. Or police, of course. Not necessarily has to be as engineer…Stability is more important. With TTC or firefighting, you have stability. As engineer, probably not. Or if you work for government, is okay. In Brazil, like police, you have to do some written exams, and if you pass, nobody can fire you. But if you’re in a good company, no projects, no money, “You’re very good engineer but unfortunately we have to let you go until we find another project (P4).

These participants, who were identified as being less satisfied with their career development, described struggling to find meaning in their immigration, re-training, and career experiences. For some, meaning in career had to be negotiated with meaning and values in other areas of life such as family. Others spoke of mixed or negative feelings around the requirement and the value of re-training. In general, these participants expressed an increased sense of ambivalence towards their experiences, choices, and present career circumstances and a lesser sense of deeper meaning.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

The current study explored, from an existential perspective, the career and life experiences of new professional immigrants to Canada who underwent vocational re-training. Findings presented in the previous chapter explored emergent themes anchored in the four existential concepts of death, freedom, and meaning (no themes emerged for the concept of isolation) (Yalom, 1980). This chapter will review and discuss the findings within each of these concepts in turn. The findings provide an empirical foundation on which this chapter develops the theoretical and conceptual implications of the study. Practical implications of the findings will also be addressed. Finally, the limitations of the present study will be reviewed and considerations for future research will be proposed.

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

Death

Yalom’s (1980) existential concern of death refers to the conflict between our desire to live and the inevitability of death. Some have suggested that job loss and unemployment are akin to death (Herr et al., 2004). Losing one’s job can be a significant challenge to one’s identity and sense of self. The findings of the current study suggests that immigration, with its inevitable career transition, may likewise feel like a loss of or threat to one’s previous identity. Several participants experienced grief and anxiety upon their loss of status or perception of self after immigration. Consistent with the literature, many participants described experiencing skill-discounting, the devaluation of their pre-immigration education and work experience in Canada
Additionally, several participants referenced not only having to start over in terms of training and career but also in terms of logistical aspects of life including obtaining a driver’s license, opening a bank account, or getting a credit card. These logistical aspects only added to the perception of loss of previous self.

This lack of recognition of pre-immigration education, skills, status, and experience put participants in the position of having to start “like a baby”, having to start “from scratch”. In essence, the lack of recognition wiped away or severely threatened their previous identity to the point of having to begin again from the beginning. Research suggests that it takes a minimum of 10 years for new immigrants to realize their economic potential and to achieve similar labor market outcomes as Canadian-born workers (Beiser, 2005; Statistics Canada 2008b). This study’s finding of loss of or threat to immigrants’ previous identities could be considered a subjective counterpart to this economic struggle and reality for immigrants. It would be interesting to explore how long it takes for new immigrants to achieve a level of confidence in their self-identity after immigration equivalent to that of their pre-immigration life.

This finding stemming from the existential concern of death has theoretical and conceptual implications for models of career development among an immigrant population. The threat to one’s pre-immigration identity experienced by participants in this study seems to suggest a distinct phase of dissociation from any previously conceived pre-immigration career path upon immigration. During this phase, participants struggled with the threat to and loss of their previous identity. Super’s (1953; 1990) life-span life-space model of career development posits five distinct career phases over the life-span: 1) Growth (Birth to 14), 2) Exploration (14-24), 3) Establishment (25-44), 4) Maintenance (45-64), and 5) Decline (65+). This model views
career development as beginning with the cultivation of one’s self-concept in childhood and continually growing and shifting across the life span as career development progresses. This study’s findings suggest that immigrants may find themselves between phases after immigration. For example, immigrants who were well into the Establishment phase of their career development prior to immigration, find themselves having to re-negotiate their career development after immigration. They may be caught between Exploration and Establishment phases, not wanting to begin completely anew but not being able to establish themselves in their pre-immigration career either. Although preliminary, this study’s findings thus suggest the need for career models to acknowledge this in-between phase for immigrant career development wherein immigrants are confronted with the death of their old career path, timeline, and identity.

A second finding of this study within the existential concept of death was an acute awareness of mortality, in the form of “time lost”, present in professional immigrants. Immigration is a lengthy process and it would seem as though the struggle to re-establish oneself after immigration evokes a heightened awareness of the finitude of time. An awareness of time played a different role for different participants. For some, like P10, the time spent before deciding to pursue re-training was seen as time wasted and was looked upon with regret and guilt; for others, like P8, re-training itself was viewed as using up valuable time to prove to one’s competence to others and was looked upon with some resentment and ambivalence. For others still, like P1 and P4, an awareness of time made one question one’s ability to begin anew, commit to additional re-training or pursue alternate career options. Additionally, two participants, P10 and P3 spoke of having to “remove age” from their evaluations of self and career development in order to feel more positively about their current circumstances. Having to
“remove age” seems to imply an awareness that they are not at par with where they anticipated to be at any given age in terms of life and career development—their timeline for themselves has not been achieved. Removing this awareness of mortality from their self-evaluations frees them of the battle between life and inevitable death by allowing them to focus on and judge by the present moment only.

This finding suggests a role for awareness of mortality or sensitivity to time in theoretical models of career development for an immigrant population. For example, in Super’s (1953, 1990) model discussed earlier, this concept could be added as a dynamic and interactive adjunct to the phase model. How do immigrants perceive phases of career in relationship to their overall life span? How does age and perceptions of time, including time lost and time left, influence immigrants’ career-decision making process in terms of pursuing or not pursuing re-training? How much weight do personal “timelines” for career development have in influencing immigrants’ career satisfaction post-immigration? This study suggests that immigrants view their immigration and re-training experiences through a lens of time and are acutely aware of the passing of time. To fully encompass the subjective experience of new immigrants, it would thus seem worthwhile to consider working this dynamic lens of time and relationship to time into models of career development.

**Freedom**

Yalom’s (1980) existential concern of *freedom* refers to the conflict between our unlimited freedom of choice, responsibility for correct choice and our desire for structure or our confrontations with limitations beyond our control. Within the concept of freedom is the partner concept of responsibility—we must take responsibility for ourselves in this world, responsibility
to exercise our freedom toward meaning. Three themes emerged within this category: 1) Responsibility in the Face of Existential Anxiety, 2) General Responsibility, and 3) Re-training as a Tool Toward Increasing Freedom.

The first theme, suggested by the narratives of three participants in particular (P6, P8, and P10) described certain individuals’ renewed responsibility towards freedom, towards their own growth and development, in the face of the existential anxiety. This theme suggests that confrontation with loss of identity, loss of confidence, and anxiety regarding one’s future after immigration can be an impetus towards renewed responsibility. This is consistent with the first step in Cohen’s (2003) four-stage existential career decision-making model. In this model, one is confronted with career choice or career transition as a boundary situation. According to Yalom (1980), boundary situations are those that make the individual more aware of existential concerns and often involve life-changing decisions. The three participants in question confronted the boundary situation of immigration with its inherent stresses and decisions. They then entered Cohen’s first stage, Responsibility, where the existential concerns of responsibility and freedom emerge. In this stage, individuals become aware of their responsibility for vocational choice and development or they avoid this responsibility. In the case of the three participants in question, their confrontation with a boundary situation made them acutely aware of their responsibility toward choice and development and fuelled an inner drive to use their freedom for growth and change.

The second theme, General Responsibility, reflected participants’ view that taking responsibility to exercise one’s freedom was essential to grow and succeed after immigration. This idea spanned participants regardless of career satisfaction post-immigration. It is interesting
that immigration and re-training provoked such a focused reflection on the importance of self and self-responsibility in this context rather than on seeking assistance from others or the government. While participants did receive assistance and guidance from friends, family, and mentors, their primary advice was to take responsibility for one’s self. Moreover, while participants did encounter difficult barriers to their freedom (e.g., skill-discounting, discrimination), this did not seem to lower their sense of responsibility for growth. Barriers were described and frustration expressed yet, somehow, participants’ continued to focus on the freedom they did have to make change. This is an elegant example of the existential concern of freedom in which one must balance unlimited freedom of choice with the barriers present in one’s particular circumstances. The participants in this study advocated for the use of responsibility as a way to negotiate the barriers one faces and the choices one encounters in terms of career development after immigration.

This finding brings to mind the literature on locus of control. Research has demonstrated that an inner locus of control is a factor in positive adjustment after immigration (Garcia, Ramirez, & Jariego, 2002) and career research supports an internal locus of control as related to increased career planning and exploration amongst barriers (Patton, Bartram, & Creed, 2002). It would appear that the participants in this study recognized the value of internal control, of taking responsibility for one’s growth and career development and of believing that one’s actions will affect outcomes.

The third theme, Re-training as a Tool Toward Increasing Freedom, when viewed from the existential perspective, adds a new layer of understanding to the benefits of re-training for new immigrants. Objectively, there are clear benefits to re-training including, better
employment outcomes (Gilmore & Le Petit, 2008), occupational status (Banerjee & Verna, 2009), and income (Rollin, 2011). The findings of the current study suggest that immigrants subjectively view re-training as a key or tool towards increasing personal freedom for career development. Re-training is thus imbued with meaning beyond its practical value; it is seen as a gateway to freedom and opportunity, a tool with which to negotiate the many barriers faced by new immigrants. This finding suggests that models of career development for an immigrant population may be warranted in considering a multi-layered conceptualization of re-training that includes both surface, practical considerations as well as deeper, existential considerations.

**Meaning**

Yalom’s (1980) existential concern of *meaning* refers to the conflict between our innate desire for meaning and the lack of any inherent meaning to life. With our freedom, we must take responsibility to create and find meaning in a meaningless world. The findings of the present study indicated a division among participants based on meaning found in re-training and this division seemed to correlate with satisfaction of career development in Canada. Six participants were defined as being very satisfied with their career development in Canada, and four participants were defined as being less satisfied with their career development. The narratives of those in the very satisfied category were generally positively reflective and demonstrated a sense of pride and meaning in their immigrant and re-training experience. The narratives of those in the less satisfied category demonstrated greater ambivalence and resignation towards re-training and career development and greater negotiation for meaning within the experience.

The participants defined as satisfied with their career development in Canada also seemed to have experienced a deeper meaning in their immigration and re-training experiences. They
reflected on meaningful shifts in perception of self, in identity, and personal growth as a result of re-training and immigration. It seemed as though immigration and re-training were embraced or recognized as opportunities for growth. On the other hand, those participants who were less satisfied with their career development described a more difficult time finding meaning in the immigration and re-training experience. These participants described having to negotiate meaning between different values, finding meaning in family instead of career, and a greater ambivalence towards both the need and benefit of re-training and the decision to immigrate itself. These findings appear to be somewhat consistent with Zikic et al.’s (2010) study examining the career orientations of qualified immigrants. This study found evidence for three distinct career orientations: 1) Embracing, viewing objective barriers as personal challenges and as ways to reinvent oneself, 2) Adaptive, making efforts to cope with career barriers and to adapt as necessary, but focused more on surviving than on thriving, and 3) Resisting, demonstrating limited psychological flexibility in response to barriers and suffering from low self-confidence and motivation. In the present study, those participants defined as satisfied with their career development seem to meet the conceptualization of an Embracing career orientation. Those defined as less satisfied with their career development seem to fall more likely within the Adaptive career orientation. The Embracing and Adaptive career orientations can also be viewed more explicitly from an existential perspective. The Embracing attitude is accepting and embracing of immigration and re-training as deeply meaningful, as an experience to make one stronger. Moreover, committing to re-training and immigration is viewed as a meaningful choice. An Adaptive attitude toward re-training and immigration does not necessarily look for deeper meaning in the immigration and re-training process. Re-training is seen as a practical tool rather
than a meaningful experience. When career development is less satisfactory than desired, the adaptive orientation leads one to negotiate meaning through other life areas, such as family.

A key feature of those individuals defined as less satisfied with career development was ambivalence. Ambivalence is defined as the holding of two conflicting emotions simultaneously about a certain situation. These individuals expressed ambivalence regarding both immigration itself and about re-training. Interestingly, ambivalence can be considered contrary to a primary premise of existentialism that of, existence preceding essence (Sartre, 1970). This premise maintains that human beings are first thrown into the world—we just are, here in the world—and only after we are, can we decide what we are through our choices and actions (Sartre, 1970). To move toward meaningful action therefore, this premise implies that we must accept that we are, here in the world, wherever we find ourselves, and then must make conscious choices and take committed action toward creating meaning. When examined this in this way, ambivalence regarding immigration or re-training can be viewed as non-acceptance of one’s present being, of one’s present experience, which thus hinders meaningful action. One could argue that some participants in this study are struggling to define who they are—for example, through questioning of their decision to immigrate or of whether or not to commit to additional re-training—before accepting that they are, here in this new country in their particular circumstances. They may have difficulty letting go of their previous lives, roles, identities, or expectations in order to face their new reality fully existentially. Comparatively, the present study’s findings regarding those participants who are satisfied with their career development seem to suggest that they were able to be more accepting and embracing of their current
situation, and then felt free to move forward. This freedom may then filter into satisfaction with career development post-immigration.

One must be careful however, in drawing conclusions, as there could be many variables affecting any particular participant’s ability to accept and take committed action forward. For example, within the six participants defined as satisfied four were young men between the ages of 22 and 33 upon immigration. Moreover, three of these men were single upon immigration. One might argue therefore that youth and relationship status contribute to a greater ability to accept the new reality of immigration as one is perhaps more open to new challenges and need not take the needs of others (e.g. partners, children) into consideration when making re-training and career decisions. The findings seem to suggest however, that on the whole, acceptance of one’s situation, or the lowering or absence of ambivalence, regardless of how one comes to it, may be beneficial for immigrants’ positive and meaningful experience of re-training and immigration and ultimately, career satisfaction.

This finding can also be related to Cohen’s (2003) four-stage existential career decision-making model. In Cohen’s first stage, Responsibility, individuals become aware of their responsibility for vocational choice and development or they avoid this responsibility. During the second stage, Evaluation, individuals search for meaning and evaluate what conditions are needed to be their authentic selves. In the third stage, Action, individuals pursue a career choice, ideally an authentic one. In Cohen’s fourth and final stage, Re-Evaluation, individuals re-evaluate themselves and their career as sources of meaning. If meaning is absent, they may feel an existential vacuum or existential guilt at not fulfilling their authentic self. The findings of the present study suggest a role for ambivalence and struggle for meaning within the evaluative
states of the model. In such a scenario, conflicting emotions or values may cloud the Evaluation and Re-Evaluation stages leading to less committed or less authentic action towards career development. Alternatively, other values, such as family, may be given precedence over career itself in these stages, leading to action that provides less satisfaction in terms of career.

**Implications for Practice and Professional and Self Helping**

This study has implications for counselling and career counselling of new professional immigrants to Canada. Working with new immigrants in a counselling capacity requires specific competencies such as an understanding of cultural diversity and cultural norms (Constantine & Sue, 2005). Moreover, counsellors need to educate themselves about multiple variables within their immigrant clients’ background including ethnicity, religion, level of acculturation, and migration history (Aponte & Johnson, 2000; Johnson, Bastien, & Hirschel, 2009) to name but a few. In addition to cultural, social, personal, and philosophical adjustment issues (Lee & Westwood, 1996), new professional immigrants face significant career-related stressors including skill-discounting (Esses et al., 2006; Reitz, 2007; Sinacore et al., 2009), work culture differences (Blythe et al., 2009), and underemployment (Galerneau & Morissette, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2009).

The present study provides preliminary evidence for additional challenges faced by new professional immigrants. Firstly, this study found evidence for an experience of death of or threat to an immigrant’s previous identity following immigration and the necessary career transition. Career counselors may thus find it therapeutic to work with immigrant clients to process this death or threat to identity, for example, by encouraging a process of grieving. While existing immigrant support organizations are helpful in developing immigrants’ career-search skills, such
as resume-writing, they may wish to encourage immigrants to allow space and time to acknowledge the loss of identity they have suffered, prior to or whilst gaining career-search skills. It would be interesting to explore whether engaging in a process of grieving of previous identity would eventually enable greater acceptance and commitment to meaningful action.

Counsellors may also consider working with clients to recognize and value their own skills and competencies outside of external or objective recognition as a way to maintain identity integrity and motivation amidst career barriers.

Secondly, this study found evidence that new professional immigrants are acutely aware of their mortality in the form of sensitivity to time. Several participants spoke of immigration and re-training as “time lost.” Given this finding, a narrative approach to career counselling may be particularly suited for new immigrants. Narrative approaches encourage clients to engage in storytelling and to create a full and meaningful narrative of their life-career experience (Cochran, 1997). Such an approach may prove comforting to immigrant clients who are concerned about having lost or wasted time, about not having enough time, or about not having met certain career goals by a specific age. Particular techniques such as success experiences, lifelines, and life chapters (Cochran, 1997) can help clients to move away from a focus on time by expanding their idea of a career timeline into a broad, full, and meaningful life-career narrative. A life-career narrative is so much more than a timeline of a client’s career life—it is a rich and deeply personal story that may help clients’ to find additional meaning in their immigration, re-training, and career experience post-immigration.

Thirdly, this study found preliminary evidence supporting a relationship between meaningful experience of re-training and immigration with career satisfaction. It was also
proposed that acceptance of one’s situation may contribute to one’s ability to take committed action towards career growth and to find meaning in the process. These findings may warrant a preliminary investigation of the use of acceptance and mindfulness based therapies, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Harris, 2006) with new professional immigrants. ACT, for example, is mindfulness-based behaviour therapy that encourages psychological and behavioural flexibility in the service of client values (Harris, 2006). It teaches clients mindfulness and other techniques that enable one to be fully present to the current moment and enable acceptance of all of life’s experiences, including negative emotions, without struggling against any of it. The aim is to use the energy previously caught up in trying to fix or obsessing about one’s negative emotions and experiences to instead move toward meaningful action guided by one’s values. Work on defining one’s values is also a central component. In terms of the present findings, one could imagine ACT principles being used with participants who were struggling to create meaning or negotiating meaning between different value sets to 1) help them accept where they are post-immigration versus painfully comparing their new life to the old life, and 2) using this new un-harnessed energy to define meaningful values, reduce ambivalence, and take meaningful action towards these values. Although not specific to career issues, at least one case study has found success using ACT with a new immigrant to the United States of America who was struggling with anxiety and depression (Murrell & Rogers, 2009). Interestingly, ACT is also thought of as having roots in existential thought (Harris, 2006).

Finally, this study found evidence for the benefit of taking responsibility for one’s own post-immigration growth and development. Several participants, regardless of level of present career satisfaction, gave advice to this effect. This findings has implications for self-helping
among new immigrants to Canada. While participants did mention the benefits of friends, family and mentors in the immigration and re-training process, they seemed to place greater value on taking responsibility for one’s own growth and development. Looking back, participants seemed to share the view that the most valuable action is action that one can take for oneself. Disseminating such a finding to potential new immigrants, for example through pre-immigration counselling, or through mentorship relationships, may motivate potential immigrants to engage in additional preparation around career and re-training prior to immigration.

**Limitations of the Present Study**

There are several significant limitations that must be considered when reflecting on the implications of the present study. Perhaps most importantly is the difficulty of accessing existential considerations. Existential reflection requires the time and space for deep reflection. While the present study provided the opportunity for participants to share their immigration and re-training narratives, it was difficult to fully probe existential concerns given the sheer number of questions to be addressed in each two-hour interview. A more focused questioning of specific existential concerns may have provided additional findings. Along this same vein, some participants’ limited command of English precluded full expression of their deeper existential reflections. The researcher attempted to accurately code for existential concerns, however, it is likely that more depth could be added to the findings had the participants had access to language that allowed for more nuanced and philosophical reflection. As it stands, a few participants are perhaps over-represented (P3, P6, P8, P10) as they had the fluency to add depth to their narratives.
A second limitation of the study is generalizability of the findings to all professional immigrants. The majority of participants in the current study had achieved a modicum of career success in Canada. This caused the researcher to question whether more “successful” immigrants had been more likely to self-select themselves into participating in the study.

A third limitation of the study was the criteria that participants must have held employment for at least one year after having completed re-training. From an existential perspective, we are continually in being, continually in a state of becoming, as we negotiate meaning in the world at every new moment. That participants were reflecting on past experiences may have clouded their ability to reflect existentially and may have coloured their existential experiencing of the moments in question (e.g. viewing re-training in a more positive light now that it is over).

**Considerations for Future Research**

It is the hope of this researcher that the present study will foster additional curiosity and scholarship regarding the existential experiences of new professional immigrants to Canada. Future research in this area would benefit from exploring reflections on existential concerns in situ, i.e., during the present moment of experience rather than as a review and reflection of past experiences. Existential theory is linked so closely to present experiencing, to continual becoming in every moment, that it would likely prove fruitful to examine existential themes with individuals currently in the middle of re-training after immigration. Secondly, more explicitly researching existential themes, for example, through semi-structured interviews made of up questions solely devoted to existential themes in relation to career, may produce more focused and useful findings. Thirdly, replicating this study’s examination of the career and re-training
experience of new professional immigrants to Canada from an existential perspective with a larger number of participants would add useful and trustworthy information to this study’s preliminary findings.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the present study’s findings, conceptual and theoretical implications, implications for practice, and considerations for future research. The immigrants who participated in this study described a wide range of immigration, career, and re-training experiences and the present study endeavored to explore these experiences from an existential perspective. Findings suggested an experience of death, loss, and threat to immigrant’s pre-immigration identity after immigration and an acute awareness of mortality and of time with regards to future career development. Participants vocalized the importance of taking responsibility for one’s career development and to exercise one’s freedom amidst barriers. Some participants in particular seemed to experience a renewed determination and strengthened responsibility in the face of existential anxiety post-immigration. Re-training was also imbued by many participants with the meaning of a tool towards increasing their own freedom through the learning of new skills and the opening of new career opportunities. While all participants in the study had achieved a modicum of career success post-immigration, two distinct groups emerged—those who very satisfied with their career development and those who were less satisfied. The very satisfied group seemed to experience greater meaning within the immigration and re-training experience in terms of personal growth. The less satisfied group seemed to experience a greater struggle for and negotiation of meaning and exhibited increased ambivalence
within the immigration and re-training experience. In conclusion, the present study serves as a preliminary step towards elucidating the importance of existential considerations among new professional immigrants to Canada and hopes to foster interest in additional research and reflection in this area.
References


Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) 2003.


APPENDIX A: Recruitment Advertisement/Poster

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

RE: How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

The recruitment poster will contain the following information:

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED for a study of the CAREER RETRAINING EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN CANADA

· You came to Canada as an immigrant within the timeframe of January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006

· You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada

· You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three-years before coming to Canada

· You have held employment in Canada (full-time or part-time), for a minimum of 1 year after completing your Canadian retraining

· You engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of retraining/educational program completion required)

· You are at least 25 years of age and older

If all of the above applies, please contact:
416.978.0725
careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca

Interviews conducted in English – Fluency is required

FINANCIALLY COMPENSATED $35

The interviews are part of a research project lead by Dr. Charles Chen in Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles Chen’s research projects to date in order to be eligible to participate.
APPENDIX B: Telephone Script

TELEPHONE SCRIPT (or LETTER) OF INITIAL CONTACT

RE: How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

Thank you very much for calling, and we really appreciate your interest in our research project. First I would like to tell you a bit about the study. Then you can take some time to consider whether you would like to participate in this project or not. If you have questions, please feel free to interrupt me at any time and ask them.

You are cordially invited to attend this interview. The interview is part of a research project being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE, UT), and his research assistants. The interview questions are designed to examine the career retraining and worklife adjustment experiences of new immigrant professionals. It is expected that the results from this study will lead to a better understanding of immigrant professionals' career retraining experiences and needs, and of the specific barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their vocational life transition in Canada. The interview questions will cover information about your recent retraining experiences, your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. We hope that you will benefit from the interview process with an increased self-awareness on issues related to career retraining, career exploration, and planning. We also hope that you would find the exploring nature of the study an interesting process from which you might learn something. However, even if the study does not benefit you directly, we hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers arriving in this country every year. We really appreciate your interest, and we are very grateful to your participation.

To follow the nature and purpose of the study stated above, research participants in this study will include a total of 90 to 120 recent immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada. All participants selected will be 25 years of age and older. Each participant is invited to complete an audiotaped interview that will last for about 2 hours. The interview will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto. As part of the interview, you will be asked to complete and return a 2-page Participant Information Sheet that contains your contact information and basic demographic information relevant to this research project.
The term "new immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada" in this study refers to a person who meets the following criteria:

(1) You are at least 25 years of age and older.

(2) You came to Canada as an immigrant within the timeframe of January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006.

(3) You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada.

(4) You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three years before coming to Canada.

(5) You engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of retraining/educational program completion required).

(6) You have held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of 1 year after completing your Canadian retraining.

(7) You are fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English).

(8) You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date.

As one of the participants, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the study, even if you finish a portion of it and then decide that you do not wish to continue. You may choose to refuse to answer any particular question or questions posed to you and still complete the interview. You may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences to your personal life, academic standing, and other career prospects later. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed either of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

In recognition of the time and effort you have given to participate in this research project, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 if you agree to participate and complete the interview process.

While we will be making an audiotape of this interview, your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous. Your results will be assigned to a code number to protect your
identity. Any information that could lead to identify you (e.g., name) will be removed from the data while the interviews are transcribed into written data, i.e., written transcripts of the interview session. You will be assigned a pseudonym in the interview, as well as throughout the entire research process, including in the data analysis, final research report(s), and other related presentations and publications. Any possible identifying information about you will be replaced by a code during the research process. Your contact information, such as your name, phone numbers and email address, will be coded and kept separately from other files. All written and audiotaped data will be kept in secured files and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased. In the event that, during the interview, you express an intention to harm yourself or harm others, it is our duty to break confidentiality and report this content to the authorities.

The results of this study may be used again in another study. However, they will only be used by Dr. Chen and his assistants for research related to immigrant professionals' vocational and career development and retraining issues. These research results may be presented in public settings such as professional and/or academic conferences, and other public forums. Reports and articles based on the research may also be published in academic and/or professional journals. Under such circumstances, your identity will remain strictly confidential, and only your pseudonym and coded information may be utilized.

We will be very glad to provide you with a summary of the current study’s results if you wish to receive such a summary report when this research project is completed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask either Dr. Chen, or his research assistant(s) (name of the prospective research assistants).

If you need more time to think about your option, please feel free to do so. You may contact me in a later time if you are interested in arranging an interview schedule with me.

If you are sure that you want to participate in this research, I can set up a time schedule with you now for the research interview.

Whether you will participate in the interview or not, I really appreciate your interest. Again, thank you very much for your time, and your inquiry about our research project!
CONSENT FORM

RE: How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

You are cordially invited to attend this interview. The interview is part of a research project being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE, UT), and his research assistants. The interview questions are designed to examine the career retraining and worklife adjustment experiences of new immigrant professionals. It is expected that the results from this study will lead to a better understanding of immigrant professionals' career retraining experiences and needs, and of the specific barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their vocational life transition in Canada. The interview questions will cover information about your recent retraining experiences, your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. We hope that you will benefit from the interview process with an increased self-awareness on issues related to career retraining, career exploration, and planning. We also hope that you would find the exploring nature of the study an interesting process from which you might learn something. However, even if the study does not benefit you directly, we hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers arriving in this country every year. We really appreciate your interest, and we are very grateful to your participation.

To follow the nature and purpose of the study stated above, research participants in this study will include a total of 90 to 120 recent immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada. All participants selected will be 25 years of age and older. Each participant is invited to complete an audiotaped interview that will last for about 2 hours. The interview will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto. As part of the interview, you will be asked to complete and return a 2-page Participant Information Sheet that contains your contact information and basic demographic information relevant to this research project.

The term "new immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada" in this study refers to a person who meets the following criteria:

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

(Printed on the letterhead of OISE/University of Toronto)
(1) You are at least 25 years of age and older.

(2) You came to Canada as an immigrant within the timeframe of January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006.

(3) You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada.

(4) You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three years before coming to Canada.

(5) You engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of retraining/educational program completion required).

(6) You have held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of 3 years after completing your Canadian retraining.

(7) You are fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English).

(8) You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date.

As one of the participants, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the study, even if you finish a portion of it and then decide that you do not wish to continue. You may choose to refuse to answer any particular question or questions posed to you and still complete the interview. You may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences to your personal life, academic standing, and other career prospects later. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed either of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

In recognition of the time and effort you have given to participate in this research project, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 if you agree to participate and complete the interview process.

While we will be making an audiotape of this interview, your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous. Your results will be assigned to a code number to protect your identity. Any information that could lead to identify you (e.g., name) will be removed from the data while the interviews are transcribed into written data, i.e., written transcripts of the interview session. You will be assigned a pseudonym in the interview, as well as throughout the entire research process, including in the data analysis, final research report(s), and other related presentations and publications. Any possible identifying information about you will be replaced.
by a code during the research process. Your contact information, such as your name, phone numbers and email address, will be coded and kept separately from other files. All written and audiotaped data will be kept in secured files and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased. In the event that, during the interview, you express an intention to harm yourself or harm others, it is our duty to break confidentiality and report this content to the authority.

The results of this study may be used again in another study. However, they will only be used by Dr. Chen and his assistants for research related to immigrant professionals' vocational and career development and retraining issues. These research results may be presented in public settings such as professional and/or academic conferences, and other public forums. Reports and articles based on the research may also be published in academic and/or professional journals. Under such circumstances, your identity will remain strictly confidential, and only your pseudonym and coded information may be utilized.

We will be very glad to provide you with a summary of the current study’s results if you wish to receive such a summary report when this research project is completed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask either Dr. Chen, or his research assistant(s) (name of the prospective research assistants). Signing the bottom of this form will constitute your consent to this interview, as well as your consent to participate in this research project.

Thank you very much for your time and valuable cooperation.

Charles Chen, Ph.D.
Professor
Canada Research Chair
Counselling Psychology Program
Department of Adult Education
and Counselling Psychology
OISE, University of Toronto
Tel.: (416) 978-0718
Email: cp.chen@utoronto.ca

Name of the Research Assistant(s)
Counselling Psychology Program
Department of Adult Education
and Counselling Psychology
OISE, University of Toronto
Tel.: 
Email:

I understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research project described above. I have been offered a copy of this consent form for my own reference.

___________________________________________  ____________________
(Print: First and Last Names of Research Participant)

________________________________________  ______________________
(Signature of Research Participant)  (Date)
APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

THEME QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

RE: How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

Demographic Information
1. Gender:

2. Age (in years)

3. Month and Year arriving in Canada:
   From – home country ___________________________________
   Immigrated with: Spouse ___ Family ___
   Close contact in Canada prior to immigrating? (state relationship: e.g., friend, cousin, etc.) ______________________________

4. Level of Education obtained before coming to Canada (e.g., college education, bachelor's degree, professional certificate, etc.): ________________________________

5. Please specify the Major/Discipline of your education from your home country (i.e., arts, science, engineering, commerce, etc.): ___________________________________
   Degree or type of retraining completed after coming to Canada:
   Institution ___________________________________
   Program length ___________________________________
   Type of qualification/credential ___________________________________
   Type of document (Diploma/certificate/degree) ___________________________________

6. Please indicate your professional and/or vocational title before coming to Canada (e.g., teacher, nurse, engineer, accountant, etc.): ________________________________

7. Please indicate your industry: ___________________________________
   Please specify your workplace setting in your home country (i.e., school, hospital, factory, accounting firm, etc.): ________________________________

8. Please indicate the job title and/or the employment you are currently holding in Canada: ________________________________
Please specify how long you have been working in this employment: ________________

Date of interview: ________________________________

Questions:

I. Before Coming to Canada

(1) I’d like to ask you about your education experience.
   a) What was the name of your degree?
   b) How many years was your degree?
   c) Was there a practical component to your degree?
   d) Was there a registration component to your profession?

(2) I’m going to ask you some questions about your life and work experiences before coming to Canada.
   a) What was your job like before you came to Canada?
   b) How satisfied were you with your career prior to coming to Canada?
   c) Things you liked and didn’t like?
   d) How central was your career to your sense of self?

(3) Why did you want to come to Canada, and how did you make this decision to come?
   --Reason(s), and main purpose.
   --Events and experiences and information that triggered your decision

(4) (If not answered already) Was employment and worklife involved in your decision of immigration? (and how) What were your expectations for employment in Canada? (if not already answered) How confident did you feel about finding work in your profession? Did you do any preparation for your qualifications to be transferable to Canada before coming to Canada? --(If not already answered) Can you tell me about your preparation and planning for employment in Canada?

(5) How much control did you feel you would have in Canada over employment decisions?

(6) Did you anticipate or plan on having to do retraining once you arrived in Canada?

(7) If yes, did you do any planning for your retraining prior to coming to Canada? What planning did you do?

(8) What were your expectations of the retraining process? What did you think the experience would be like?
II. After Coming to Canada: Initial General Experience

(9) How did you feel when you initially came to Canada? (Were things different than your expectations/what you expected?)

(10) What were the most significant changes and difficulties you experienced when you first came to Canada?
   a) How did you cope with the changes and difficulties in life?
   b) What was most helpful, least helpful for coping with these changes?
   c) How did these experiences impact your well-being? (mental and physical health), and the well-being of your family?

(11) How did your ability to cope with these changes impact your self-esteem and confidence levels?

(12) Did you search for help or resources? If so, what were they?

(13) Having faced these difficulties/changes, did you develop a plan of action for your career development? Did that include plans for retraining?

III. Ongoing Vocational Adjustment and Transition in Canada

(14) How important was it for you to find a job when you first came to Canada? Which kind of jobs did you intend to find to get your worklife restarted in Canada?

(15) (If not already answered, Cover all of these points) What were the major factors you had to consider when you were trying to find employment in Canada?
   -- Concerns for financial survival.
   -- Gain Canadian experience.
   -- Some relevancy to previous educational and professional background experience.

(16) What did you do to try to get a job that is related to your previous vocational and/or professional background experience from your home country? (Use discretion). -if applicable.

(17) Could you tell me briefly in sequential order the main jobs you have held since coming to this country, and your experiences with these jobs?

(18) Was there a period of time during which you were unemployed after coming to Canada? For how long? How did this affect you?
(19) How difficult or easy was your original job search? What factors made the search easier and/or more difficult?

(20) What were some of the expected and unexpected events that influenced your job-seeking and vocational development experiences in Canada? And how did you respond to such events?
   --Opportunities/people that led you to a vocational choice
   --Anticipated or unanticipated barriers.
   a) What was most helpful, least helpful to you?

(21) What were some of the supports you found in your job search in Canada? Could you give me some specific examples?

(22) In your job-search in Canada, how useful was your work experience from your home country?

(23) Were your qualifications and training from your home country useful in getting work?

(24) How long after you came to Canada did you decide to pursue retraining/ further education? What led to that decision? What factors influenced this decision? Did anyone influence your decision?

(25) What had you hoped your retraining or education in Canada would lead to?

(26) How did you plan for your retraining? Did you encounter any barriers in this process?

(27) What actions did you take to make your retraining experience possible?
   -- What resources did you seek out? Did anyone help you?

(28) (If not already answered) How did you find out about available retraining opportunities? (career centre, internet, social network, job etc...)

(29) What form of retraining or professional training did you do once you arrived in Canada?
   -- Did you try to regain your pre-Canada professional qualification/designation?

(30) In what field was your retraining? How did you choose the program/field?
   -- Why did you stay in the same field? OR Why did you change fields?
   -- If you changed fields, how did you come to the decision to change?

(31) How did you find this new "learning" experience in Canada? Did you have to change your "learning style"? In what ways?
(32) Could you describe your general impression and feeling about this training experience?
   --Things you enjoyed the most.
   --Things you enjoyed the least.

(33) How did the retraining compare to your original training back home?

(34) Did the retraining experience differ from what you expected it would be like?

(35) If different how did it affect you? How did you cope?

(36) (If not already touched on) Were there any unexpected or chance events that occurred prior to, during, and after your retraining?
   -- Any unexpected events that occurred that led you to take the training program?
   -- Any unexpected learning experiences?
   -- Any unexpected benefits or costs from retraining?

(37) How much control (or lack of control) did you feel you had in terms of your retraining experience? (ref for interviewer e.g. choice of institute, choice of certificate, ability to reaccredit in your old field vs. being forced to retrain for something completely new, limitations of funding sources or finances for training, etc...).
   a) What led to this feeling and what did you do in response to it?

(38) Thinking about your pre-Canada skills and abilities, how did you think you would perform in the retraining? (interviewer: thinking about self-efficacy)

(39) How did you feel about having to take this retraining? (e.g. resentment for the necessity of retraining vs. framing it as a new opportunity, positive chance for growth vs. feeling lucky that retraining was a possibility...)-interviewer give both sides of possibility.

(40) What were some sources of support for you during your retraining experience? (e.g. family, classmates, mentors, friends, etc...)

(41) What was the role of your interests or hobbies in coping with your retraining experience? How do these activities help you cope? (e.g. losing yourself, engaging)

(42) Were you employed during your retraining experience? Which role? What was it like having to balance both? Do you feel it impacted your retraining?
IV. Results of Post-Retraining

(43) How important and useful was your Canadian retraining experience to your employment opportunities in this country?
--Leading to employment that was similar or close to your background experience.
--Leading to new vocational choice and opportunity.
--Leading to no beneficial outcome for employment.

(44) What is your understanding of why it became necessary for you to pursue retraining in Canada?

(45) (For those of you who re-trained in your original career), do you agree that the retraining was necessary for you to be competent in your profession after arriving here in Canada?

(46) How did you feel about your skills and abilities after the training program? (Did you feel better or discouraged about yourself, the same?)

(47) How did the process of retraining affect (or not affect) your sense of "career identity"?
(Sense of yourself or experience of yourself as ___profession)
   a) Did your sense of identity evolve during your retraining experience (identity at the beginning vs. middle vs. end)
   b) What impact does this experience have on your perception of self-worthiness as a new Canadian?

(48) Has your career taken on a different role in your life as a result of your retraining experience?
   -- Has your career identity changed as a result of your retraining experience?

(49) During the retraining, what did you discover about yourself? (Prompt: Self-discovery and meaning on a personal career-related level)

(50) Did your retraining lead you to be more encouraged or discouraged to pursue your desired career? How come?

(51) How did the retraining program impact the factors that motivate you within your career? Did your career-related values change? (e.g. enjoyment of work and interest in professional activities vs. importance of prestige, salary, promotion) If so, how so?

(52) Is there anything else that you feel you gained or lost through retraining?
(53) What were some of the main lessons you learned from your retraining experience in Canada?

(54) Was the retraining what you expected it to be? If not, how did it differ? What issues did this raise? How did you feel about those issues? What did you do about those issues?

(55) How did any difference in expectations versus the reality of your retraining affect your sense of identity or value as a person, your confidence levels, and feelings in terms of your career?

(56) What were the major compromises you made when approaching retraining opportunities in Canada? How did you decide what to do when you had to make a compromise in your retraining? (Joint action - family, mentor, community)

(57) How did you feel when you had to make a compromise for your retraining choice?

(58) In general, how has your retraining impacted your experience as a new worker in Canada?

(59) How important were your own actions in setting up and completing your retraining?

(60) After your retraining, what did you do to build your career in Canada?

(Steps toward current employment… see next section)

V. Current Employment.

(61) Could you tell me about the circumstances that led you to your present work life? --The nature of your employment.

(62) How do you feel about your current job? Could you tell me the things you like and/or dislike about your current employment?

(63) How does the employment you hold now compare to the employment you held prior to moving to Canada?

(64) How important is your vocational life in your total new life in Canada? How does your work life affect your personal and family life here?

(65) Do you feel a sense of vocational and career identity from your current employment experience in Canada? Why or why not?

(66) Do you feel that some of your qualifications (e.g., hard and soft skills) or strengths are not
being used in your work-life? For example, do you have skills that are not used in your job? What needs to change for your skills to be better utilized? (e.g. actions you can take, actions your employer or the system can take)

(67) Overall, what factors have been the most influential in helping you to succeed in your career development within Canada? What factors have made your career life difficult?

(68) Have any factors challenged your beliefs that you could succeed in your career/work-life?
(69) How satisfied do you feel about your career/work-life experience in Canada?

(70) Consider your life as it has turned out until now, how much of an element of choice has there been? For example, is the job you do a chosen vocation or more or less the result of a series of chance events? Are there any aspects of your life that are the result of a considered choice?

(71) What has the role of chance been in your life and career in Canada? What did you do in response to chance events?

a) How do you feel about the chance events in your life?

(72) What are some of your main concerns and needs about your future worklife in Canada? How do you feel about your future vocational development prospects in Canada, and why do you feel this way?

(73) Do you intend or expect to pursue any additional retraining in the future? Why or why not? What type?

(74) What will you intend to do to improve the quality of your work-life and to enhance your career development in Canada?

(75) Anticipate your vocational direction 5 years from now.
    a) How have your career priorities changed?

(76) What are some of the most important career-related lessons you learned and looking back, is there anything that you would have done differently?