A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF CAREER RESILIENCY IN PROFESSIONAL IMMIGRANTS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study endeavored to interview professional immigrants in order to better understand the adjustment and career-related challenges that professional immigrants encounter when they immigrate to Canada and pursue educational retraining. The main purpose of the study was to explore retraining decisions and outcomes and uncover the factors that influence career resiliency amongst professional immigrants.

It was discovered that most professional immigrants have a desirable pre-immigration career and come to Canada to provide a better standard of living for themselves and/or their children. Professional immigrants often expect that they will be able to continue in their vocational field after arriving in Canada with little or no retraining. Unfortunately, most professional immigrants encounter significant initial career barriers such as discrimination, a lack of social networks, and non-recognition of
foreign education and work experience. These barriers often lead to issues such as unemployment, under-employment, unfair treatment, psychological distress and a reduced standard of living. To help cope with these difficulties, most professional immigrants rely on social support and personal actions. In particular, encountered career challenges often prompt professional immigrants to adopt educational retraining as a career-enhancing strategy. The specific retraining experiences and career outcomes of participants were explored and discussed in detail.

In summary, some participants were able to re-establish a career in Canada that was as satisfying as their pre-immigration career, however, most participants were unable to establish a career that is equivalent to their pre-Canadian career status. A number of participants even found themselves’ unemployed or grossly under-employed despite living in Canada for at least six years and having completed retraining. Overall, participants in this study represented a wide range of experiences which served to guide the formation of a new theoretical model for career resiliency. In addition to accounting for the influence of individual, relational and contextual factors, the newly presented Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency accounts for the influence of relative comparisons, which were found to influence participant’s attitudes, perceptions and coping abilities. The important implications for theory, policy and practice are discussed. Suggestions for future research on career resiliency are also made.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Work life is a fundamental aspect of most people’s lives, accounting for approximately one third of our total adult life experience (Blustein, 2001a). Perhaps due to the significance of work in people’s lives, career theorists have taken an active interest in the area of career development since the field of vocational research began to bloom in the early 1900’s. Although Frank Parsons, the original founder of the career development field, was particularly interested in whether or not immigrants could find meaningful work, most career development research to date has not attempted to help fulfill any kind of a social justice mandate (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). In fact, the overwhelming majority of career development research has been conducted utilizing convenience samples, made up of mostly white middle-class undergraduate students (Stebleton, 2007). As a result, career development research has tended to largely overlook the unique experiences and career development dynamics of immigrants and/or ethnic adults (Blustein, 2001a; Bohon, Johnson & Gorman, 2006; Cahill & Martland, 1994; Lopes, 2006; McWherter, Hacket & Bandalos, 1998; Stebleton, 2007).

The narrow scope of traditional career development research, derived mainly from white middle-class individuals has caused some researchers to be quite critical of past career development research. Richardson (1993) argued that, “the absence of racial, ethnic, poor, and lower class populations in the career development literature seriously undermines any claims this literature might make to scientific validity” (p. 426).
Vocational research derived from white middle class individuals is not very applicable to understanding and/or assisting immigrant workers because the career dynamics of immigrants are often substantially different from white and/or native born workers.

Research based on white middle class individuals may not take into account the impact that cultural values have on one’s career development. Although personality variables and individual interests have historically been recognized as the predominant factors that influence career development, cultural and familial values are also known to shape career development by influencing one’s motivations, assumptions, beliefs and worldviews (Euvrard, 1996; Lingxin & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Lopes, 2006; Shinnar, 2007; Stebleton, 2007). For instance, exposure to Eastern collectivist ideology rather than Western individualist values is thought to affect career development by leading to differences in career motivation (Lopes, 2006). More specifically, within a collectivist culture interpersonal relationships tend to be valued over performance outcomes, and this may uniquely influence career choice and work behaviour. As Stebleton (2007) contended, “Western career development theories based on individualism have limited applicability because they undermine contextual factors, such as family and community” (p.295).

Aside from the influence of unique values on their career development, immigrants may also face the unique challenge of navigating between two sets of cultural values, norms and expectations. The process of trying to maintain one’s cultural traditions and expectations, while adopting the norms of the new culture is an experience that is uniquely challenging and stressful for new immigrants. The unique experience of being caught between two sets of cultural values has been called “the challenge of
straddling both worlds”, and highlights the fact that immigrants must often decide on the extent to which they want to assimilate into a new culture (Gomez, Fassinger, Prosser, Cooke & Mejia, 2001, p.291).

The stressful process of assimilating or adopting the dominant values and norms of a newly encountered culture is known as “acculturation” (Bhagat & London, 1999, p.353). The high level of stress encountered during acculturation is thought to have a significant impact on the career development of immigrants (Bhagat & London, 1999; Gomez et al., 2001; McWherter et al., 1998; Shinnar, 2007). For example, immigrants may be at a vocational disadvantage because they may have difficulty comprehending and adjusting to new cultural workplace norms and expectations. As Bhagat and London (1999) suggested, “immigrants might experience difficulty in establishing effective mentor-protégé relationships because of their somewhat incomplete and slower rates of learning and understanding the organizational culture” (p.356). As a result of this cultural-social disconnect, immigrants may often have difficulty developing the social connections that are often crucial to career advancement or progression amongst many domestic employees.

Since encountering new values and workplace norms and adapting to a new culture can impact on career development, career research derived from domestic workers is not very applicable to immigrant workers (Parker, Hagan & Dinovitzer, 2003). Aside from having to adapt to a new culture, immigrant workers may also encounter a number of other unique difficulties and experiences that can impact upon and/or create barriers to their career development. Swanson and Woitke (1997) identified career barriers as “events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment,
that make career progress difficult” (p. 434). Aside from acculturation stress and dealing with competing values, immigrants are known to frequently face several other barriers, such as communicating in a new language, not having their credentials recognized, feeling pressured to undergo re-training and financial difficulties (Bhagat & London, 1999; Blustein, 2001a; Bohon, 2006; Gomez et al., 2001; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Lopes, 2006; Shinnar, 2007).

Over 95% of new immigrants perceive learning or improving their ability to speak English to be an important issue (Statistics Canada, 2005). Perhaps this is largely because immigrants who encounter challenges such as language barriers are particularly disadvantaged within the workplace. For instance, unfamiliarity or lack of proficiency with a language creates career challenges because immigrants may have difficulty communicating in the dominant language and they may not be able to effectively convey their level of knowledge and skill (Chen, 2008; Shinnar, 2007). Immigrants may also have difficulty connecting socially. As a result, language barriers could make immigrants less appealing to potential employers. Difficulty comprehending new cultural workplace norms may further heighten social disconnectedness and disadvantages for immigrants. Shinnar (2007) described how a lack of interpersonal connectedness with potential employers or supervisors can lead to subtle forms of discrimination. This can pose huge challenges for many immigrants because employers often remain unwilling to hire or promote them, thus stifling their career development.

Immigrants may also encounter career setbacks as a result of not having their credentials recognized in the new country (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). In Canada many skilled labour immigrants become frustrated as a result of expecting that their skills
are needed and then encountering a very lengthy formal credential recognition process (Statistics Canada, 2005). Therefore, even highly skilled immigrants often encounter vocational roadblocks that hinder their career advancement. Problems with foreign credential recognition are exacerbated by the fact that there is not a unified system of accreditation in Canada.

Aside from issues with credential recognition, immigrants are also often faced with the discounting of their foreign work experience (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). The inability to have foreign credentials or work experience recognized often leads to unemployment and underemployment amongst newcomers in Canada. Finding ways to better facilitate credential and work experience recognition is important because it directly impacts upon the successful integration of immigrants within Canada and determines the degree to which immigrants either contribute to or depend on society (Statistics Canada, 2005).

The pervasive issue of underemployment amongst immigrants has been referred to in the literature as “brain waste” (Shinnaoui & Narchal, 2010, p.423). Non-recognition of foreign credentials and/or work experience can occur as a result of accreditation agencies having difficulty assessing the credibility or equivalency of foreign institutions and/or the limited transferability of previously established credentials (Statistics Canada, 2005). Underemployment of immigrants can also result from employer ignorance, bias and discrimination (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). For instance, Shinnaoui and Narchal (2010) found that employers often utilize “foreignness of credentials” as a way to rationalize decisions to not hire or promote immigrant workers (p. 428).

A lack of career progression as a result of discriminatory hiring and management
practices is known as the “glass ceiling effect” (Shinnar, 2007, p.342). Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) referred to the glass ceiling as: “a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy” (p.200). Aside from highlighting the existence of discriminatory practices, the issue of immigrant underemployment is a concern because immigrants’ economic and psychological well-being depends largely upon their economic integration. An inability to successfully integrate into a new country’s labour market can lead to unmet expectations, disappointment, career disadvantage, and financial stress.

Financial constraints are often a significant source of stress for many immigrants. Aside from having negative effects on career development, difficulty obtaining employment can lead to financial hardship and even poverty. Statistics Canada (2005) reported that 14% of newly arrived immigrants had no family income, while 50% of newly arrived immigrants with a family income earned less than $1600 month (p.22). In addition, for those immigrants who manage to enter the workforce, there has been a trend towards declining earnings amongst immigrants (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Frenette & Morisette, 2003; Picot & Sweetman, 2005; Reitz, 2007a). More specifically, it was estimated that immigrants in Canada have endured a 20% decline in earnings since the 1970’s (Reitz, 2007b). Financial problems can impact upon career development by heightening concerns over job security. Quite often immigrants may end up making decisions to not switch jobs out of fear of losing one’s position and/or benefits, thus stifling their career development (Shinnar, 2007).

On the flip side, an inability to locate employment in one’s own field, along with mounting financial concerns, may lead many immigrants to pursue retraining (Adamuti-
Trache, 2011; Remennick & Shakhar, 2003; Rhone, 2007; Schwarzwald & Shoham, 1981). Although between the years 2000 and 2001, 90% of skilled worker immigrants in Canada found employment within the first two years of their arrival, only 48% were able to obtain employment within their intended occupation (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Perhaps as a result of not finding desired work, within six months in Canada, approximately two-thirds of new immigrants initiate plans to pursue further education (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Pursuing post-secondary education may be an important strategy for immigrants to attempt to overcome difficulty obtaining employment within their field; however, educational re-training is a pursuit fraught with many challenges. These challenges often begin with trying to gain access or acceptance into an educational or training program. For instance, up to 42% of new immigrants reported having difficulty accessing education or training in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005). Most of these difficulties are related to either language barriers or financial constraints.

Even when immigrants successfully enroll in some form of re-training, they often still face difficulties such as the cost of tuition, language barriers, time constraints and personal issues associated with having to adapt to a new culture. After documenting the challenges faced by Russian professional immigrants pursuing social work retraining in Israel, Gorbatova and Eaglstein (1998) concluded that: “in order to gain full educational benefit from the retraining process idiosyncratic issues related to being an immigrant must be given full attention” (p.250). The barriers faced by immigrants not only influence decisions to retrain, barriers also impact on the retraining and career process itself by affecting individual goals, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Lent et al.,
Statement of the Problem

In attempting to understand educational choices and career development, vocational research has traditionally focused on internal factors, such as self-aptitudes and aspirations. However, for immigrants, a choice to modify one’s career path is often prompted by economic and social factors that are external to the individual (Krau, 1981). For such individuals, assessment of available opportunities has replaced tradition and/or personal preferences as the basis on which career choice evolves (Clausen, 1991). This means that for immigrants, the opportunity structure supersedes individual characteristics as the main determinant of career development (McWherter et al., 1998).

The career choices of immigrants are uniquely influenced by factors such as traditional values, acculturation, language barriers, discrimination, credential discounting, financial constraints and external pressures to seek professional retraining. As a result of these unique experiences and barriers, traditional career research that is derived from white middle-class individuals and focused on internal factors, is not reasonably applicable to immigrants. Since career barriers can have a significant impact on one’s career development, career theory and research that aims to be applicable to immigrants must consider the unique challenges faced by immigrants.

Unfortunately, there is a relative lack of research that has examined the career dynamics of immigrants (Cahill & Martland, 1994; Coleman & Barker, 1992; Counsell, 1999; Lopes, 2006; Parker et al., 2003; Stebleton, 2004). Although career development theories have increasingly examined career change patterns, most career development research has not adequately accounted for “environmentally induced career change
patterns” (Grzeda, 1999, p.305). The issue with a general lack of career research with immigrants is further compounded by the fact that the limited pool of career research with immigrants that does exist often lumps foreign-born immigrants with domestic born children of immigrants (Parker et al., 2003). The relative lack of vocational research specific to immigrants, alongside the fact that foreign born workers encounter very unique barriers and experiences compared to native born workers, means that the currently available pool of research poses problems for anyone hoping to effectively understand and/or assist new immigrant workers with vocational problems and/or career development.

The overall lack of research on the career dynamics of foreign born workers is particularly concerning in Canada, where research has been limited despite the fact that immigration is actively promoted because it is considered essential for continued nation growth. Between 2001 and 2006, over one million immigrants were admitted to Canada and this number continues to increase significantly with each passing decade (Statistics Canada, 2009). As a result, in the coming years most of Canada’s labour force will be comprised of foreign born workers. In fact, 70% of the growth in the labour force over the last decade was the result of immigrants beginning work in Canada and this number is expected to rise in future years (Vu, 2003). Furthermore, within Canada nearly one in five workers is born outside of the country (Statistics Canada, 2003). In Ontario, the province with the highest percentage of foreign born workers, 29.1% of workers are foreign born and this number is expected to continue to rise (Vu, 2003).

The specific demographic characteristics of immigrants to Canada are also rapidly changing. In recent years, due to policy changes that reflect Canada’s emphasis on highly
skilled workers, a rising proportion of immigrants possess a university degree. In particular, the proportion of immigrants arriving with a university degree rose from 10% in 1980, to 18% in 1990 and then to 44% in 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2005). By 2006, the proportion of immigrants who possessed a university degree rose to more than 50%. This means that recent immigrants are now more than twice as likely than native-born Canadians to have a university education (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The new wave of professional immigrants was expected to increase the proportion of immigrants entering Canada’s workforce, however, a 2001 census study revealed that within six months of their arrival, only 44% of all immigrants had entered the workforce (Statistics Canada, 2005). Although the number of total immigrants who entered the workforce within the first two years rose dramatically to nearly 80%, only 42% were able to obtain a job in their intended occupation. Amongst skilled-worker applicants, the proportion who successfully secured employment in their intended field within two years of arrival was only slightly higher at 48%. Therefore, even most highly skilled professional immigrants are unable to obtain employment in their intended occupation. As a result, many immigrants who arrive in Canada with a foreign degree seek retraining in order to re-establish and/or upgrade their credentials.

Retraining offers immigrants the potential to upgrade their credentials and more successfully re-integrate into the Canadian labour force. Retraining can therefore be thought of as an important career-enhancing strategy and a marker of career resiliency. Unfortunately, of the two-thirds of immigrants who pursue retraining in Canada, approximately 42% encounter difficulties such as locating appropriate institutions, tuition costs and language barriers (Statistics Canada, 2005). These difficulties are important to
understand because they may interfere with one’s ability to access and/or successfully complete a re-training program and successfully reintegrate into the Canadian workforce.

Although it is important to understand the factors that affect successful retraining, very few studies have specifically investigated the retraining experiences of professional immigrants (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998). Research examining the retraining experiences of new professional immigrants appears to be even more limited within Canada. As a result, little is known about the specific factors that affect immigrant retraining choices and outcomes in Canada. In addition, no specific vocational model seems to have been constructed in order to explain how despite pervasive challenges, some immigrants are able to benefit from career retraining as a life-long learning opportunity along the path towards their cultural and career adjustment within their new country.

Current research on the retraining experiences of new immigrants, along with research examining the career and adjustment barriers they face is important in order to help inform public policy and create effective intervention programs to assist immigrants to successfully overcome the barriers they encounter after arriving in Canada. Without relevant research to guide effective intervention programs, immigrants may be left unaided to deal with the impact of encountered issues such as acculturation stress, language barriers, discrimination, credential barriers and employment and retraining difficulties. These challenges are not only detrimental to the well-being and/or career development of immigrants, they also pose problems for countries and organizations meant to benefit from immigration.
Immigration has the potential to greatly benefit our country because immigrants can help fulfill labour shortages, enhance international trade and increase economic activity (Shinnaoui & Narchal, 2010). However, when immigrants have difficulty entering the labour market, these benefits are not fully realized. Without research on the challenges faced by immigrants, organizations will be ill equipped to attract, retain and effectively support immigrant workers. Without knowledge of the career dynamics of immigrants, organizations will also have increased difficulty with employee turnover, low moral and incidents requiring intervention (Lopes, 2006). Therefore, ongoing research is needed to help increase our understanding of the experiences encountered by new immigrants as they attempt to navigate the Canadian workforce. Ignoring this important and growing segment of Canadian society has consequences for individuals, organizations and the entire country as a whole. Furthermore, in order for counsellors to effectively assist immigrants with employment difficulties and/or decisions, it is necessary to have a solid understanding of the current unique experiences, influences and barriers that immigrants face along their career development journey.

**Overview of all Chapters to Follow**

The next chapter (chapter two) is a literature review and will discuss past research on both general career development and topics pertaining more specifically to the career development of immigrants. Chapter three will then provide an overview of the methodology utilized for the current study. For organizational purposes, the results of the current study will be broken down and presented in six separate chapters, chapters four to nine. Finally, chapter ten will summarize and discuss the study’s findings and present a theoretical model to account for the results. Chapter ten will also point out the strengths
and weaknesses of the study and make suggestions regarding policy, practice and future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is broken down into several parts and begins by providing a historical overview of general career development research. Theoretical concepts pertaining to career development will be introduced in order to explain how career development is thought to evolve. Emerging trends in career development research will be highlighted, along with a discussion about how traditional research, with its focus on internal factors, fails to fully explain the career dynamics of immigrants. The Career Life-Path Model and Social Cognitive Theory will be introduced in order to help provide an organizational framework for understanding the complexity of career development. Then, a review of more recent research, which examines the impact of relational and contextual determinants of career development, will follow. The impact that contextual barriers and relative deprivation have on the lives and careers of immigrants will be highlighted and the role of retraining will also be discussed. Finally, research on resiliency will be discussed in the context of the career development of professional immigrants.

Introducing the ‘Career’ Concept

Work has a critical and complex role in the everyday lives of most humans. In trying to illuminate the important meaning of work in people’s lives, scholars have used the term ‘career’ to describe experiences related to one’s work life. Patton and McMahon (2006) defined ‘career’ as: “the variety of occupational roles which individuals will undertake throughout life” (p.4). Chen (1998) described ‘career’ as: “a lifestyle consisting of a sequence of work or leisure activities throughout one’s lifetime” (p.438). Although the exact meaning of ‘career’ has varied slightly between scholars and has
changed significantly over time, the term tends to be used primarily to describe work roles and experiences, and usually includes pre-occupational, occupational and post-occupational stages in one’s lifelong work journey (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

Over the years, the notion of ‘career’ has been largely reserved for middle class individuals in professional occupations. In response, the term has been criticized as a limited concept that serves to perpetuate middle class bias and ideology (Blustein, 2001b; Richardson, 1993). To help broaden the term and make it more widely applicable, Richardson (1993) suggested that we define the term ‘career’ as: “human activity that is initiated for individual success and satisfaction, to express achievement and strivings, to earn a living… to further ambitions and self-assertions… and to link individuals to the larger social good” (p.428). Following this line of thought, the career concept has increasingly become broader and more inclusive of the various experiences and roles that humans encounter along their entire life journey. More often today, “instead of viewing career as a narrowly defined, isolated work-related aspect only in one’s life, career is seen as an integral, active, and essential component in a person’s life” (Chen, 1998b, p.439).

Despite the important impact that careers have on human experience, personal identity and on people’s construction of life-meaning, work-life has been a relatively neglected aspect of human behaviour that has not received sufficient research attention (Axelrod, 1999). This chapter will demonstrate that, despite its existence for more than a century, the career development field is still largely in its preliminary stages (Patton & McMahon, 2006). In particular, most career development research to date has been based on the experiences of white middle class individuals and has focused on internal individual factors that shape career development. As a result, traditional research is
largely inadequate for describing the career development of immigrants. In order to accurately and comprehensively describe the full range of potential career development experiences and influences, career theories need to capture not just individual, but also relational and contextual factors. Research that explicitly examines external factors and the unique career experiences of immigrants has only recently started to emerge (Chen, 2008).

Career Development: Laying a Theoretical Foundation

Originating with the work of Frank Parsons in the early 1900’s, the vocational development field began with a focus on how career choice is influenced by individual characteristics (O’Brien, 2001). Parson’s (1909) early focus on congruence between individual and workplace factors led to person-environment-fit theories, which emphasized how the degree of alignment between individuals and their workplace determines the successfulness of career outcomes (Sekiguchi, 2004). For example, Holland’s Personality Typology Theory proposed that both individuals and workplaces can be typified according to certain characteristics (e.g., ‘artistic’) and that a high degree of congruence between the individual and his/her workplace is thought to lead to greater career satisfaction, achievement and stability (Holland, 1959).

Although theories such as Holland’s have received a lot of empirical attention and support over the years, person-environment-fit theories have been criticized as being too static due to their focus on relatively stable aspects of individual and workplace characteristics (Sekiguchi, 2004). In response to a need for a more dynamic approach, career theories that focused on the stages and processes of career development began to emerge (Patton & McMahon, 2006). These newer developmental theories became
increasingly comprehensive and/or complex. While many early developmental approaches still focused on individual disposition, they also started to consider more dynamic factors, such as cognition and learning. Over time, instead of narrowly focusing only on relatively stable dispositional traits and interests, career development theories became embedded within a broader life context, where the concept of ‘career’ became integrated with other aspects of life such as leisure and recreation. In addition, more recent developmental approaches to career theory tend to emphasize that careers are often altered in response to both internal characteristics and external pressures and thus better describe the fluid nature of careers (Chen, 1998b).

One such developmental approach is the ‘lifecareer’ concept, which has been used to reframe the once fairly static concept of ‘career’ into a more dynamic ‘lifestyle’ concept that involves both work and leisure activities across the lifespan (Chen, 1998b, p.440). From this perspective, one’s career is no longer simply a reflection of one’s job or occupation, but encompasses the various ongoing roles and experiences that people may encounter over their lifetime, as well as their self-perceptions of those experiences and their future intentions. A lifecareer perspective is thought to more accurately capture the full meaning of ‘career’ in one’s life because, “the labour market is one of many arenas in which people function and from which they may derive satisfaction and a combination of work, learning, leisure, relationships, etc. is likely more important to an individual’s satisfaction with life than any single dimension” (Cahill & Martland, 1994, p.313).

In line with a lifecareer perspective, Super’s (1980) Life-span, Life-space Career Development Theory described how individuals play various roles (e.g., worker, spouse etc.) within a variety of domains, such as the home, workplace or community. In response
to both individual and situational variables, roles often change over the life-span and overlap and/or interact with various life domains. As a result, roles manifest uniquely across individuals. According to this view, the complex blending of various roles at any given time reflects one’s ‘life-style’, while the sequential adoption of various roles makes up the ‘life cycle’ (Super, 1980, p. 288). Super’s (1979) Vocational Maturity Model also suggests that a person’s life career is shaped by movement through several development stages, including growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline (Super & Kidd, 1979). Furthermore, decision points along these stages largely determine the trajectory of both the ‘life-style’ and the ‘life-cycle’.

The concept of career decision points highlights the important role of human agency in career development. Human agency has been thought of as the capacity of individuals to direct the course of their own life through purposeful action and involves qualities such as self-awareness, forethought, intention, self-regulation and action (Bandura, 2001). Within a career context, the concept of human agency has been used to help explain the capacity of individuals to make choices and take actions in response to encountered vocational barriers and opportunities (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Confidence in one’s ability to effectively carry out tasks related to career decisions has been called “career decision-making self-efficacy” (Metz, Fouad, & Ihle-Helledy, 2009, p. 198). The notion of ‘self-efficacy’ is vital to the concept of human agency because “self-efficacy is considered part of the core foundation and mechanisms that enable people to exercise human agency” (Chen, 2006, p.132).

In addition to a developmental lifespan perspective that emphasizes concepts such as human agency and self-efficacy, many recent views on career development have also
adopted a constructivist approach, where career paths are seen as contextually (rather than just individually) situated. A constructivist approach to career development theory corresponds well to the increasingly more inclusive use of the term ‘career’, discussed above. Following a constructivist perspective, “careers do not exist in the objective sense that jobs or occupations do, rather they are created by individuals” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p.5). Therefore, careers are the meanings that people construct out of the daily roles that he/she performs and are based on personal perceptions and attitudes, as well as social exchanges. Career development theory is largely an attempt to understand and describe such meanings and the ways in which career pathways are shaped.

The discussed changes in career development theory over time have been further complicated by recent rapid changes in educational and vocational trends. For example, in Canada, the last decade has been marked by a significant increase in post secondary enrollment, spurred on by the relatively new knowledge economy (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). In Canada’s knowledge economy, there is a higher demand for a university education and Canadians often have to alter their career paths accordingly in order to ensure vocational success.

Along with changing educational trends, globalization, corporate downsizing and rapid advancements in technology have also led to significant changes in Canada’s labour market. For instance, there are now less jobs available within the manufacturing sector, while there has been employment growth in the service and technology sector (Bernard, 2009). Most fields have also seen an increase in temporary and part-time work, with a decrease in permanent full-time jobs (Cahill & Martland, 1994). To help cope with these changes, workers have increasingly taken on varied roles within a variety of settings. The
overall composition of Canada’s workforce has also changed in response to changes in immigration policy. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of foreign born workers. In fact, most of the growth in Canada’s labour force is now the result of new immigrants entering the workforce (Vu, 2003).

The rapid changes within education and the labour market have led individuals to experience increasingly varied and ever-changing career development paths (Cahill & Martland, 1994). While just a few decades ago significant mid-career changes were considered noteworthy and uncommon, today career change has become routine. The increasing tendency towards more frequent career changes, and heightened job instability, has been particularly pronounced for visible minorities and individuals with lower educational attainments (Marcotte, 1999).

The recent increase in rapid shifts in people’s career paths has been referred to as “career pandemonium” (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larsson, 1996, p.53). This concept refers to the changing structure of careers that has occurred as a result of factors such as globalization and the knowledge economy. In particular, rapid changes in technology, globalization and corporate downsizing have led to individuals experiencing ongoing environmentally-imposed changes in their career trajectory. As Chen (1998b) pointed out:

Parallel to the unprecedented structural changes in human work-life such as the coming of the information age, high technology and globalization, people are experiencing a profound epistemological expansion and enrichment of defining and redefining the meaning of career development in their fast-changing vocational life (p. 437).
Therefore, rather than invoking ‘low person-environment-fit’, as the reason for career change, sources of environmental turbulence, such as restrictive economic trends, are being increasingly recognized as precipitating career change (Grzeda, 1999, p.305).

Career development theory has attempted to keep pace with rapidly changing vocational trends, however, “the broadening of the concept of career development has far outpaced the development of theory to account for it” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p.3). Therefore, even though rapid changes in the labour market have been observed and acknowledged to be impacting on people’s career development, research that seeks to understand the impact of these changes has lagged behind (Grzeda, 1999). For example, even though it has now become increasingly recognized that social and cultural context have a profound impact on career development, “little is known about the overlap between work and relational experiences” (Blustein, 2001b, p.179).

This chapter will now discuss how there has been a relatively recent shift away from exclusively examining internal determinants of career development towards a greater consideration of external relational and contextual factors. Then, in order to provide an overview of what is currently known about career development, the research on individual factors related to career development will be examined, before moving on to more recent research, which focuses on relational and contextual factors. As will become apparent, clearly separating individual, relational, sociopolitical and contextual influences is not a very pragmatic task. Individual, relational, sociopolitical and contextual factors are often inter-related. In addition, the more external factors, such as encountered barriers, become relevant, the more individual factors, such as human agency and human resiliency, become important. Ultimately, career development is
shaped by a complex multitude of internal and external factors and the subsequent separation of these factors only serves as an organizational framework for this chapter.

*Career Development: From Individual Towards Social-Contextual Influences*

As mentioned above, career development research was traditionally conducted from the vantage point of the individual, exploring the effect that internal individual variables, such as personality traits, competencies and characteristics have on career development (Stebleton, 2007). Individual variables are comprised of one’s individual characteristics and/or personality traits or dispositions (Gomez et al., 2001). Examples of individual variables that have been explored in the career development literature include competence, self-efficacy, expectation for achievement, motivation, goals and personal resiliency. Although each of these individual variables warrants consideration because of their significant impact on career development, career development is a complex process involving a multitude of factors, not narrowly confined to individual variables alone. Aside from important individual variables there are equally important contextual and relational variables that also exert a significant impact on career development.

Since the rise of career development research in the early 1900’s, over time there seems to have been a gradual shift from a narrow individual focus towards consideration of some of the complex contextual and relational factors which also impact on career development. This shift has been paralleled by a similar trend within the broader field of psychology, where in the last few decades there has been an increasing tendency towards recognizing the central role of context, relationships and relational strivings in human behaviour (Blustein, 2001). Although the importance of social context has been increasingly considered in relation to mental health and well-being, the role of social
context has only very recently started to be considered in relation to career development (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). In fact, career research has traditionally either overlooked the role of social context or viewed social influences in a negative light, whereby being influenced by others has been regarded as dependency or a failure to follow personal vocational strivings (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, Devoy, & DeWine 2005; Palladino-Schultheiss, Kress & Manzi, 2001). Stebleton (2004) referred to the lack of consideration given to non-individual factors such as family, community and the environment as “the marginalization of contextual factors” (p.20).

Because the impact of social context on career development has only recently been acknowledged, research examining contextual and relational influences on career development, particularly the career development of immigrants, is relatively sparse (Ali, Martens, Button & Larma, 2011; Blustein, 2001; Coleman & Barker, 1992; Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2002; Richardson, 1993). The lack of research in this area led Blustein (2001) to conclude that, “exploratory research that can identify the full gamut of relational domains that are relevant in the work domain would seem critical to advancing the knowledge base” (p.184).

Fortunately over the past decade or so, career research has began responding to this need by increasingly acknowledging the important influence that contextual and relational variables have on career development. For instance, relational support, especially during times of transition, is now seen as important in helping to foster healthy career development (Ali et al., 2011; Blustein, 2001; Blustein et al., 2005; Phillips et al., 2001; Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2001). In addition, contextual barriers, such as language barriers and/or discrimination are now known to significantly alter the course of
one’s career progression (Bhagat & London, 1999). Due to socio-cultural factors, such as uneven distribution of wealth, contextual and relational influences on career development are especially salient for individuals from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Blustein, 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Shinnar, 2007).

In noticing that traditional career research, focusing almost exclusively on individual influences, within white middle-class individuals, does not adequately account for the career development paths of immigrants, researchers began to look for career models that could better account for the overall experiences and career development of immigrants and/or ethnic minorities. One such model, the Career Life-path Model, is centered on the self but describes how during the career development process an individual navigates through and is influenced by equally important cultural and contextual variables, such as family background (Gomez et al., 2001).

*The Career Life-Path Model & Social Cognitive Career Theory*

The career life-path is influenced by a mixture of both individual and contextual influences (Gomez et al., 2001; Shinnar, 2007). The dimension relating to the self includes factors such as one’s personal characteristics, life-purpose, roles and gender and/or ethnic identity etc. Contextual influences can be broken down into relational/cultural, socio-political and immediate contextual factors. The relational/cultural dimension involves one’s values as influenced by culture and family, familial career aspirations, and the impact of relational influences. Sociopolitical influences include sub-cultural and/or ethnic or community experiences, political movements and economic realities that one encounters. The immediate context is comprised of the barriers, opportunities, and resources one is presented with and the
coping skills that one employs (Gomez et al., 2001).

The Career Life-Path Model is highly interactive and dynamic because, instead of just describing how individual characteristics and personal preferences shape career development, the model describes how during the career development journey the self constantly interacts with one’s immediate context, which is continually being shaped by relational, cultural and sociopolitical influences (Gomez et al., 2001). Within this framework, the career life-path can be understood as a reflection of the self operating within one’s immediate context, where both the self and context are influenced significantly by culture, relational influences and socioeconomic conditions. The model is useful for understanding the complexity of career development and conceptualizing how several characteristics both within the individual and within one’s environment interact to exert effects on career development.

The Career Life-Path Model is similar to Lent, Brown and Hackett’s (1994; 2000) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which explained career development by outlining how cognitive (e.g., aspirations & expectations), person (e.g., ethnic background) and contextual (e.g., relationships & barriers) variables interact to determine career choices. Historically, career theory and research have focused on cognitive components (e.g., interests, aspirations & expectations) and have largely overlooked relational and other contextual factors that shape career development (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000). Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizes how career development is determined by both objective and perceived environmental, social and behavioural factors. The degree of influence that an objective factor has on one’s career development outcome depends partly on the way that an individual interprets and responds to external
events. Therefore, although externally situated factors (e.g., relationships, opportunities, and barriers) can facilitate or hinder career development, personal agency moderates the precise impact of various variables. Because Social Cognitive Career Theory simultaneously considers the role of personal factors, relational and contextual factors, this theory is considered applicable to research with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Yakushko et al., 2008).

The Career Life-Path Model and Social Cognitive Career Theory serve as a framework for this chapter, helping to navigate through the vast layers of individual, relational and other contextual variables that impact on career development. Mirroring the progression of career development research, this chapter will start with reviewing research on the impact of individual and person variables, before exploring the role of relational variables and then other contextual variables, such as encountered barriers. The dynamic interplay between the role of individual human agency and resiliency in responding to encountered social context will then be examined in order to more fully understand the unique career development dynamics of immigrants.

Understanding the Factors that Influence Career Development:

*Individual/Internally Situated Influences*

In highlighting the idea that career development is determined by a complex combination of individual characteristics and contextual and relational variables, Clausen (1991) maintained that, “the sources of successful achievement… are to be sought both in the person’s own attributes, as given at birth and developed through… socialization, and in subsequent experience of reasonably stable social and economic contexts and the absence of discrimination” (p.810). Individual attributes therefore lie at the centre of the
career life-path and are continually influenced and/or altered by experienced opportunities, challenges, and personal relationships. Some of the main individual variables that are thought to lie at the centre of career development are: level of competence, aspirations, expectations, career motivation, and personal identity.

**Competence**

Competence is characterized by traits such as self-confidence, dependability, and intellectual investment (Clausen, 1991). Generally speaking, competence involves having knowledge about one’s abilities, interests and available opportunities, the ability to understand others and the self-confidence to pursue goals. Taken together, such abilities and attributes are thought to determine an individual’s capacity to set achievable goals and realize success over the course of their development. This fairly broad and multi-layered personal characteristic has been referred to by Clausen (1991) as “planful competence” (p.811). The concept of planful competence rests primarily on an individual being dependable, intellectually invested and self-confident. Dependability is marked by responsibility and self-control, while intellectual investment refers to intelligence and coping ability, and self-confidence denotes healthy self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Clausen (1991) predicted that those who display a high degree of planful competence at an early age (adolescence) will be more successful in their career development in terms of career attainment and stability. To examine this prediction, a longitudinal study that followed five-hundred participants from high-school to middle age was conducted. The study found that adolescent dependability, intellectual investment and parent socioeconomic status are the most significant predictors of educational attainment and career stability for men (Clausen, 1991). Interestingly, the association
between planful competence and career attainment was not as strong for women because most women in the study had dedicated themselves to family and had less participation in the labour force as a result. Therefore, even though planful competence may play a key role in influencing many people’s educational and career development (e.g., white middle class men), contextual variables, such as values and/or social class, can significantly alter the impact of individual competence by changing one’s life circumstances (Parker et al., 2003).

The notion that context can change the importance of personal characteristics, is particularly relevant to immigrants and ethnic minorities, who often face unique circumstances that affect their career development. While Clausen (1991) acknowledged that contextual and relational variables can alter the impact of competence on career development, the longitudinal study from which Clausen drew his work from did not include a multicultural sample (not surprising considering the study began in the 1950’s) or consider ethnic differences in terms of the impact of planful competence. Cross-cultural research investigating the relevancy of planful competence across different ethnicities is therefore needed in order to understand the importance of planful competence for ethnic minorities.

Aspirations & Expectations

Although cross-cultural research does not appear to have been done in order to consider ethnic differences in terms of the impact of planful competence on career development, recent research has examined ethnic differences in career aspirations and expectations. Aspirations, which are people’s abstract hopes for the future, are often shaped by individuals’ values (Metz et al., 2009). In contrast, expectations are the more
realistic self-appraisals of what individuals actually expect to achieve and are more heavily influenced by contextual barriers, such as a lack of educational opportunities (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995). Outcome expectations are also influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, which involve self-perceptions regarding one’s internal capabilities (Yakushko, 2008).

According to Status Socialization Theory, career success amongst individuals is dependent on the individual’s belief that success is desirable and attainable (Bohon et al., 2006). What is considered ‘attainable’ may be influenced by both self-efficacy beliefs and external opportunities or barriers. Therefore, aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs and expectations interact to influence career outcomes, whereby career progression is largely dependent on an individual thinking that pursuing higher education and/or career goals is personally desirable, self-suitable, realistic and/or attainable.

Research on the influence of aspirations and expectations is highly relevant to career research with immigrants because, although aspirations have been shown to be relatively comparable between immigrant and domestic born workers, expectations are known to be significantly different (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995). In particular, several studies have reported that although many ethnic minorities have high aspirations (often higher than the aspirations of white domestic born workers) their expectations tend to be alarmingly low (Arbona & Novi, 1991; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Fouad & Byers-Winston, 2005; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Metz et al., 2009). The noted difference between ethnic individuals’ aspirations and expectations has been referred to as “the career aspirations-expectations discrepancy” (Metz et al., 2009, p.157).

The aspirations-expectations discrepancy amongst ethnic minorities has often
been attributed to a lowering of expectations in response to cultural and contextual barriers that are often faced by ethnic minorities (Bohon et al., 2006; Fouad & Byers-Winston, 2005; Metz et al., 2009). The process where aspirations and expectations are shaped by experience has been labeled “habitus”, which varies according to one’s minority status and is thought to be the cumulated effect of past experience in the form of class socialization (Bohon et al., 2006, p.208). The notion that aspirations and expectations can be negatively affected by contextual barriers is concerning because high aspirations and expectations are thought to be crucial to healthy career development. For instance, in referring to differences amongst adolescents in terms of career aspirations and expectations Clausen (1991) stated: “with drifting, the chances of a propitious landfall are diminished. All may not be lost, but those who, instead of drifting, set out with a plan will have a head start” (p.808). In support of the importance of early strong aspirations and expectations amongst youth, some studies exploring the career development of successful minority women found that successful professionals tend to find their calling and/or plan their career development as young adults (Gomez et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997).

Although expectations and aspirations are thought to be central to career development, few studies had considered ethnic differences in expectations and aspirations until the last decade or so. Studies that had previously examined such variations tended to only examine differences between Caucasians and African Americans (e.g., Hout & Morgan, 1975; Richie et al., 1997). Studying differences in aspirations and expectations is important because of the concern that lower expectations often lead to lower educational and career attainments amongst ethnic minorities and/or
immigrants (Metz et al., 2009).

Research that examines how the aspirations and expectations of different ethnic minorities are affected by contextual and/or relational influences is also important because this research can help to guide more effective interventions for improving educational attainments amongst ethnic minorities (Bohon et al., 2006). Proactive measures to help identify discrepancies between aspirations and expectations may be valuable because discrepancies are thought to lead to career indecision and reduced career self-efficacy (Patton & Creed, 2007).

In response to these concerns, several recent studies have examined ethnic differences in aspirations and expectations across ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Latinos and Mexicans (Arbona & Novi, 1991; Bohon et al., 2006; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Fouad & Byers-Winston, 2005; Metz et al., 2009). Cheng and Stark (2002) concluded that Asian Americans have the highest career aspirations, while Hispanic Americans have the lowest and Caucasians and African Americans fall somewhere in between. In contrast, Fouad and Byers-Winston (2005) concluded that there are not significant differences in career aspirations across various ethnic groups, only differences in expectations. These researchers found that ethnic minorities tend to have lower career expectations due to an expectation that they will encounter fewer opportunities and more barriers in their career journey. Fouad and Byers-Winston (2005) postulated that lowered expectations affect career development by limiting career choices.

In addition to differences in career aspirations and expectations across ethnic groups, research has also uncovered gender differences in career aspirations. Patton and Creed (2007) found that career aspirations and expectations differed by age for females,
but did not differ by age for males. To further complicate the picture, gender differences do not appear to be uniform across ethnic groups. For instance, Arbona and Novi (1991) found gender differences in career aspirations amongst European American and Mexican American students, but no gender differences amongst African American students.

After noticing that most research tends to make large generalizations in terms of ethnic groups, Bohon et al. (2006) conducted a study that differentiated Hispanic Americans into more specific ethnic sub-groups. In particular, these researchers considered differences in aspirations and expectations amongst Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Mexican Youth residing in the United States. Interestingly, the study found significant differences between ethnic sub-groups in terms of both educational expectations and aspirations. In particular, Cubans demonstrated stronger aspirations and expectations than both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans and non-Latino whites. In addition, when socioeconomic status and academic variables were accounted for those effects disappeared for Mexicans, but not for Puerto Ricans, whose aspirations still remained very low. The significant difference between the aspirations of Cubans and Puerto Ricans highlights the importance of not following the traditional trend of lumping different Hispanic ethnicities into one homogeneous ‘Hispanic’ group (Bohon et al., 2006).

Although research has uncovered the existence of aspirations-expectations discrepancies amongst ethnic minorities and the importance of differentiating between ethnic groups, possible reasons for the discrepancy have not yet been adequately explored through research. One reason is that until quite recently, few studies had even examined the existence of differences in career aspirations and expectations amongst ethnic minorities and these studies have not tended to investigate the relative impact of potential
causes for the discrepancy (e.g., barriers faced VS. family values). As already mentioned, studies have also tended to lump multiple ethnicities together, thus making it difficult to understand the relevancy of factors such as cultural and familial background and/or sociopolitical factors. To illustrate, a recent study that specifically examined the existence of aspiration-expectation discrepancies amongst ethnic minorities used a sample that consisted of 70% European Americans and combined all non-white ethnic categories into one ‘ethnic minority’ category (Metz et al., 2009).

Due to issues such as a relative lack of research, inadequate sampling and a lack of focus on underlying causes, explanations for the aspirations-expectations discrepancy amongst ethnic minorities tends to be largely limited to educated guesses and/or assumptions. Therefore more research is still needed to better understand the relevancy of contextual barriers, family roles and cultural traditions and their impact on the aspirations and expectations of different ethnic groups.

*Career Motivation*

Although suspected causes of aspirations-expectations discrepancies amongst ethnic minorities have not yet been fully explored in the research, it does seem likely that lowered expectations can interfere with educational and/or career attainment by altering a person’s career motivation and subsequent career goals. Career motivation encompasses characteristics such as the will to complete job-related tasks, including searching for, accepting and remaining at a job (Grzeda, 1999).

According to Bhagat and London (1999), career motivation entails three dimensions: 1) insight or an unbiased understanding of the self in relation to one’s career environment, 2) identity or how one views the self, and 3) resiliency or the inner strength
that helps people to overcome barriers. A person’s insight, identity and resiliency interact to determine the shape and course of one’s career goals and the level of motivation maintained in order to reach those goals.

Contextual and/or relational influences, such as barriers faced and/or familial values, could likely impact on all three aspects of career motivation. For instance, being raised under the influence of strong traditional gender roles could lead a woman to experience a discrepancy between her aspiration to be a doctor and her expectation to stay at home and raise children. Being raised within certain cultural norms could therefore influence a person’s identity and subsequent career goals.

In addition, facing contextual barriers such as discrimination could lead some ethnic minorities to alter the way they view themselves within their environment and the extent to which this occurs seems to be mediated by one’s resiliency to overcome challenges (Bhagat & London, 1999). In particular, although barriers are often thought to impede career progression, some studies have documented how barriers can also serve to increase career motivation (Gomez, et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997). For example, Gomez et al. (2001) found that many successful Latino women were motivated by a desire to prove that they could indeed succeed, despite all odds. Richie et al. (1997) found that many of the successful black women they interviewed reported being highly motivated to overcome sexism and discrimination and succeed in their careers.

Although past research has demonstrated that career motivation is influenced by a multitude of factors such as social support, perceived challenges and job characteristics, past research has not adequately considered the differences in these influences across various ethnic populations (Lopes, 2006). When exploring the impact of career
motivation on career development it is important to consider differences across
ethnicities and between domestic and foreign born workers. Since one’s motivation is
shaped by one’s culture and upbringing, the motivation of ethnic minority workers could be significantly different than the motivation of non-minorities (Lopes, 2006).

Not being aware of ethnic differences in regards to factors that influence career motivation can contribute to issues with bias and/or discrimination. For instance, Shinnar (2007) warned that: "adopting the view that the desire for career progression is natural, normal, and a measure of individual success may limit and bias our interpretation of the career related choices that individuals make” (p.367). In other words, traditional career research has often been conducted from the viewpoint that progressive career advancement is a ‘normal’ and ‘ideal’ pursuit; however, some research has found that linear career progression is not always achievable or even desirable due to contextual realities and/or relational influences that some individuals face.

Identity

The notion that linear career progression is not everyone’s goal is in some ways tied to variations in individual identity, which are influenced by one’s cultural and family background (Gomez et al., 2001). The notion that identity is somewhat central to career development was recognized by Clausen (1991) who argued that, “some degree of early identity closure- knowing what kind of person one wishes to be and the intellectual and moral enclave in which one wishes to participate- is almost essential for effective preparation for adulthood effectiveness” (Clausen, 1991, p.807). A person’s individual identity can have a significant influence on one’s career development by impacting on the specific types of education and career goals that individuals choose for themselves. For
example, being raised with strong family values and traditional gender roles could lead some women to adopt the identity of ‘caregiver’, which would likely shape their career development in that these women will set career goals that are either compatible with staying home to care for children and/or seeking out careers that involve the care of others. Therefore, one’s personal identity strongly influences the type of career that a person seeks out (Clausen, 1991; Gomez et al., 2001).

The impact that personal identity has on career development has recently been examined in relation to the identity formation of ethnic minorities and/or immigrants. In particular, Gomez et al. (2001) discovered that the desire to balance multiple roles is often intertwined with a layered self-concept and that career decisions are based on the desire and need to fulfill differing roles, such as professional, mentor, leader, community advocate, spouse, mother and family member (Gomez et al., 2001).

The impact of gender identity on one’s desire to fulfill particular roles has illuminated the complexity that exists between cultural, familial and individual variables. For instance, Shinnar (2007) found that for many Latino women, the centrality of the family influenced their career development by leading them to not be interested in pursuing supervisory positions, since they felt that the commitment would interfere with their family care duties. Meanwhile, other researchers have indicated that individual differences still exert a significant influence on career development regardless of cultural value orientations (Gomez et al., 2001). Many of the successful Latino women interviewed by Gomez et al. (2001) reported that they either avoided Hispanic men or married Hispanic men that they considered ‘non-traditional’ and these women seemed to ignore restrictive gender role messages that they received growing up, looking instead to
female role-models for inspiration. Overall, vocational identity seems to be influenced by a complex interplay between individual, cultural, and familial variables.

**Familial and Cultural Influences**

**Values**

Although individual personality variables have historically been seen as the driving force behind career development, cultural and familial values are also known to shape career development by directly shaping one’s assumptions, beliefs and worldviews. In examining the impact of cultural and familial values on career development, two key areas have been investigated in the literature, namely the impact of collectivist and familial values. Based on value differences between Eastern and Western cultures, the impact of having a collectivist versus an individualist ideology is thought to affect career development by leading to differences in career motivation. In particular, within a collectivist culture interpersonal harmony is often valued over competition and individual performance (Lopes, 2006).

A focus on preserving harmony in interpersonal relationships, by avoiding conflict or criticism from others has been referred to as “Personalismo”, and is thought to deter some individuals from seeking positions within management (Shinnar, 2007, p.361). At the same time, values that highlight the importance of self-discipline, perseverance and collectivity, facilitate career development by transmitting expectations for higher education (Lingxin & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). When operating from a core value system that promotes collectivism, some individuals may feel compelled to go into an occupation that will allow them to give back to their community (Stebleton, 2007). A study that explored the career aspirations of South African students found that most
wanted to pursue occupations that would allow them to benefit their community (Euvrard, 1996).

Having a concern about giving back to one’s family is also known to influence career choice. Furthermore, level of family commitment is often influenced by cultural factors. For example, a central commitment to the family is vital for many Latino women (DelCampo, Jacobson, Van Buren & Blancero, 2011; Shinnar, 2007). A heightened commitment to family has been termed “familialism”, and is defined as “one’s identification with, and attachment to, nuclear and extended families, expressing strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family” (Shinnar, 2007, p.361). Within this framework, individual concerns become secondary to family concerns. As a result, certain types of jobs, such as executive positions, may be undesirable due to the constraints that would be imposed on family time.

When individuals seek to balance family and/or collectivist values with the individual pursuit of their own career path, conflict can emerge. The challenge of managing multiple identities and/or roles has been referred to as “hybridity”, which refers to the various identities and/or roles that immigrants may encounter and need to negotiate as they adapt to a new culture (Stebleton, 2007, p.4). Difficulty often arises because “immigrants may experience stress and subsequent dysfunctional behavior as a result of having to pick and choose the values that are convenient for certain situations (e.g., work), thus leaving them without a true philosophical grounding that reflects their traditional values, including emphasis on family and community” (Stebleton, 2007, p.296). This difficulty may be particularly pronounced for immigrants who receive competing messages from their family or community.
Relational Influences

Within a career context, social support has been defined as an individual’s perception of the relational aspects of their environment that facilitate or promote successful career decisions (Ali et al., 2011). Relational support is thought to influence career development by providing emotional support, instilling a sense of belonging, confidence building, role-modeling, and by providing information and practical assistance (Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2001). Recognizing the dynamic interplay between individual and relational factors, by focusing on both social learning and perception processes, Social Cognitive Career Theory explains how relationships can affect career development (Lent et al., 2000). In particular, relationships can influence career choices and experiences through role-modeling and/or by providing learning opportunities, by altering self-efficacy beliefs, influencing educational and career decisions and by mitigating the impact of career barriers. In light of these various functions, social support has been conceptualized as assisting individuals to succeed by providing emotional and/or instrumental support (Blustein, 2001).

According to Attachment Theory, relationships have the capacity to either facilitate or hinder exploration and skill development (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Strong relational bonds are thought to facilitate success and development, while more fragile or precarious bonds are believed to impede one’s development. Although secure attachment relationships were first studied during the late 1960’s in relation to mother-infant interactions, in recent decades attachment theory has been increasingly applied to adult phenomena, such as romantic relationships (Johnson, Bradley, Furrow, Lee, Palmer, Tilley, & Woolley, 2005). Recently, the role of attachment relationships has even been
considered within the context of career development (Ali et al., 2011; Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Lingxin & Bonstead-Burns, 1998; Palladino-Schultheiss, et al., 2001). Examining the role of relationships in career development is crucial because, as Palladino-Schultheiss et al. (2001) pointed out, “what transpires in our relationships may be key to the facilitation or hindrance of our ability to progress effectively through challenging career tasks” (p.217).

Parents

In attempting to understand the impact of relational influences on career development, researchers have examined the impact of parental figures on career-related choices and attainments. Parents are thought to exert a significant influence on career development because career expectations and aspirations begin to form within the home during childhood. As Cheng and Starks (2002) contended, “a child conceptualizes a particular sociocultural reality through perceptions and the internalization of information provided by significant others vis-à-vis daily communications” (p. 307). Through day-to-day communications and parental behaviours (e.g., level of homework support), parents are thought to transmit familial career aspirations, which are the messages that young individuals receive from parents about their career possibilities (Gomez et al., 2001).

Through socialization parents shape their children’s career development in four significant ways: 1) Through financially supporting their children to achieve goals, 2) by serving as positive role models, 3) by encouraging concrete goals, and 4) by reinforcing positive behaviours (Lingxin & Bonstead-Burns, 1998, p.191). Overall, through their behaviours, communicated messages and reinforcement contingencies, parents impact upon their children’s career development by influencing their children’s work values,
self-confidence, educational choices, and work opportunities (Amundson & Penner, 1998). In support of the impact that parental figures can have on people’s career choices, Agarwala (2008) reported that Indian management students cited their ‘father’ as the person who exerted the biggest influence on their career path.

While investigating the effect of parental support on educational attainments, Parker et al. (2003) concluded that strong relational ties to parents significantly predicts higher educational attainment for students. Lingxin and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) discovered that parental involvement in their children’s learning seems to increase parent-child agreement in terms of expectations and that this leads to greater academic success. In a review of relevant literature on attachment relationships and career development, Blustein et al. (1995) concluded that a close connection between adolescents and parents facilitates exploration and risk-taking and that this in turn promotes identity formation and career development. Therefore, parents appear to have an important influence on career development, however, this influence may not always be positive.

As much as parental support can facilitate educational success and career development, parents can also erect barriers to one’s career development. In particular, a study by Gomez et al. (2001), which interviewed successful Latino women, found that many of these women reported that their parents tried to sabotage their careers due to strict gender role expectations. One of the participants in the study described the pressure she experienced from her family to not leave the home in order to pursue a career, while another participant mentioned that her father had discouraged her from pursuing a career in law because that would be “taking the job of a man who has to provide for his family”
Therefore strong parental promotion of traditional gender roles or cultural values can affect career development, although research is still needed to uncover what factors determine the extent to which individuals adhere to parental values.

To further complicate the issue of parental influence, gender differences in terms of the effect of parental support have emerged, suggesting that parental impact on educational attainment and career development is complex and not likely to be uniformly distributed. For instance, Hout and Morgan (1975) found that grades for white males were determined equally by both intelligence and parental encouragement, while amongst females, intelligence more strongly determined grades, which subsequently affected the amount of parental encouragement they received. In addition, Trusty, Watts and Erdman (1997) found that parents were more involved in the career development of their daughters than their sons. In light of gender differences in regards to the affect of parental encouragement on educational attainments, it seems likely that there could also be differential effects across ethnicities.

Differential effects across different ethnicities in terms of parental educational aspirations have in fact been recently supported in the research literature. Cheng and Starks (2002) found that Asian, Hispanic and African American parents tended to have higher educational aspirations for their children than Caucasian parents. Spera, Wentzel and Matto (2009) found that the impact of parental educational attainments on parental aspirations for their children differed across various ethnic groups. In particular, Spera et al. (2009) found that while the aspirations of Caucasian parents were influenced by parental educational attainment, the aspirations of non-Caucasian (African American, Asian and Hispanic) parents were not influenced by parental educational attainment. In
addition, the impact of parental perceptions of school quality on parental education aspirations was stronger for non-Caucasians.

The impact of parental educational attainment on individual’s educational and career aspirations has also been shown to differ across ethnicities. Bohon et al. (2006) found that, unlike amongst Caucasians, for all three Latino groups studied, parental educational attainment did not seem to influence expectations and/or aspirations. Taken together, recent research on parental educational aspirations and attainments supports the idea that research on educational aspirations and career development that is derived from Caucasian middle class individuals is not applicable to ethnic minorities and immigrants.

After a review of the literature on the impact of family of origin on career development, Whiston and Keller (2004) concluded that: “the process by which families influence career development is complex, and is affected by many contextual factors such as race, gender and age” (p. 493). As a result, more research is needed in order to understand the impact of family influence on the career development of immigrants.

**Siblings**

Relational influences on career development involve not just parents, but also non-parental influences, such as siblings, peers and mentors. In fact, non-parental influences are important to consider because adolescents and adults have been shown to turn to non-parental figures, such as siblings and peers, more often than parents for career advice (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Although parental influences have often been considered in relation to career development, less is known about the influence of other non-parental relational bonds. For instance, although siblings represent another valuable source of support and role-modeling, siblings represent an often overlooked source of
relational support in one’s career journey (Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2002). As a result, few studies could be located that directly investigated the influence of siblings on career development.

One study that did examine the role of siblings in career development was a qualitative study conducted by Palladino-Schultheiss et al. (2002), who investigated people’s perceptions of sibling influence on career decision making. The study uncovered how siblings can exert an influence on one’s career development through several avenues, including: 1) emotional support (dependability, encouragement), 2) social integration (having common interests or ground), 3) esteem support (encouragement, enhanced confidence), 4) information support (advice, opinions, shared info), 5) positive role modeling (demonstrating success), 6) negative role modeling (models something to be avoided), and 7) personality and ideology (characteristics such as dependency or family cohesion). The researchers also discovered that siblings exert the most influence on career exploration and development during educational and/or career decisions or transitions. For instance, sibling have a tendency to turn to each other for support or guidance when transitioning into and out of high school, changing careers, deciding to go or to return to college, deciding on a college major, and persisting in high school or in challenging courses (Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2002).

Peers

Aside from turning to parents and siblings, individuals are also known to turn to peers for career advice and support. During adolescence, peer groups may represent one of the most important sources of relational influence on educational and career choices (Kiuru, Aunola, Nurmi & Leskinen, 2008). In fact, Palladino-Schultheiss, et al. (2001)
suggested that adolescents are generally more likely to turn to counsellors, teachers, or friends, rather than their siblings or parents, for career support. The researchers suggested that common interests and values may explain why friends are influential to individual’s difficult career decision-making process. During the qualitative interviews conducted in the Palladino-Schultheiss et al. (2001) study, a few participants discussed the importance of shared and similar experiences with friends, suggesting that peers play an important role by providing validating experiences and a sense of common ground.

Results from an earlier study by Hout and Morgan (1975) uncovered differential effects of peer influence across genders. These researchers reported that peer expectations have a significant effect on the career aspirations of males, while for females peer influence is not significant. A more recent study by Kiuru et al. (2008) found that regardless of gender, school motivation (as reflected by degree of school burnout) was significantly influenced by peer group attitudes and behaviours, although male peer groups tended to experience a larger increase in school burnout by the end of the school term. These researchers investigated the extent to which peer group similarity in school burnout is the result of peer group selection or peer group influence. They observed significantly similar changes in school burnout amongst different peer groups over time. They attributed the effects of peer group influence to processes such as observational learning and pressure to conform. The researchers were unable to find a significant influence for peer group selection and suggested that future research try to qualitatively examine the micro-processes involved in peer group influence on educational attitudes and choices.
Unfortunately to date not much research has examined the impact of peer relationships on educational choices and career development (Kiuri et al., 2009). The paucity of research on the influence of peers seems to be particularly pronounced for ethnic minorities and immigrants. The studies conducted by Kiuri et al. (2008; 2009) involved samples that were 100% Finish (White European). The Palladino-Schultheiss et al. (2001) study utilized a sample consisting of 50% European American, while the other 50% combined African American, Asian and Middle Eastern individuals. Even the very recent Ali et al. (2011) study utilized a sample consisting of 73.7% Caucasian Americans. Future research on the effect of peer influence on career development is important because peer influence has been shown to impact upon career interventions designed to improve educational outcomes (Kiuri et al., 2010).

**Mentors**

Aside from family members and peers, mentors can also play an important role in one’s career development by providing information, support and encouragement (Gomez et al., 2001). Mentorship is generally characterized by the existence of a supportive relationship between an older and a younger person, whereby the older person plays a role in providing vocational guidance (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995). However, even older workers are known to have higher job satisfaction when they have a mentoring relationship (Finkelstein, Allen & Rhoton, 2003).

In recognizing the important role of mentor relationships in vocational development, research has started to examine the impact that mentors have on the career development of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Klaw and Rhodes (1995) uncovered how access to mentors can increase career optimism, aspirations and goal-directed
behaviour amongst African-American pregnant teenagers. In a study with immigrant construction workers, Iskander and Lowe (2010) found that even informal mentor relationships are crucial for career development because such relationships can assist individuals to develop their tacit skills. DelCampo et al. (2011) reported that compared to domestic-born Hispanic professionals who tend to rely on peer group support, immigrant Hispanic professionals are more likely to seek out individual mentor relationships.

Although mentors represent a potentially valuable career development resource for immigrants, it is often difficult for immigrants to access and/or benefit from a mentor in their new country due to issues with relocation, language barriers and discrimination (Shinnar, 2007). As Bhagat and London (1999) reported, “immigrants might experience difficulty in establishing effective mentor-protégé relationships because of their somewhat incomplete and slower rates of learning and understanding of the [domestic] organizational culture” (p.356).

In recognizing the potential benefits of mentor relationships and the difficulty that immigrants often face in accessing such relationships, in 2005 the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council set up a mentoring partnership program to help link professional immigrants with a mentor (Young, 2007). Mentorship matching is thought to assist immigrants not only by improving their job search skills, but also by facilitating acculturation to domestic business values and practices. Having an improved understanding of domestic workplace culture and an improved social network can lead to an increase in ‘social capital’ (discussed more below) and can improve job search outcomes. Unfortunately spaces within the mentorship program are limited and locating a mentor can be difficult for immigrants who are not able to access this type of program.
Because accessing mentor relationships can be difficult for immigrants, more research is needed to examine the impact that a lack of mentorship has on immigrants’ career development.

Overall, relationships, such as family members, peers and mentors, appear to impact upon career development by influencing career decisions, educational plans, career expectations and available opportunities. Relationships can also provide support and/or alter people’s beliefs and perceptions (Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2001). Many types of relationships influence career development and no single type of relationship can be considered as the most influential to all people because the impact of relational influences on career development is thought to manifest differently across different individuals, genders and ethnicities (Shinnar, 2007). As a result, in order to understand the impact of relational influences on career development, relationships such as parents, siblings, peers and mentors need to be considered within multiple contexts and across cultures.

**Sociopolitical Influences**

*Community and the Role of Social Capital*

Extending beyond the individual relationships discussed above, one’s relationship to the larger community can also have a significant impact on career development. As Cahill and Martland (1994) contended: “humans are social beings who function within the contexts of the communities to which they belong” (p. 314). Because people tend to learn, grow and make decisions within the context of the particular community in which they live, community influence on vocational development needs to be understood if we want to fully explain career development (Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2001). In support
of this notion, Counsell (1999) found that career advancement often depends more on strategic membership within particular social groups, rather than on qualifications and/or length of experience. The benefits and/or resources that one gains access to as a result of belonging to a social group has been termed “social capital” (Shinnar, 2007, p.341).

The impact of social capital on career development may be particularly pronounced for ethnic minorities and/or immigrants who are often at a disadvantage in securing mentoring relationships and/or face additional social and economic barriers to their career progression (Shinnar, 2007). In a study that examined the career development of successful African American women, Richie et al. (1997) discovered that these women reported feeling very connected to their community. In fact, community support may have a more significant impact on career development than family support. For instance, Lingxin and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) discovered that community social capital had more of an influence on immigrant children’s academic success than family social capital.

After controlling for other parental factors such as socioeconomic status, the researchers found comparable levels of low parental involvement in school learning amongst both Asian and Mexican parents. To explain the relatively higher level of academic achievement amongst the study’s Asian students, the researchers postulated that the disparity was likely attributable to differences in ethnic values and community support, rather than parental support. The researchers further concluded that strong community ties allow immigrant communities to develop an atmosphere of trust and support, which in turn facilitates self-confidence and leads to greater vocational advancement.

The results of studies that demonstrate the importance of community support for career advancement suggest that social capital may be a particularly important career
development resource for immigrants. According to a social capital perspective, frequent
encounters with unfavorable social and environmental barriers lead many immigrants and
ethnic minorities to make a greater investment in social capital. As a result, immigrants
and ethnic minorities may have a greater reliance on relational resources, such as familial
circles, peer networks and community groups. Social capital is thought to benefit
individuals by providing greater access to resources such as positive role models, support,
encouragement, advice and opportunities (Portes & MacLoad, 1996). Ethnic solidarity
and community support, in the form of social capital, allows individuals to receive
ongoing support from diverse sources such as community members, religious
organizations and social organizations. Within a community context, social standards are
established and reinforced by social groups, which are then passed down to younger
and/or new group members (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). As a result, social capital may be
particularly relevant to young ethnic minorities and new or recent immigrants.

Pointing out the crucial influence of community support on young immigrants’
career development, Zhou and Bankston (1994) stated that, “social capital is crucial and,
under certain conditions, more important than traditional human capital for the successful
adaptation of younger-generation immigrants” (p.842). In further explaining the
important role that social capital plays in the educational and career outcomes of
immigrant youth, Portes and MacLoad (1996) concluded that, “the internal character of
the community plays a key role in encouraging students to achieve” (P. 264).

In support of the influence that social capital has on immigrant youths’ career
development, a study with Mexican origin high school youth found that students with a
higher level of academic achievement tended to have greater social capital than their
under-achieving peers (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Therefore, individual and ethnic differences in educational and/or status attainment may be partially determined by the extent to which individuals can access community support as a form of social capital.

*Political Climate, Geographical Location and Economic Trends*

The extent to which individuals can rely on community support and social solidarity is thought to be influenced by factors such as where one is geographically located and the socio-political climate in which one resides. Sociopolitical climate can influence community solidarity because the presence of social conflict has the potential to divide, as well as unite communities (Thee, 1977). The idea that political conflict can divide and harm communities is concerning because political conflict and militarism are known to be prevalent in many areas of the world, particularly within third and second world countries such as Liberia and Egypt. Despite this, specific research that investigates the impact of political conflict on career choice and development has been rather limited.

One study conducted by Counsell (1999) supported the notion that socio-political variables can influence people’s career development. This study, which examined the career development of Ethiopian business students, posed the following question to participants: “During your working life, what factors (people, events, situations, etc.) have influenced your thoughts and decisions about your career?” (p.48). The most commonly cited answer was ‘economic and political factors’, followed by ‘key individuals’ and then ‘previous work experiences’. Counsell (1999) pointed out that this finding was not surprising in light of the tense political climate and the trend towards privatization of services within Ethiopia at the time that the study was conducted. The
findings suggest that depending on where an individual resides, political and economic climate can influence people’s career path.

Since political and economic climate varies across countries, career development may be uniquely shaped by the political and economic trends and policies within each country. In communist countries such as China, people’s career paths are strongly determined by social and government policy. In particular, the Chinese government (Chinese Communist Party) selects individuals for various positions such as management, through a process known as “meritocratic appointment” (U, 2005, p.363). Meritocratic appointment involves career assignment based on qualities such as trustworthiness and adherence to current political ideology, rather than merit. Government selection criteria have been observed to reflect changes in ideology over time, leading to differing career opportunities for different age cohorts. As U (2005) explained: “because official ideology fluctuates, the significance of social class, education, or political capital as determinants of careers has changed over time” (p.360). Due to government selection, career development within a sociologist or communist country may be shaped more by perceived sense of duty, expectations and external assignment, rather than self-directed interest, choice and/or merit.

Political unrest and conflict can also shape career development. A study conducted by Stebleton (2007), which examined the career development needs of African immigrants in the U.S, uncovered how displacement from loved ones as a result of civil war and political unrest impacts upon career development by causing psychological distress and altering people’s priorities. The study demonstrated how many African immigrants struggle with significant issues of loss, grief and guilt due to experiences with
political and social unrest in their home country. According to Stebleton (2007), “African immigrant college students may experience depression, anxiety, and fear related to these issues of loss and ambiguity, while others are concerned about sending enough money back home to support members of their extended families” (p.294).

In attempting to understand how geographical location affects career development, Cahill and Martland (1994) postulated that place impacts upon career paths in three distinct ways. First, career attitudes and norms are known to vary across locations. Second, since work characteristics differ across location, so does occupational knowledge, hiring practices and employment standards. Third, the relevancy of the concept of person-environment-fit differs across locations and can relate to differences in both the physical and social settings of workplaces. Geographical location and political climate are also thought to impact upon career development by influencing the barriers, opportunities and motivations of individuals. For instance, Gomez et al. (2001) discovered that Latinos who immigrated to the United States were motivated mostly by a goal to ‘survive’, rather than ‘excel’. This motivation can stifle career development by necessitating that individuals remain in survival jobs, rather than focusing on career development initiatives such as higher education and pursuing a desired path.

General economic conditions can also determine the extent to which individuals may feel locked into survival jobs. In particular, certain labour market trends, such as high unemployment or economic instability, can increase fears over job security (Stebleton, 2007). Heightened job insecurity can hinder career development by leading individuals to remain at a particular job, rather than pursuing higher education and/or alternate career avenues. In addition, immigration policies that promote increased
immigration levels for specific occupational groups (e.g., skilled labour) can lead to higher saturation within the labor market and higher competition for jobs. These trends can affect career development by restricting job opportunities or choices. Other economic trends that have been thought to influence career development include: the aging population, rising workplace costs, globalization, health and environment trends, and technological changes (Ryan, 2011). Although these trends have been identified as having a potential impact on career development, specific research aimed at exploring these impacts is limited. More research is therefore needed in order to better understand how changes in economic, population, technological, environmental and immigration trends affect people’s career development.

**Immediate Contextual Influences**

Changes in the economy, immigration policy, technology and social practices can create new challenges or barriers for individuals in terms of their career development. Swanson and Woitke (1997) identified ‘career barriers’ as: “events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career progress difficult” (p. 434). Societal trends, such as high unemployment or corporate downsizing, encompass some of the environmental conditions that can interfere with career progression. Barriers affect career development by hindering successful labour market entry and advancement (Heilbrunn, Kirshnirovich, & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010). Barriers can either directly or indirectly impact on career advancement by altering external opportunities and/or internal self-efficacy beliefs and/or expectations (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000).

Typical career barriers include limited work opportunities, lower wages, higher demands for specialized education and labour market over-saturation. In addition to these
general barriers, immigrants are known to face additional unique career barriers, such as difficulty understanding or adjusting to newly encountered workplace norms, language barriers, problems with credential recognition, foreign work experience, lack of social networks and discrimination (Bhagat & London, 1999; Blustein, 2001a; Bohon, 2006; Gomez et al., 2001; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Lopes, 2006; Shinnar, 2007). Light and Rosenstein (1995) conceptualized such barriers as disadvantages and differentiated between “resource” and “labour market” disadvantages (p.62). Resource disadvantages represent a lack of human capital, such as insufficient language proficiency, domestic education and work experience, lack of social networks and low self-confidence. Labour market disadvantages represent unequal opportunities that often emerge as a result of racial, ethnic or gender discrimination.

In line with Social Cognitive Theory, a distinction can be made between ‘objective’ and ‘perceived’ barriers (Murtagh, Lopes & Lyons, 2007, p.333). In support of this distinction, Heilbrunn, et al. (2010) found that in Israel, although immigrants from the Former Soviet Union were noted to face more objective barriers, immigrants from Ethiopia reported a higher level of perceived barriers. The researchers also found that the ability to cope with barriers affects the degree to which immigrants perceive barriers. Factors such a younger age at immigration and higher level of education seem to promote coping ability and enhanced coping may lead to a lower level of perceived barriers. In addition, the distinction between objective and perceived barriers may also relate to the fact that not all objective barriers have the same impact. In particular, some barriers (e.g., older age) may be more difficult to overcome than other barriers (e.g., lack of education).
Regardless of whether barriers are objective or perceived, generally, the more barriers an individual encounters, the less individual factors, such as interests and abilities, seem to determine one’s career path (Clausen, 1991). In other words, when external barriers become prevalent, the opportunity structure becomes a more important determinant of career development than individually situated variables (McWherter et al., 1998). Therefore, in order to understand the unique career development dynamics of immigrants, it is essential to have an understanding of some of the contextual factors or barriers that immigrants frequently encounter along their career journey.

*Acculturation as a Context-Specific Barrier*

The process of adapting to a new country and culture poses significant challenges for immigrants. Faced with starting over in a new country, immigrants may need to secure housing, learn how to navigate a new place, adjust to a new climate, find work, and deal with disconnection from family and friends, all while encountering a new language, new norms, new practices and new values (Ishii, Olguin & Keim, 2009). There may be marked differences in language, religion, ethnicity and cultural practices (Heilbrunn, et al., 2010). Despite these challenges, migration in itself does not preclude negative outcome, rather contextual factors influence the extent to which challenges lead to experienced distress (Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivo & Merrell, 2008). The extent to which immigrants experience stress during this process may depend on many factors, including the relative difference between their native culture and the newly encountered culture, the amount of support and sense of security they receive and the extent to which they face pressure to assimilate (Gomez et al., 2001).

Assimilation has been defined as adoption of the host country’s values, norms and
practices (Lee, 2009). When faced with novel cultural norms or values, immigrants often must decide to what extent they want to assimilate into the new culture. The process of adapting to and/or adopting the dominant values and norms of the new culture is known as “acculturation” (Bhagat & London, 1999, p.353). Acculturation is defined as, "the adaptation process of newcomers to the sociocultural and psychological characteristics of the host society" (Shinnar, 2007, p.343). Acculturation can be an extremely stressful process, filled with uncertainties and pressures from trying to adapt and/or accommodate to a new culture. For many immigrants the process of acculturation may be marked by feelings of discomfort and alienation, as well as psychosomatic symptoms such as physical illness (Bhagat & London, 1999). These types of stressors can impact upon career development by altering self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and even hindering actual capabilities (Yakushko et al., 2008).

The extent to which immigrants experience acculturation stress depends on factors such as the degree to which the new country differs from the previous country, the amount of support received and the extent to which one faces pressure to assimilate. Acculturation causes more distress when there is conflict between one’s personal striving to adopt new practices and one’s prior traditional cultural or family values (Gomez et al., 2001). Immigrants may also experience a higher degree of acculturation stress if their family is less acculturated and there is pressure to maintain traditional family values (Blanco-Vega, et al., 2008). Immigrants can also face competing pressures from the new culture to assimilate and from their cultural community to maintain traditional values and practices. For example, Gomez, et al. (2001) found that some Latinos experience pressure from the new culture to assimilate, while simultaneously experiencing pressure from the
Hispanic community to not ‘sell out’ or conform to ‘White America’ (p.292).

To help explain the complex process under which immigrants experience acculturation stress, Bhagat and London (1999) outlined a Model of Acculturation Stress. The model describes how the severity of acculturation stress is determined by an interaction between demand, opportunity and constraint stressors, which are mediated by one’s cognitive appraisal of the stressor and level of perceived social support. According to this model, acculturation often involves stressors such as facing conflicting values, dealing with stereotypes and encountering unequal opportunities for advancement. Perceptions about encountered stressors and the degree to which one feels supported by others can significantly impact on the degree to which a person either copes with the challenges or becomes overwhelmed.

The high level of stress encountered during acculturation can have a significant impact on the career development of immigrants (Bhagat & London, 1999; Gomez et al., 2001; McWherter et al., 1998; Shinnar, 2007). The extent to which acculturation impacts upon one’s career development depends on a person’s ability to adapt to the new culture and encountered barriers. A study by Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee, and Lee (2006) found that a higher degree of acculturation was associated with improved career self-efficacy beliefs amongst Mexican-American males. Gomez et al. (2001) found that highly successful Latino women residing in the United States seemed to share a common ability to maneuver in both their native culture and Anglo American culture. Bhagat and London (1999) referred to this cultural maneuverability as “intercultural effectiveness” (p.358).

Intercultural effectiveness is the ability to understand and interpret cultural behaviour patterns and is influenced by factors such as being flexible and having a
positive view of other cultures (Bhagat & London, 1999). The ability to successfully navigate within two or more cultures has also been labeled “cultural competence” and involves having a strong sense of identity, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, communication skills, a willingness to conform and actively socialize, as well as the ability to maneuver within organizational structures (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993, p.396). Possessing intercultural effectiveness or cultural competence is thought to help buffer against the stress of acculturation, which in turn helps reduce the negative impact of immigration on career outcomes (Blanco-Vega, et al., 2008). In support of this view, Gomez et al. (2001) found that some Latino women struggled with pursuing their career if their parents expected strong adherence to Latino cultural values while they struggled to adapt to the new culture. In addition, Kalbach and Kalbach (1995) found that immigrants who came to Canada at an earlier age achieved higher educational attainments, perhaps in part due to becoming more acculturated into Canadian society (although the impact of age discrimination should also be considered).

Since intercultural effectiveness can impact on the degree to which acculturation stress hinders a person’s career development, Parker et al. (2003) cautioned against research that lumps foreign-born youth with domestic born children of immigrants. Due to acculturation stress, foreign-born youth are thought to encounter very unique challenges. To better understand these challenges, Lingxin and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) differentiated acculturation into ‘consonant acculturation’ and ‘dissonant acculturation’. Consonant acculturation occurs when immigrant parents and children acculturate at the same speed and level, while dissonant acculturation occurs when the parents do not learn or adopt the new language or cultural norms, while the children do (Lingxin & Bonstead-
Consonant acculturation is thought to help facilitate career development by leading to a stronger level of parental support. The process of acculturation is important to consider in relation to career development because, “the more acculturated the individual, the stronger the relationship between his/her interests and occupational choice” (Fouad et al., 2008, p.43). In other words, a high level of acculturation stress may make it more difficult for immigrants to overcome challenges and pursue their desired career path.

*Language as a Context-Specific Barrier*

Part of the difficulty of adapting to a new culture involves having to learn a new language and domestic language acquisition is often seen as a robust indicator of successful acculturation (Yakushko et al., 2008). Having to learn or adapt to a new language is a potent career barrier that can make pursuing a desired career path very difficult for immigrants. Different cultures not only use different languages to communicate, they also vary in terms of general communication patterns or norms (Chen, 1995). Proficiency in a dominant language is considered a very important indicator of human capital and represents an invaluable resource for career progression (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). As a result, immigrants who encounter language barriers are particularly disadvantaged within the workplace. In particular, unfamiliarity or a lack of proficiency with a language creates career challenges because immigrants may have difficulty communicating in the dominant language and they may not be able to effectively convey their level of knowledge and skill (Chen, 2008; Shinnar, 2007).

Without proficiency in the dominant language, immigrants may also have difficulty connecting socially and building the social networks that are known to be vital
to job entry and career progression. Difficulty comprehending new cultural workplace norms may further heighten social disconnectedness and disadvantage for immigrants. Shinnar (2007) described how a lack of interpersonal connectedness with potential employers or supervisors can lead to subtle forms of discrimination. This can pose huge challenges for many immigrants because employers often remain unwilling to hire or promote them, thus stifling their career development.

The prevalence of language barriers may be the reason that over 95% of new immigrants perceive learning or improving their ability to speak English to be an important issue (Statistics Canada, 2005). Lack of English skills proficiency is in fact the main reason cited by employers for the lack of available opportunities for immigrant workers (Center for Workplace Success, 2007). In further support of the impact of language proficiency on the career development of immigrants, Miranda and Unhoefer (1998) found that amongst Latino adults, acculturation and English language use were the best predictors of career self-efficacy. In fact, acculturation and language use were better predictors of career self-efficacy than educational level or length of time residing in the new country.

**Prejudice/Discrimination as a Context-Specific Barrier**

Prejudice and discrimination is another factor that is known to increase acculturation stress and diminish self-efficacy (Yakushko et al., 2008). Discrimination in the workplace also diminishes available opportunities and stifles career development. The effects of prejudice and discrimination may be particularly pronounced for immigrants who are used to belonging to a majority group and/or have diminished social support as a result of moving to a new country (Ishii, Olguin & Keim, 2009). Unfortunately, many
immigrants encounter experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Fouad et al., 2008; Grant, 2008; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Yakushko et al., 2008). For instance, Grant (2008) reported that 74.1% of immigrants to Canada believe that they are accorded a lower social/economic status than other Canadians. In addition, Fouad et al. (2008) documented how immigrants often report feeling as if they have to work extra hard in their job in order to overcome prejudice and discrimination. A lack of career progression as a result of discriminatory hiring and management practices is known as the “glass ceiling effect”, whereby the glass represents the invisible barriers through which immigrants can see higher level positions, but they cannot access those positions (Shinnar, 2007, p.342).

Aside from hindering career development, discrimination is also known to cause significant psychological distress. In fact, discrimination has been shown to have a more detrimental impact on psychological well-being than most other stressful life events, perhaps as a result of being so pervasive and systematic and damaging to core beliefs and self-concept (Utsey et al., 2008). In particular, discrimination is known to contribute to anxiety and depression and undermines self-esteem (Grossman & Liang, 2008). Increased difficulties with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem as a result of encountering discrimination is one way that discrimination indirectly stifles career development. More saliently, discrimination impedes career development by leading to labour market exclusion and/or discriminatory hiring practices. For instance, employers may be guided by inaccurate perceptions that immigrants are uneducated, lazy, untrustworthy and desperate to enter the host country, when in fact research demonstrates that immigrants tend to be highly educated, hard working, high in values and they often have a desire to
return home (Yakushlo et al., 2008). Unsubstantiated beliefs and perceptions contribute to prejudice and discrimination, which manifest in both overt and subtle ways. Subtle forms of discrimination are thought to be reflected in practices such as not recognizing immigrant’s foreign credentials and/or work experience (Shinnaoui & Narchal, 2010).

Foreign Credentials and Work Experience as a Context-Specific Barrier

A lack of domestic credentials and/or inability to have foreign credentials recognized is another contextual barrier commonly encountered by immigrants (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Li, Gervais & Duval, 2006; Picot & Sweetman, 2005; Reitz, 2007b; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). Reitz (2007b) referred to the difficulty immigrants have with establishing credential credibility as ‘devalued currency’, which implies that immigrants often arrive with a resource (education) that unfairly loses its value (p. 50).

The notion that immigrants’ foreign education is often not recognized by employers is particularly concerning in Canada, where immigration policy has shifted in recent years to attract highly skilled individuals (Li et al., 2006). In particular, Canada made changes to its point system, which awards higher points to highly educated immigrants in an effort to recruit highly skilled workers from the global labour pool (Somerville & Walsworth, 2009). Opposite to the trend observed for domestic workers, once in Canada, a higher level of education amongst immigrants is actually associated with lower levels of employment for many occupations (Hall & Sadouzai, 2010). This led Somerville and Walsworth (2009) to conclude that: “the point system used to select applicants for the Economic Class in Canada makes skilled immigrants vulnerable to a number of perils after the migrant lands” (p.147).
In Canada many skilled labour immigrants become frustrated as a result of expecting that their skills are needed and then encountering a very lengthy formal credential recognition process (Statistics Canada, 2005). Non-recognition of foreign credentials may occur as a result of accreditation agencies having difficulty assessing the credibility or degree of equivalency of foreign institutions and/or the limited transferability of previously established credentials. As a result of these issues, after arriving in Canada, many immigrants are unable to secure the professional job for which they expected to be qualified for (Reitz, 2007b). Because of difficulty with establishing credential credibility, within Canada many highly skilled immigrant workers are often forced to work in low-wage jobs. For example, in the late 1990’s, approximately 52% of new professional immigrants with a university degree worked in a job requiring only a high school education, compared to 28% of Canadian-born workers (Li et al., 2006). In light of such observations, Picot and Sweetman (2005) stated that recent immigrants are: “increasingly unable to convert their education and experience into earnings in the way that earlier cohorts had” (p.11).

The issue of foreign credential recognition is complicated by the fact that there is not a centralized system of credential accreditation in Canada. Formal recognition of foreign education varies by province and is typically handled by post-secondary educational institutions, provincial governments, employers and/or self-regulating bodies (e.g., World Education Services Canada, International Credential Assessment Service of Canada etc.). It is therefore not surprising that many immigrants are unaware of how or where to have their credentials assessed (Statistics Canada, 2007). For immigrants who went through the credential recognition process within six months of their arrival
between the year 2000 and 2001, nearly half reported that their credentials were not fully accepted (Statistics Canada, 2005). Many others did not attempt to have their credentials assessed because of reasons such as not having enough time, not knowing where to go and not having the financial means to do so. This means that credential barriers have a significant impact on the career development of many immigrants.

Although a more unified credential recognition system would help to simplify this complex process, a unified system would not necessarily diminish credential recognition as a barrier to immigrants’ career development. Hall and Sadouzai (2010) discovered that immigrants from unregulated hi-tech occupations enter the labour market more quickly and are more likely to find work within their profession, at a level that is more comparable to their pre-immigration work experience. Immigrant workers in unregulated professional occupations are also more likely to have their foreign work experience recognized by employers. This finding suggests that regulatory mechanisms are an intervening contextual factor that influences career development. This issue is important because many immigrants encounter difficulties with having their foreign work experience recognized by potential employers (Adamuti-Trache, 2011).

Hall and Sadouzai (2010) attributed the easier work transition for immigrants from unregulated professions to transferability of skills and lack of institutional barriers. The researchers further propose that recent immigrants face increased difficulty entering the labour market due to structural changes in the economy and immigration policy. In particular, the increase in immigrants from engineering and information technology occupations and the decline of the high-tech sector since the late 1990’s led to declining employment rates amongst new immigrants. The finding that immigrants from
unregulated hi-tech backgrounds are not as likely to encounter credential and work experience barriers suggests that although foreign credentials and work experience are barriers for many immigrants, the impact varies across occupational categories. As a result, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of how immigrants from various occupations and backgrounds are currently being impacted by difficulties with foreign credential and work experience recognition. Finding ways to better facilitate credential recognition is also important because it directly impacts upon the successful integration of immigrants within Canada and determines the degree to which immigrants either contribute to or depend on society (Statistics Canada, 2005).

The Consequences of Contextual Factors on the Career Development of Immigrants

Immigrant Underemployment

Prejudice, discrimination and the inability to have foreign credentials or work experience recognized often leads to underemployment amongst newcomers in Canada. Therefore, even though skilled-labour immigrants are more likely than average Canadians to have a university education, immigrants are much more likely to be unemployed (Statistics Canada, 2007). Difficulty entering the Canadian labour market is particularly pronounced for skilled labour immigrants who immigrated between the years 2001 and 2006. In 2006, unemployment rates for this immigrant cohort were 11.5%, compared to 4.9% for the Canadian-born population. In light of this trend, it is not surprising that even after four or more years in Canada, 22% of skilled-labour immigrants cited a lack of employment opportunities as the primary problem with immigrating to Canada (Schellenberg & Slowey, 2007).

Unemployment amongst immigrants to Canada indicates that even for highly
skilled, highly educated immigrants, the Canadian labour market is not very promising (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Entering the labour market may be particularly difficult for older immigrants, who often must compete for entry-level positions with young domestic born workers (Young, 2007). The observed rates of relatively high immigrant unemployment in Canada led Young (2007) to contend that, “whilst policy has been successful in raising the education and experience levels of immigrants, it has been less successful in employing their talents” (Young, 2007, p.402).

The unemployment rate amongst immigrants is concerning, however; the underemployment rate for immigrants may be even more alarming. Underemployment refers to individuals who are employed in an occupation that does not utilize one’s skills or education (Kraut & Walld, 2003). The unemployment rates discussed above do not reflect rates of underemployment amongst immigrants. Even when immigrants manage to locate some form of employment in Canada, the issue of underemployment remains a problem because many highly skilled immigrants are often unable to find a job within the field in which they were previously trained.

When skilled-labour immigrants are unable to secure desirable employment, they often turn to survival jobs to generate an income (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Reitz, 2007b; Remennick & Shakhar, 2003). As a result, for many immigrants, work is fully centered on survival, rather than personal career development (Yakushko et al., 2008). In particular, highly skilled immigrant workers often end up in low-skilled jobs for which they are overqualified and underpaid (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Although this is likely devastating for many immigrants, more research is needed to understand the personal impact of underemployment and how individuals cope with these experiences. The issue
of immigrant underemployment is a huge concern because immigrants’ economic and psychological well-being depends largely upon their successful economic integration.

**Immigrant Poverty**

Not only has it been difficult for new immigrants to successfully obtain a job, especially within their field, new immigrants to Canada have also been experiencing a significant decline in their earnings over the last few decades. Reitz (2007b) estimated that immigrants to Canada have endured a 20% decline in their earnings since the 1970’s. Furthermore, in the years between 1980 and 2000, male immigrants working full-time experienced a 13% decline in their earnings, while Canadian-born men working full-time saw a 10% increase in their earnings (Picot & Sweetman, 2005).

In terms of actual earnings, Statistics Canada (2005) reported that 14% of newly arrived immigrants had no family income, while 50% of newly arrived immigrants who had a family income earned less than $1600 per month (p.22). As a result of increasingly low incomes, the percentage of new immigrants with a family income below the poverty line increased from 24.6% in 1980, to 31.3% in 1990, and then to 35.8% in 2000 (p.11). These figures can be compared with the low-income rates of Canadian-born families, whose poverty rates fell, from 17.2% in 1980 to 14.3% in 2000. This comparison indicates that the observed increase in low-income rates amongst immigrants can not be attributed solely to a general deterioration in the Canadian economy. In addition, although wage gaps between new immigrants and domestic born workers used to decrease over the years that immigrants spent in Canada, since the 1980’s the gap no longer narrows as it once did (Picot & Sweetman, 2005). As a result, Picot and Sweetman (2005) concluded that: “the low-income rate among immigrants entering
during the 1980’s and early 1990’s remains well above that of earlier immigrants, no matter how long they have been in Canada” (p.13).

Although many researchers agree that immigrant wages are declining (e.g., Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Frenette & Morisette, 2003; Hyndman, Schuurman & Fiedler, 2006; Picot & Sweetman, 2005; Reitz, 2007a &b), not all agree about the cause of the decline. In discussing declining earnings amongst immigrants over the last couple of decades, Reitz (2007b) noted, “this decline remains substantial when immigrants are compared with demographically comparable native-born workers, indicating that the decline may not be explained by changing characteristics of immigrants” (p. 44).

In contrast, Aydemir and Skuterud (2005) suggested that, “roughly one-third of the long-term decline in the entry earnings of Canadian immigrant men and women can be explained by compositional shifts in language abilities and region of birth” (p. 656). Picot and Sweetman (2005) agreed that changing immigrant demographics are at least partly responsible for wage decreases. These researchers pointed out how recent immigrants increasingly come from regions such as Eastern Europe, South Asia (India, Pakistan), East Asia (China, Korea, Japan), Western Asia (Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan) and Africa. In fact, immigration from these regions rose from 35% in 1981 to 72% in 2001 (p.16). Picot and Sweetman (2005) suggested that immigrants from these regions may have human capital that is less easily transferable due to issues with language, cultural differences, and education quality.

Declining wages amongst immigrants in recent years may also be partly attributable to socio-political and economic changes, such as the growing knowledge economy and the economic recession. In considering the various factors contributing to declining
immigrant wages in Canada, Picot and Sweetman (2005) pointed to: 1) changes in immigrant characteristics such as source regions, 2) decreasing economic returns for foreign work experience, and 3) a general decline in labour market outcomes for all participants in the labour market. Regardless of the exact reasons for the relative decline in immigrant earnings, it seems that the trend towards increased unemployment and/or underemployment and/or decreased wages amongst immigrants has resulted in increased rates of poverty for immigrants in general and recent immigrants in particular. These issues are concerning not just because of the impact on immigrants’ economic well-being, but also because unemployment and underemployment can have detrimental impacts on people’s physical and psychological well-being.

*Negative Impacts on Well-being*

"Work represents a stabilizing domain in the lives of many people" (Blustein et al., 2005, p.366). For immigrants, work has the potential to facilitate adjustment within a new culture by providing improved access to social support, facilitating language skills and providing opportunities to learn domestic social norms. However, when immigrants are unable to find suitable work, they may be at a greater risk for both mental and physical health problems (Mascaro, Arnette, Santana & Kaslow, 2007; Yakushko et al., 2008). A person’s well-being can be thought of as a reflection of the level of congruence between one’s aspirations and level of achievement (Murphy & Mahalingam, 2006; Stutzer, 2004). When one’s career aspirations are unmet, his or her well-being will likely suffer. In support of this, after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic variables, Jin, Shah and Svoboda (1997) found that unemployed people have more than twice as many hospital admissions and visits to doctors’ offices than employed people. Unemployment
can be detrimental to one’s health for several reasons. In particular, unemployment can negatively affect health by disrupting social relationships, increasing drug/alcohol consumption, leading to poorer diet, and by causing stress (Yakushko et al., 2008).

Unemployment can be viewed as a chronically stressful state that has detrimental effects on one’s mental health (Mascaro et al., 2007). In particular, job loss has been associated with negative feelings such as low mood, uselessness, worthlessness, guilt, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Yang, 2002). Not surprisingly, many researchers have linked unemployment to higher rates of depression (Catalano et al., 2000; Jin, Shah & Svoboda, 1997; Kraut, & Walld, 2003; Lewis & Sloggett, 1998; Mascaro et al., 2007).

Based on data from a longitudinal study spanning twenty seven years, Lynch, Kaplan and Shema (1997) found that individuals who reported suffering from economic hardship were three times more likely to meet DSM-III-R criteria for depression. In another study that examined depression rates amongst Mexican Americans, Catalano et al. (2000) found that onset of Major Depression was significantly more likely when individuals lost their job in the preceding seven to twelve months than when individuals had remained employed. After a review of the literature, Mascaro et al. (2007) concluded that unemployment is a risk factor for depression and also that conversely, employment serves as a buffer against continued depression.

Lewis and Sloggett (1998) suggested that employment can help define an individual’s place within their community, while unemployment can lead to feelings of alienation, a known precursor for suicide. Unemployment is also thought to precipitate suicide attempts by leading to increased rates of depression, psychological distress, low self-esteem and unhealthy life-styles (Kraut & Walld, 2003). In fact, unemployment has
frequently been found to be associated with increased rates of suicide, especially amongst individuals with fewer resources and/or lower family incomes and/or lack of social support (Jin, Shah & Svoboda, 1997; Kraut, & Walld, 2003; Lewis & Sloggett, 1998). This has critical implications for immigrants who frequently encounter difficulties with finding employment, and, who as a result of migrating to a new country, often have reduced human capital, relatively low incomes and reduced social support.

In support of the link between immigrant unemployment and poorer mental health, a longitudinal study conducted by Kennedy and McDonald (2006) found that unemployment lasting longer than two months does in fact lead to reduced mental health outcomes for immigrants and that conversely, sustained employment is associated with improved mental health outcomes. Therefore, there is reason to believe that unemployment affects general mental health outcomes for both domestic and immigrant populations alike. However, findings from a Montreal-based study, which compared the subjective mental health outcomes of immigrants and non-immigrants, suggest that the link between unemployment and poor mental health may be especially salient for immigrants (Zunzunegui, Forster, Gauvin, Raynault & Williams, 2006). These researchers found a stronger association between unemployment and poor mental health for immigrants compared to non-immigrants.

The stronger association between unemployment and poor mental health can not be attributed to relatively lower baseline levels of depression amongst immigrants. Stafford, Newbold and Ross (2010) for instance found that compared to domestic born Canadians, immigrants tend to have a lower prevalence rate of depression. However, rates of depression amongst non-white immigrants vary across region according to factors such as
immigrant density. Contrary to what was expected, rather than being negatively affected by living in a region with lower socioeconomic status, the researchers found that immigrants living in regions with a higher percentage of non-white immigrants tend to have lower rates of depression. The researchers attributed this to the fact that visible minority immigrants living in higher immigrant density areas are more likely to belong to a social group made up of individuals with a relatively low social status. This may result in increased access to services for immigrants and/or more social support, which might help to buffer against depression (Stafford, Newbold & Ross, 2010). Living in a relatively high non-white immigrant density area may also alter individual social comparison norms (discussed more below). Overall, the significant relationship between unemployment and immigrant well-being is complex.

The relationship between unemployment and suicide is also complex. For instance, Yang and Lester (1995) argued that the link between unemployment and suicide rates is strong in North American countries such as the United States, while the same relationship is weak and/or non-existent in some countries. Comparing across countries, Jungeilges and Kirchgassner (2002) reported that suicide rates actually tend to be greater in higher-income countries. In addition, Noh (2009) found that the positive relationship between unemployment and suicide rates is stronger amongst groups or countries with a higher income and that a strong positive relationship between unemployment and suicide does not exist amongst people with relatively low incomes. These trends may be explained by the idea that drastic changes in income, rather than continual low income, are responsible for increased suicide rates (Noh, 2009).
Changes in employment status occur within a social context, where comparisons between oneself and others are continually made so that average income levels affect subjective perceptions. As Noh (2009) explained: “if everybody is poor, loosing a job for a while is not as much of a stigma as loosing a job where everybody else is very successful” (p.581). This idea may explain why on a macro level, increases in general income level or GDP over time are not associated with societal increases in general life satisfaction (Easterlin, 1995). Since people continually adapt to their living status, higher living status tends to lead to only initial increases in satisfaction, a phenomenon known as ‘hedonic adaptation’ (Stutzer, 2004, p.90). In other words, increasing the income of all individuals does not increase general levels of happiness because subjective judgements of well-being are based on social norms and/or relative comparisons. On the flip side, individual decreases in income will likely be most detrimental to individuals who either live within a relatively wealthy or successful group and/or who were once wealthy or successful themselves.

Relative Deprivation and Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The notion that employment or income difficulties uniquely impact people depending on one’s frame of reference has important implications for highly skilled immigrants, who often leave professional jobs in their country of origin only to experience great difficulty locating employment after arriving in a new country. According to Sorokin (1925), “poverty or wealth of a man is measured, not by what he has at present but by what he used to have before or what others have” (p. 72). In support of this idea, Stutzer (2004) found that prior financial status influences future aspirations and that people who had a better position in the past have greater difficulty adapting to a
new, more difficult situation in the future. This means that upward adjustments in aspirations occur more easily and quickly than downward adjustments. This finding suggests that adapting to job loss and/or underemployment could be especially challenging for professional immigrants who are unable to obtain work in their previous field. As a result, relevant theories are needed in order to try to accurately understand the unique psychological impact that job loss or underemployment has on immigrants who experience a relative down-grade in their career and/or standard of living.

Relative Deprivation Theory describes how the extent to which individuals feel unfairly treated or compensated depends largely on one’s standard of reference, rather than on objective deprivation (Crosby, 1976). Relative deprivation is thus the negative feeling that results when one believes that he or she has been unjustly deprived of something. Relative deprivation can be distinguished into personal relative deprivation, which reflects comparison’s based on oneself, and group relative deprivation, which reflects comparisons based on one’s social or cultural group as a whole (Walker, 1999). While group relative deprivation is thought to predict protest behaviours, personal relative deprivation is thought to predict psychological distress and stress symptoms.

In order for relative deprivation to occur, one must lack something and: a) perceive that similar others have it or one previously had it, b) want it, and c) believe that they are entitled to it (Crosby, 1976, p.88). The experience of relative deprivation may lead to feelings such as frustration, dissatisfaction, anger, and resentment (Grant, 2008). Relative deprivation may also diminish self-esteem (Walker, 1999). The extent to which relative deprivation occurs may depend on factors such as previous attainments and the extent and length of those attainments, the perceived feasibility of attainment, and external
blame attributions (Crosby, 1976; Grant, 2008). For instance, a higher degree of relative deprivation is thought to occur when individuals believe they are deprived for external or systemic reasons, rather than internal or personal reasons and relative deprivation will be greater when the feasibility of obtaining something desired is perceived to be high, yet somehow blocked (Crosby, 1976).

When individuals don’t perceive achieving a desired goal or career as feasible, they may respond by reducing their expectations, thus potentially lowering their sense of relative deprivation and distress (Krau, 1981). Cognitive Dissonance Theory attempts to explain this process and in turn may further explain the psychological impact of experiencing a negative contrast between one’s past and current work-life. Cognitive dissonance related to one’s career refers to an internal conflict that arises when there is a discrepancy between past and present status and/or when career expectations don’t match career attainments (Krau, 1981). The degree of cognitive dissonance that one experiences is thus a reflection of the amount of discrepancy between past and present living standards and/or expectations and actual outcomes (Murphy & Mahalingam, 2006).

In order to cope with cognitive dissonance, some individuals may reduce their aspirations or expectations. Krau (1981) found that immigrants who reduced their sense of self-assertion and/or self-image reported increased life satisfaction compared to those who did not reduce their self-assertion. However, Krau cautioned that reducing self-image or denying incongruence between one’s aspirations and attainments may not be the most beneficial way of coping. More specifically Krau asserted that, “reducing cognitive dissonance by denying status incongruence may be an efficient coping strategy with regard to behavioral outcomes, but it may prove detrimental to subjective well-being and
mental health. The solution should be a career change which minimizes denial efforts” (p.301). In other words, Krau suggests that when faced with status incongruence immigrants ought to consider pursuing training for a career that is attainable, yet doesn’t necessitate reducing one’s self-image.

Post Secondary Educational Retraining for Immigrants

Difficulty finding suitable and stable employment creates cognitive dissonance by leading to a gap between one’s career aspirations and current career attainments. Aside from leading to psychological distress, difficulty finding desired employment can have a negative impact on career development by leading immigrants to work in survival jobs, where they are unable to fully utilize their previous vocational skills and abilities (Yahushko et al., 2008). The need to stay in a survival job may additionally impede career development by making it difficult for individuals to pursue further education (Yakushko et al., 2008). On the flip side, career barriers may also lead some individuals to pursue further training and education as a career enhancement strategy. The notion that career barriers can either hinder career development by locking individuals into survival jobs, or enhance career development by leading to the pursuit of higher education, highlights the dual aspect of the social context that new immigrants to Canada may experience. In particular, barriers interfere with the successful integration into the labour market, while at the same time opportunity structures within the educational system lead many immigrants to pursue post-secondary education (Adamuti-Trache, 2011).

Upgrading one’s skills through educational training has in fact been shown to be the primary way that individuals (even in third world countries) attempt to advance their career (Counsell, 1999). Adamuti-Trache (2011) pointed out that many immigrants
pursue formal education as a way to “validate, recycle, enrich or change their occupational profile” (p.66). Retraining therefore represents an extremely important career enhancing strategy for many immigrants. In fact, within six months of arrival, 11% of new immigrants are actively involved in post secondary education, while another 24% become involved after two years and then another 11% within four years (Statistics Canada, 2006). Therefore, within the first four years of arrival, 46% of immigrants participate in post secondary education.

Although educational retraining can be viewed as a valuable career enhancement strategy, more than half of new immigrants in Canada do not pursue retraining (at least within the first four years of arrival). Research is therefore needed to help identify the factors that facilitate or assist immigrants to utilize educational retraining as a career enhancement strategy. Presently we know that for immigrants who do attempt to pursue retraining, approximately 42% encounter difficulties such as locating appropriate institutions, tuition costs and language barriers (Statistics Canada, 2005). Many immigrants also report that they do not know what type of retraining to pursue (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). These difficulties are important to understand because they may interfere with one’s ability to access and/or successfully complete a re-training program and thus successfully reintegrate into the Canadian workforce.

Despite the importance of retraining as a career enhancement strategy for immigrants, a review of the literature reveals that very limited research has specifically examined the retraining experiences of immigrants. In fact, most research on educational retraining has either been general and not specific to immigrant individuals (e.g., Chen, 1999), or has been conducted in countries outside of Canada (e.g., Krau, 1981;
Remennick & Shakhar, 2003; Schwartzwald & Shoham, 1981). Aside from research by Statistics Canada (2005) that included statistics on the number of immigrants who pursue retraining in Canada, there does not appear to be any Canadian studies that specifically examine the retraining experiences of professional immigrants. Information gleaned from general studies on retraining and international immigrant retraining studies will now be presented and summarized in order to lay a foundation for the current study which will investigate retraining amongst professional immigrants as one of its key topics.

*Past Research on Immigrant Retraining*

The level of motivation behind one’s pursuit of higher education is thought to influence people’s level of adjustment and success with learning (Chen, 1999). In order to help understand the motivations behind general educational retraining pursuits, Krau (1981) suggested that educational retraining tends to be motivated by either 1) internal factors (e.g., ideological reasons) or 2) external factors (e.g., job loss). Similarly, Schwartzwald and Shoham (1981) suggested a Tri-level Model for understanding the motivations for retraining. These researchers proposed that retraining is motivated by one of the following factors: 1) compliance (externally motivated), 2) identification (internal comparisons to an external role model), and 3) internalization (choice based on meeting internally set professional objectives).

Interestingly, the tri-level model has been placed within the context of Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy of needs, where retraining at the compliance level is related to inhibitory factors, such as establishing safety and security, while retraining at the identification level relates to the need for belonging and esteem and retraining at the internalization level relates to the desire for self-fulfillment (Schwartzwald & Shoham, 1981, p.268). Within
this framework, compliance-motivated decisions to retrain are geared towards establishing economic security.

For immigrants, retraining is thought to be primarily motivated by external factors (Krau, 1981). In particular, immigrants often seek educational retraining due to reasons such as difficulty obtaining desired employment and/or having one’s former credentials recognized. Facing these circumstances, immigrants may pursue retraining that is strictly practical by shifting their priorities and enrolling in a retraining program that will most directly lead to employment (Remennick & Shakhar, 2003). However, external and internal motivators can overlap. For instance, an immigrant may retrain for external reasons, while still centering specific retraining choices on internal desires, goals and interests. When faced with external barriers, immigrants may also become internally motivated by the cognitive dissonance they experience between their previous career and current lack of career advancement in their new country (Krau, 1981). Following this idea, career decisions made under external pressure can be viewed as being aimed at reducing both internal and/or external pressure.

The type of motivation behind retraining is important because when retraining choices are externally motivated research suggests that individuals may be less likely to successfully complete their retraining. For instance, Schwartzwald and Shoham (1981) found that individuals who were externally motivated to pursue retraining were more likely to drop out of their re-training program, and the externally motivated individuals who completed their retraining were less likely to obtain a job related to the retraining. Although the researchers attributed this observation to cognitive dissonance, whereby externally motivated individuals may not have felt the need to justify their inability to
find work in the field for which they re-trained, the researchers did not consider how contextual barriers (e.g., discrimination) may have accounted for outcome variations amongst those who were either externally or internally motivated. This suggests that more research is needed to further understand the idiosyncratic reasons that individuals who are externally motivated may have less successful retraining outcomes.

Unfortunately relatively limited research, particularly Canadian research, has specifically investigated the unique experiences of immigrants who pursue educational retraining. In Israel, Gorbatova and Eaglstein (1998) studied the experiences of Russian immigrants who retrained as social workers. The researchers found that immigrants who lived in Israel longer reported less difficulty with retraining, while age or similarity of one’s previous occupation did not affect level of experienced difficulty. None of the participants in the study reported having problems with understanding course content, however, many reported having issues with language barriers and personal problems such as difficulty managing child care. Level of satisfaction with the retraining was found to be related to the particular university attended and the number of difficulties reported, but not to age or pre-immigration career status.

Since that study pointed out how satisfaction with the retraining experience is related to the number of difficulties encountered, research that examines the specific contextual difficulties encountered by immigrants during retraining is highly valuable. As Gorbatova and Eaglstein (1998) stated, “it is manifestly clear that in order to gain full educational benefit from the retraining process idiosyncratic issues related to being an immigrant must be given full attention” (p.250). In particular, future research could consider how factors such as language barriers, perceived difficulty of course content,
teaching issues, general conditions for studying and personal issues affect immigrants’ satisfaction and/or success with completing a retraining program. In addition to identifying the idiosyncratic challenges faced by immigrants who pursue educational retraining, it is also important to gain a better understanding of the way that immigrants adjust to and/or cope with retraining experiences.

Transitioning back into an educational retraining program is an experience that requires a momentous psychological adjustment (Chen, 1999). This may be particularly true for older immigrants who have moved to a new country and may not have previously anticipated returning to college or university. For most people, the transition to higher education is thought to involve facets such as social connectedness, role changes, and academic competence (Chen, 1999, p.31). For adults, and immigrants in particular, this transition may also involve faucets such as work-school-family balance and learning style adjustment. Research does not appear to have investigated these facets within the context of immigrants’ retraining experiences.

Although scant research has specifically investigated the adjustment process of immigrants who undergo professional retraining, Remennick and Shakhar (2003) found that amongst previous Soviet Union doctors who immigrated to Israel and retrained as physiotherapists, men seemed to have a more difficult adjustment experience than women. In particular, the men described the transition as having a more negative impact on their self-esteem and perceived status, despite having achieved objectively higher positions than the women. The researchers attributed this finding to the women’s prior experiences with sacrificing career aspirations in order to meet family obligations. The study also uncovered how younger immigrants seemed to have more positive adjustment
experiences than older immigrants. In particular, the older immigrants reported a greater
tendency to mourn their previous role and a slower adjustment to their new role. Despite
these difficulties, most of the immigrants in this study did not express regrets or doubts
about their retraining (Remennick & Shakhar, 2003).

Since educational retraining is a relatively common and valuable career
enhancement strategy for many immigrants, research that helps to increase our
understanding of the retraining process is important. For instance, research is needed to
help us better understand the unique challenges that immigrants face and how they adjust
to their educational experiences along their career journey. Unfortunately, relatively little
research has examined the retraining experiences of new professional immigrants
(Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998). As a result, little is known about the specific factors that
affect immigrant retraining choices and outcomes. In addition, no specific vocational
model seems to have been constructed to explain how despite pervasive challenges, some
immigrants are able to benefit from career retraining as a life-long learning opportunity
along the path towards their cultural and career adjustment within their new country.

*Role of Resiliency and Human Agency*

The process of pursuing educational retraining and/or a career change involves
the difficult task of adjusting to a new role and undergoing an identity transformation, all
while mourning the loss of a previous identity (Chen, 1999). The ability to successfully
adjust and excel within a new environment, new role and new identity likely requires
effective coping responses. Coping responses describe the characteristic responses that
individuals make in response to stress or novelty, involving behavioural, affective and
cognitive dimensions (Beutler, Moos & Lane, 2003). Coping responses have been
conceptualized along a continuum that ranges from internalizing to externalizing tendencies (Beutler, Harwood, Kimpara, Verdirame & Blau, 2011). Internalizing tendencies are characterized by a tendency to withdraw, avoid and be self-critical, while externalizing tendencies are marked by a willingness to seek out novelty, confront and make external blame attributions. Adaptive or successful coping is thought to involve a balance between internalizing and externalizing tendencies and is reflected by behaviours that are active and problem focused, while minimizing harm to self and others.

Although coping responses are thought to reflect a person’s habitual way of responding to stressful events, as Chen (1999) explained: “the meaningfulness of present coping experiences goes beyond its face value of reactive and remedial effect: it leads to a proactive and developmental approach in designing and fulfilling one’s life career mission” (p.35). Each time a stressful event is encountered, one has the opportunity to utilize and practice different coping responses and over time the selection of adaptive coping responses can strengthen one’s ability to adapt to stress.

The ability to actively and successfully cope over time when faced with difficult life challenges has been conceptualized as “resiliency”, or the ability to adapt and/or bounce back in the face of adversity (Luther, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, p.25). As a descriptor for the capacity to overcome challenges, resiliency can be thought of as either a state or a process involving the capacity to access and utilize psychosocial resources (Jacelon, 1997). Resilience describes a tendency to adapt, yet also implies that some individuals have protective factors that help to buffer them from the deleterious effects of stress. Psychosocial resources are thus mobilized in an effort to mediate stress via processes such as modifying the characteristics of a problem, altering one’s perception or
meaning of stressful events and regulating the emotion evoked by a stressful event (Utsey et al., 2008). Resiliency, or the propensity to utilize these inner resources has also been conceptualized as a form of “psychological capital” (Luthens, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006, p.25).

Resiliency refers not only to the ability to cope well with stress, it also refers to the ability to actively grow and even thrive during challenging experiences (Felten, 2000). The concept of resiliency is being increasingly utilized within the field of psychology to help understand the factors that promote recovery and growth amongst individuals. Resiliency has now been explored in relation to how people cope with all sorts of adversities, such as violence, abuse, trauma, pain, mental and physical illness, grief and major life transitions across all age groups including children, adolescents, adults and seniors (Buckley, Thorngren & Kleist, 1997). This research has been helpful in uncovering some of the factors thought to promote resiliency. Some of the factors now thought to bolster resiliency include: having social support, positive role models, high self-efficacy, a willingness to tolerate uncertainty, flexibility and an ability to regulate distressing emotions (Luthens, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Weiss, 2008). Even biologically inherited genes have recently been implicated as having a role in resiliency (e.g., Beaver, Mancini, DeLisi & Vaughn, 2011).

Apart from having access to external and internal resources, exposure to adverse life events also seems to be an active ingredient in developing a capacity to be resilient. Watt, David, Ladd and Shamos (1995) discovered that compared to individuals low in resiliency, highly resilient individuals had more cumulative life stress and exposure to early adverse life events. As a result it seems that resiliency is manifested by having
certain internal and external factors (e.g., social support and self-esteem) and that the ability to draw on one’s resources in times of crisis can be strengthened through practice. Successful use of adaptive coping strategies in response to stress may also bolster self-confidence in one’s ability to effectively deal with future adverse events (Buckley, Thorngren & Kleist, 1997).

Since resiliency involves people’s ability to persevere and even grow in the face of adversity, this concept is especially relevant for immigrants who are known to face very significant challenges. Not surprisingly then, research has started to investigate the factors that promote resiliency amongst immigrants (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008; Grzeda, 1999; Heilbrunn, et al., 2010; Ornelas et al., 2009; Stafford, Newbold and Ross, 2010; Utsey et al., 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yeh et al., 2008). This research has been prompted not only by the fact that immigrants frequently encounter adversity (e.g., adapting to a new culture, discrimination etc.), but also by the observation that immigrants often appear to be resilient as evidenced by their relatively lower rates of chronic physical and mental illness (Escobar, Nervi, & Gara, 2000; Newbold, 2006). The tendency of many immigrants to enjoy better health outcomes than domestic born individuals has been termed “the healthy immigrant effect” and is thought to be indicative of resiliency (Stafford, Newbold & Ross, 2010, p.439).

So what factors appear to promote resiliency in immigrants? To help answer this question, Hielbrunn et al. (2010) examined the coping responses of immigrants from Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union who immigrated to Israel. These researchers found that a younger age at time of immigration, a higher education and social resources were all associated with more adaptive coping. Yakushko et al. (2008) reported that factors
such as language skills, voluntary migration, optimistic attitudes, cognitive flexibility, and social support were associated with a smoother and/or less problematic transition for immigrants. Social support in the form of belonging to a larger immigrant community was also found to be particularly helpful and thus access to social capital seems to promote resiliency. Similarly, a study that examined resiliency amongst Latino immigrant students found that the most important factors appear to be: 1) parental/familial support, 2) positive community support, and 3) positive self-concept (Blanco-Vega, et al., 2008). Social and/or community support may foster feelings of belonging, which are particularly important for immigrants who are often excluded from the larger social context. Positive identification with a cultural group and positive familial support may also foster healthy self-esteem and/or an enhanced self-concept by buffering against acculturation pressures that promote feelings of shame, inadequacy or invisibility (Yeh, Kim, Pituc & Atkins, 2008).

Within the vocational psychology field, Chen (1997) referred to the factors that promote career resiliency as ‘the three P’s’, identifying them as: 1) perspectivity- the ability to remain open and flexible and engage in self-exploration and perspective taking, 2) projectivity- taking ownership over one’s career outcomes and anticipating the future, and 3) perseverance- a commitment to continuing to act even in the face of uncertainty or rejection (Chen, 1997, p.6). Yakushko et al. (2008) also saw characteristics such as personal dedication, insight and clearly defined goals as central to resiliency. These concepts help us to not only better understand the factors that contribute to resiliency, they may also guide us in constructing interventions that will facilitate people’s career
resiliency. This makes research on career resiliency highly valuable from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint.

Resiliency within a career context, known as ‘career resiliency’, refers to people’s ability to bounce back from disappointments or career setbacks and has been defined as, “the person’s resistance to career disruption in a less than optimal environment” (London, 1983, p.623). A high level of career resiliency is associated with a higher probability of initiating career change (Grzed, 1999). In particular, those who pursue a career change are more likely to feel capable of adapting to changes and making career-related choices. In addition, successful career change, particularly when faced with challenges, requires resiliency, which allows people to remain flexible and/or persevere. Since immigrants are particularly at risk of undergoing environmentally imposed career changes, along with other challenges, research that specifically examines career resiliency in immigrants is very valuable. In addition, since immigrants are often faced with the challenge of trying to re-establish and/or persevere in their career after immigration, the notion of ‘career resiliency’ rather than ‘career development’ per se will be the focus of the current research project.

The notion that resiliency plays a fundamental role in how one copes with challenges and adapts to career change highlights the important role of individual action in responding to contextual barriers. The capacity of individuals to make choices and take actions in response to contextual barriers has been conceptualized as ‘personal agency’ (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Personal agency involves having a sense of mission or purpose that drives choices and actions (Chen, 1997). The role of personal agency is important to consider when attempting to understand how immigrants cope with contextual barriers.
Adamuti-Trache (2011) compared the career progression of immigrants to a card game, where the outcome depends in part on the cards that are dealt and in part on the players’ skills and strategies. Following from this, although the nature of the hand dealt is critical, it is also valuable to know the rules of the game and have strategies at one’s disposal in order to succeed. Parker, Hagan and Dinovitzer (2003) uncovered the importance of individual agency when they found that English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students’ educational attainments were more strongly determined by planned choices and a commitment to working hard than by socioeconomic background alone. Therefore, educational and career outcomes are shaped by both context and individual responses and choices. As Adamuti-Trache (2011) so eloquently stated, “within a structure of opportunities and constraints, people make decisions that are rooted in personal life history, current life circumstances and individual dispositions, all factors that will shape their life course trajectories accordingly” (p.64).

The term ‘bounded agency’ has been used to describe how decisions and actions are influenced by a dynamic interplay between personal agency and social/contextual context (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, p.65). Following this notion, both context and individual characteristics shape personal choices and personal choices shape subsequent experiences. Career development can therefore be thought of as a culmination of internal individual characteristics and external social, environmental and political contexts. Furthermore, the relative impact of individual and contextual variables and the specific experiences that one encounters is largely determined by individual resiliency and human agency or purposeful actions and choices.
In examining the career literature to understand how individuals make choices and use strategies to enhance their career, Greenhaus and Callanan (1994) concluded that there are seven broad career strategies: 1) Competence in current job- attempting to perform more effectively, 2) Extended work involvement- devoting additional time and energy, 3) Skill development- attempting to enhance skills and abilities through education and training, 4) Opportunity development- sharing one’s career plans with others through networking, 5) Mentor relationships- establishing relationships in order to receive information, guidance and support, 6) Image building- improving one’s appearance, and 7) Organisational politics- using flattery, conformity and favours to enhance success.

Although these strategies help to highlight the role of human agency in career development and identify important career enhancement strategies, the extent to which contextual factors influence the actual strategies that one employs is not well understood. Since immigrants are known to face unique contextual barriers (e.g., discrimination) and social circumstances (e.g., social isolation), there is reason to believe that strategies such as extended work involvement, establishing mentor relationships and image building may not be as easily utilized by foreign born workers.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, retraining seems to be one strategy that is pursued by many professional immigrants. Research is now needed to help us understand the factors that shape immigrants’ career choices and to uncover how some immigrants are able to overcome the challenges inherent to migrating to a new country and culture in order to seek out available opportunities, while some immigrants experience greater difficulty coping and adjusting to their new life circumstances.
**Study Rationale**

Since its birth in the early 1900’s, most career development research has been conducted from a traditional positivistic approach that emphasizes internal individual variables and utilizes white middle class samples to test models of fit. Due to a nearly exclusive focus on the individual, traditional career development research has tended to ignore other contextual and relational factors outside of the individual that can impact on the career development of individuals. This has critical implications for immigrants who are known to have unique relational experiences and who are at an increased risk of experiencing contextual barriers, such as underemployment, poverty, language barriers, social isolation and discrimination. Therefore, to appropriately understand the career development of immigrants, it is necessary to not only understand individual interests and aptitudes, it is also important to understand contextual and interpersonal influences.

Fortunately within the last two decades or so, contextual and relational factors have been increasingly recognized as fundamentally important in shaping an individual’s life-career path. Ironically, the more external and/or contextual factors have been recognized in relation to career development, the more we have once again turned back to examining the role of individual factors, such as human resiliency and agency, to help us understand how individuals cope with and respond to the external factors that impact upon career development. Overall it now seems that career development is shaped by a complex interplay between individual characteristics, choices, actions, encountered barriers, opportunities, economic and technological trends and relationships.

Although career development theory is evolving by increasingly becoming more encompassing of the array of both internal and external determinants of career processes,
because of the relatively young age of the vocational psychology field and the rapid recent changes in the vocational landscape (e.g., globalization, immigration, technology etc.), there is much work to be done before career development theory can be considered fully encompassing of the full range of human vocational experiences.

Since relatively limited research has investigated how the career and adjustment experiences of new professional immigrants in Canada affect career resiliency, the main purpose of the current study is to investigate how the experiences of new professional immigrants affect career retraining choices and outcomes. Since retraining is an important career enhancing strategy that is pursued by many professional immigrants and prior research has been limited, particularly in Canada, the current study will specifically include professional immigrants who have pursued retraining in order to understand the barriers faced and the factors that facilitate or hinder retraining choices and outcomes. In particular, what factors shape career retraining choices and determine the ability of immigrants to overcome the barriers they encounter in order to retrain and successfully integrate into the Canadian workforce?

Using previous knowledge about the difficult adjustment experiences of new immigrants and established career theories as a background, the current study will explore the career adjustment and retraining experiences of professional immigrants in southern Ontario. This research will focus specifically on identifying the factors that seem to influence career development and/or resiliency amongst the professional immigrants who successfully retrain and obtain desired work. Barriers to successful retraining, such as language barriers and acculturation stress, will also be examined. Key
meaning themes identified and distilled from the interview data will be analyzed in order to help formulate a theoretical model of career resiliency for professional immigrants.

This research study intends to make a number of innovative contributions to knowledge building and knowledge enhancement. First, it will help to enhance current knowledge about the unique career development paths of professional immigrants via retraining in their host country. Second, it will identify critical factors that either facilitate or hinder the target group’s retraining experience, generating invaluable references and insights to inform stakeholders such as policy makers, educational organizations, educators, professional helpers, and immigrant workers themselves. Third, it will contribute to empirical evidence-based theory development, expansion, integration, and enrichment for vocational and career psychology broadly defined. Fourth, it will inform and promote both knowledge advancement and best practice related to the study of immigration and new immigrants’ transitional experiences in Canada.

From a practical standpoint these contributions could be helpful in guiding the development of initiatives to assist new immigrants to effectively cope with the barriers and stressors they face and to help immigrants find and sustain meaningful work within Canada. Understanding the most important influencing factors in the career development and retraining experiences of immigrants is an important step in guiding these interventions. A theoretical foundation to help guide such interventions will be built by exploring new immigrants’ unique experiences using qualitative research methodology.

Employing qualitative methodology is very appropriate when one is attempting to explore and more fully understand the unique experiences, meanings and behaviour of people (Berg, 2007). As Cahill and Martland (1994) contended: “much qualitative
research is required to reflect the plurality of contexts in which careers are pursued” (p.310). Qualitative approaches involve making the experiences and meanings of individuals known through linguistic representations collected in the form of conversations, interviews, observational notes etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

**Research Questions**

Using a qualitative design, this study will use semi-structured interviews to explore the following main research question:

1) What main factors influence retraining choices and outcomes and what factors influence career resiliency amongst new professional immigrants?

And the following secondary research questions:

2) What are the current main challenges faced by recent professional immigrants within the first few years in Canada and how do immigrants cope with these challenges?

3) What role do relational influences play in the adjustment and/or career development experiences of professional immigrants?

4) What impact does retraining have on professional immigrants’ self-esteem, career motivation, sense of career identity and on actual career attainment?

5) What can be learned from the experiences of recent professional immigrants that will serve to inform public policy and/or interventions designed to assist immigrants to successfully adapt and/or integrate into the Canadian workforce?
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study was conducted at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. The current study was undertaken as part of a larger study conducted by Dr. Charles P. Chen (principal investigator) and his research team (made up of six graduate students who each contacted their own participants from the larger study sample and then independently completed their own interviews and data analysis). The current study paralleled the larger study by taking a qualitative exploratory approach and using the same open-ended interview questions (see APPENDIX F), however, the current study focused on the experiences of a smaller number of participants (20 out of the approximately 90 total recruited participants) and a slightly smaller subset of topics.

This study employed qualitative methodology based on a Grounded Theory approach. This methodology chapter will first explain the rationale for selecting a qualitative design and then provide an overview of Grounded Theory. The specific procedures employed in the study will then be outlined by explaining the sampling method, participant inclusion/exclusion criteria, and the steps taken to recruit participants and conduct interviews. The method for analyzing the data will also be explained. Finally, the role of the researcher and an explanation of the researcher’s personal perceptions about the current topic will be offered.

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Scientific research, through empirical or systematic observation, provides an avenue to more reliably and validly examine the complexities of human experience
(Cozby, 1997). Within the social sciences, scientific research has traditionally followed a positivistic model of inquiry, where priority is given to uncovering uniformity and testing a priori hypotheses using quantitative methodology (Seidman, 2006). This type of inquiry is typically characterized by quantification, which leads to describing findings in terms of magnitude through statistical analysis (Kazdin, 2002). Under this nomothetic frame of reference, unique aspects of human experience are often considered mere ‘noise’ in the system (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003, p.19). However, for researchers who are interested in pursuing relatively unexplored areas of inquiry or gaining more in-depth understanding of individuals’ experiences, such ‘noise’ is considered to be a valuable source of information in and of itself. In recognizing the value of idiosyncratic information, qualitative research is characterized by qualification which involves describing findings in terms of descriptive language, rather than numbers (Kazdin, 2002).

In order to try to capture the unique experiences of professional immigrants in Canada, this study employed a qualitative research design.

Qualitative research is generally known as a broad range of empirical procedures that allow researchers to describe and understand the context specific experiences of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research has also been more specifically described as a method of inquiry that makes the routine and problematic experiences and meanings of individuals known through linguistic representations collected in the form of conversations, interviews, observational notes, photographs and self-reflections (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This methodological approach is analogous to ethnographic research, where the intent is to observe, describe and interpret human behaviour (Chen, 1998a). Qualitative research is therefore most applicable to research that is attempting to explore
and more fully understand the experiences, meanings and behaviour of people (Berg, 2007). For this reason, qualitative methodology lends itself well to the study of vocational psychology and/or career. In particular, qualitative methodology allows for “the discovery of qualitative differences and the incorporation of context into the career process” (Cahill & Martland, 1994, p. 310).

Relative to the natural sciences, where there is routine adherence to quantitative approaches to research, the social sciences allow for a more rich exploration of phenomena because, unlike with inhuman subjects such as planets or animals, human subjects can talk and explain (Seidman, 2006). Exploring human experience through language is particularly valuable because, “at the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language. To understand human behavior means to understand the use of language” (Seidman, 2006, p.8). Because of the manner in which human language allows us to uniquely access and better understand the unique and shared experiences of individuals and the meanings they attribute to their experiences, qualitative research conducted in formats such as interviewing offers us a uniquely valuable method of studying complicated human issues. Narratives are thus a valuable resource for gaining a better understanding of human experience (Chen, 1998a). The words shared during an interview offer the researcher a unique glimpse into the meaning within which people structure their experience (Seidman, 2006). The emphasis on deciphering people’s meanings from an interview also means that compared to quantitative methodology, qualitative methods may be “more in keeping with the philosophical underpinnings of counselling because they demand empathy and subjective engagement of the researcher” (Cahill & Martland, 1994, p.310).
In navigating through one’s life experiences, individuals tend to search for meaning in order to make sense of their experiences. Finding meaning and purpose may further facilitate purposeful action (Chen, 2006; Chen, 1997). The qualitative methodology used in the current study is a suitable method for exploring how individuals perceive and attach meaning to their life experiences and ultimately how they make choices and take actions that direct their life-long career-life path.

Unfortunately science, with its traditional emphasis on quantitative methodology, has not long recognized or respected the value of qualitative research (Berg, 2007). Perhaps because of its emphasis on characteristics such as control and parsimony, quantitative research has long been recognized as the gold standard in scientific research. Through its adoption of precise and replicable methodology, the experimental paradigm has allowed us to make significant advances in terms of our understanding about human thought and behaviour (Camic et al., 2003). Although enhanced control is the crowning feature of quantitative research, some researchers have pointed out that rigid control within a study does not necessarily guarantee that the results will be representative of real world phenomena (Camic et al., 2003; Kazdin, 2002; Slife et al., 2005). Qualitative research offers an alternative way to describe and understand the context specific experiences of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). In particular, qualitative research allows for the consideration of “complex patterns of interrelationships” and is well-suited to research that seeks to understand human experiences (Camic et al., 2003, p.9). The ability to study complex patterns is valuable within the behavioural sciences because of the complexity of human behaviour.
Both quantitative and qualitative research methods involve collecting, interpreting and analyzing data and both approaches are considered to be empirical (Ponterotto, 2005). However, traditional quantitative research favours a nomothetic perspective, which focuses on identifying general normative patterns of behavior, and may not easily allow for the exploration of the unique and rich experiences of research participants. The qualitative paradigm on the other hand embraces an idiographic perspective that focuses on understanding the uniqueness and complexity of individuals. Rather than focusing on uncovering uniformity and testing a priori hypotheses, qualitative methodology follows a constructivist paradigm which holds that there are multiple equally valid realities and that each reality is constructed within the mind of individuals, rather than externally created (Ponterotto, 2005).

Although research in the social sciences has traditionally been predominately quantitative in nature, today researchers are expanding and advancing research practice by more often utilizing qualitative research practices (Berg, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). This shift towards qualitative research led Ponterotto (2005) to argue that, “as counselling psychology broadens its paradigmatic base and extends its scope of research methods to include qualitative approaches, it will advance rapidly as a scientific field” (p.126). However, even with a paradigmatic shift towards qualitative research in motion, in practice there is still currently a relative lack of qualitative research. For instance, a recently conducted survey demonstrated that only ten percent of counselling psychology doctoral students in North America complete dissertations that are qualitative in nature (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, in recognizing the need to balance quantitative research
with qualitative inquiry, there is still a need for more research to be conducted from a qualitative framework.

Information gathered within a qualitative framework is usually obtained through one of three methods: 1) in-depth, open ended interviews; 2) direct observation, and 3) written documents (Patton, 2002). These methods are used to uncover new information, not to test hypotheses (Seidman, 2006). Interviewing in particular is thought to be a fundamental method of inquiry for exploring and understanding human thought and behavior. The hermeneutical approach, which helps to guide qualitative research, maintains that in order to be understood, meaning must be uncovered via an interactive dialogue between researchers and their participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

In this study information about the experiences of professional immigrants to Canada was obtained via in-depth, open ended interviews. A qualitative design using in-depth interviews as a basis for data collection is suitable because the researcher (1) believes that the immigration experience is a largely subjective experience that is influenced by the unique circumstances and characteristics of each individual, (2) is primarily interested in exploring the unique experiences of this population, (3) wishes to explore the range of challenges faced by professional immigrants, (4) believes there is a current lack of qualitative research examining the unique experiences of professional immigrants to Canada, and (5) hopes to generate a theoretical model to help explain the factors that influence career resiliency in this population.

**Grounded Theory**

Qualitative research consists of several different approaches to analyzing collected data, such as a Narrative, Phenomenological, Ethnological or a Grounded Theory.
approach (Patton, 2002). For this study a Grounded Theory (GT) approach was used because this approach emphasizes the importance of context and/or the notion that truth is socially constructed. In addition, a Grounded Theory approach lends itself well to exploratory research that is attempting to generate ideas and/or theories based on individuals’ shared narratives. In particular, the purpose of Grounded Theory is to systematically gather and analyze qualitatively collected data in order to formulate theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences of professional immigrants in order to generate a theory concerning the career development and/or career resiliency of professional immigrants. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), “Grounded Theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p.7).

Grounded Theory originated during Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss’s 1965 and 1967 research on dying in hospitals (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). As Glaser and Strauss recorded and examined extensive conversations and observations, they developed systematic methodological strategies that guided subsequent research on many different topics. In their work they advocated that researchers develop themes from their research data, rather than deducting testable hypotheses from previous research. Therefore, when operating from within a Grounded Theory framework, researchers do not approach their work with a pre-established theory or hypothesis, but rather they allow theory to arise from the information collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From this perspective it is important to remain open and learn about the unique experiences of research participants before forming potential theories to explain studied phenomena.
Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) laid the original framework in which Grounded Theory came to be constructed, there have been several transformations that have occurred to alter their original approach. The most significant transformation occurred in the area of data analysis. The original method that Glaser and Strauss (1967) utilized to analyze data consisted of the “constant comparative method”, which involves four processes: (1) Comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory (p.105). Today Glaser continues to emphasize the constant comparative method, facilitated by remaining open to arising categories and using memos to enhance creativity and formulate ideas (Glaser, 1992), while Strauss has shifted his original methodological position towards a greater emphasis on deduction and verification of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) also proposed new methods of analysis, such as theoretical coding and axial coding, which emphasize relationships between categories. Although both Glaser’s and Strauss’s approaches begin data analysis by using open coding, each approach utilizes different methods of subsequent coding (Kendall, 1999).

Coding is a fundamental procedure within qualitative research. Coding involves attaching labels to segments of data and the labels help to illuminate the meaning behind each segment (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). In other words, coding helps the researcher to make sense out of his/her data. As Bryant and Charmaz (2007) explained: “analytic categories and the relationships we draw between them provide a conceptual handle on the studied experience” (p.3). The researcher in the current study decided to take an approach more in line with the coding methods proposed by Glaser (1992) because these methods focus more heavily on the contextual and emergent aspects of theory.
development by allowing the theory to arise from the data, rather than imposing a pre-established theoretical frame on the data (Bryant, 2002). A contextual approach was desired because a literature review on career development highlighted the importance of constructive meaning in understanding an individual’s career development path (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Remennick & Shakhar, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008).

Utilizing Glaser’s (1992) approach to data analysis, the first step is to use open coding to identify relevant categories or themes (e.g., unemployment). The next step involves the use of selective coding to organize previously established categories into core categories (e.g., challenges/barriers) and a final step utilizes theoretical coding to conceptualize how established categories relate to each other (e.g., pre-immigration expectations and employment difficulties). For this study, categories and/or themes will be successively generated based on the shared experiences and/or narratives of professional immigrants. Emerging categories will then be organized according to how they relate to each other and to the broader topic of career development and resiliency in order to help generate an overall theoretical model of career resiliency for professional immigrants.

Participants

Sampling Strategy

This study employed two types of sampling strategies: 1) purposive sampling and 2) convenience sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants known to represent a specific population, while convenience sampling involves accepting or recruiting participants as they become available (Berg, 2007). For the current study participants known to be professional immigrants to Canada were exclusively chosen to
participate because the study’s aim was to explore the unique experiences of individuals who immigrated to Canada and had to take educational re-training in order to obtain work in their desired field.

Maximum variation sampling involves maximizing the variability of a specific criterion by purposefully selecting a wide range of individuals (Sandelowski, 1995). For this study maximum variation was achieved by the researcher purposefully contacting recruited participants from several countries of origin. In particular, the researcher attempted to include participants from at least ten or more countries, while also ensuring that multiple participants from at least two countries were interviewed. Maximum variation sampling helped to ensure that the experiences of immigrants from many countries of origin were represented, while at the same time allowing the researcher to explore the varied experiences of participants from the same country of origin.

Selection Criteria

The targeted sample for this study was professional immigrants to Canada who took educational retraining after arriving in Canada in order to help advance their career. In order to ensure that participants had sufficient time to pursue retraining and since length of stay in a new country has been shown to affect cultural adjustment (e.g., Markovizky & Samid, 2008), only participants who immigrated within a certain time frame were selected. The selection criteria helped to ensure that each participant could talk about their immigration experience in relation to the challenges they faced and their experience with completing retraining and looking for work in their desired field. To ensure that participants could discuss recent experiences with leaving a professional job in their home country and pursuing retraining in Canada in order to successfully locate
desired employment, the following selection criteria were utilized: 1) Participants were at least twenty five years of age or older in order to focus on those who already had a career established, 2) Participants immigrated to Canada between January 1st, 1999 (this date was originally set at January 1, 2001, and was revised to allow some additional participants who met all other criteria to participate), to December 30th, 2006, 3) Participants immigrated to Canada under the skilled worker class designation, 4) Participants had a previous university degree that was earned outside of Canada, 5) Participants worked full-time in a professional occupation in their country of origin for at least three years before immigrating to Canada, 6) Participants engaged in formal educational retraining in Canada, meaning that they worked on earning a Canadian university, college or professionally certified and/or formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation, 7) Participants were able to provide proof of taking retraining, 8) Participants held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of one year after starting their Canadian retraining, 9) Participants were fluent in English (because interviews were conducted in English), and 10) Participants did not participate in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s previous research projects. Only participants who met these criteria were included in the study.

Recruitment

Participants for the larger study were recruited with the use of a poster advertisement (See APPENDIX A). The research team compiled the poster by stating the topic of the study and listing the inclusion criteria. Participants were offered a $35 honorarium for their time. The poster requested potential participants to either call or email the research team. An email account and a voicemail in-box were set up for the
study. The six graduate students within the research team were assigned specific days to be responsible for checking the voicemails and emails and recording potential participants’ information on a database. The database was located within a secure server and could only be accessed by the research team. As calls and emails came in, the researchers contacted potential participants either by phone or email and provided information about the study following a guided script (APPENDIX B & C). The participant data sheet was updated accordingly as inclusion criteria were reviewed with potential participants. Eligible participants who agreed to participate in the study were then scheduled for an interview at the OISE campus psycho-educational clinic.

*Characteristics of the Participants*

A total of twenty participants were interviewed by the researcher. A brief overview of the characteristics of these participants is presented below and is summarized in APPENDIX H. A more in-depth account of each participant’s career and adjustment experiences is given at the end of this document (See APPENDIX I). Presenting the rich and unique stories of each participant was considered to be an important part of this project because: 1) each account offers an in-depth frame of reference to refer to if more information about one’s life context is desired when examining the study’s results, and 2) each story could serve as a personal source of inspiration for other professional immigrants who would like to learn more about the experiences of other professional immigrants.

All of the participants immigrated to Canada sometime between December 2000 and July 2006. Therefore, the length of stay in Canada for participants ranged between approximately six to twelve years. The participants ranged in age from twenty-eight years
to sixty years. There were ten males and ten females. Twelve different countries were represented in the study sample, including: Columbia (2), The United States (1), Russia (1), Argentina (1), Uganda (1), India (5), China (3), Albania (1), Philippines (1), El Salvador (1), Israel (1), Zimbabwe (1), and Ukraine (1). All of the participants had obtained either a professional certificate (1), Bachelor of Arts (8), Bachelor of Science (1), Masters Degree (8), or PhD (2) before immigrating to Canada. Three participants were medical doctors in their home country (P15, P19, & P20).

All participants had taken some form educational training since immigrating to Canada, ranging from several college/university courses (2), to completion of a professional certificate (9), degree re-certification (2), college diploma (6) or a Masters degree (1). Thirteen of the participants were married at the time of immigration, while seven were single. All of the participants had at least one year or more of Canadian work experience; however, five participants were currently unemployed at the time of interviewing. Please refer to APPENDIX I for a richer and more detailed account of each participant’s background and career and adjustment experiences.

**Data Collection**

In order to obtain the information for this study, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher in a private interview room within the Psycho-educational clinic at the OISE campus. The interviews took place over four months between August and November, 2011. Before beginning each interview, the informed consent (APPENDIX D) was reviewed and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. Once informed consent was obtained, the researcher requested demographic information (see APPENDIX E) from participants and recorded
this information on an excel spreadsheet. Once the demographic questions were answered, participants were introduced to the verbal audio-taped interview.

Before beginning the interview, participants were reminded of their right to not answer any questions that they choose not to discuss and to withdraw at any time. Participants were also instructed that they could skip questions if they wished to come back to them at a later time (none of these options were pursued by any of the participants). Interviews were conducted using an interview guide created by the research team (see APPENDIX F), which contained approximately seventy-six questions related to topics such as pre-immigration experiences, initial challenges faced, retraining decisions and job searching. A digital recorder was used to record each interview. When the interview was completed participants were thanked for their time and given the $35 honorarium. The twenty completed interviews ranged from fifty minutes to one hour and forty five minutes in length.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the interviews was guided by Grounded Theory and conducted by having the audio-recorded interviews transcribed into written transcripts. Transcriptions were conducted by a professional transcriber. The use of filler words, such as “um” and “well” were disregarded. Each interview transcript was between twelve and twenty pages in length, singled-spaced.

Thematic coding of the written transcripts was completed using Nvivo9 software, which served to highlight, organize and analyze key themes. Written transcripts were first reviewed multiple times to check for any errors. Each transcript was then subjected to open coding to generate thematic categories in the form of tree nodes and thematic
groupings. Each subsequent interview was compared to the others in order to generate successive common themes. After all twenty transcripts were coded using the constant comparative method, each transcript was reviewed a second time to ensure accuracy. The themes generated from this analysis helped to guide the conceptualization of some theories about the main challenges faced by professional immigrants and the factors that influence career resiliency.

Confidentiality of Data

In order to help increase feelings of anonymity, the rights to confidentiality were reviewed and highlighted during the informed consent procedure before beginning the interviews. The written consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet within a locked research office and only the members of the research team and the supervisor Dr. Charles P. Chen had access to the office. Audio interviews were uploaded to a secure server immediately following each interview and backed-up onto an audio CD (two copies), which were stored in a locked cabinet. All electronic files were stored within a secure University of Toronto server and only the research team had access to the files. The interviews were transcribed by one professional transcriber who agreed to the confidentiality of the information and password protected each transcript. To further ensure the anonymity of the participants, each participant was assigned a pseudo-name and will never be identified by their real name. All audio files obtained in this study and identifiable written information will be kept in a secure locked location until they are erased or destroyed in accordance with the research ethics protocol approved by the university ethics review board.
Methods of Verification

When conducting empirical research it is important to ensure that collected data is accurate and trustworthy. For this study accurate and trustworthy data collection and analysis was considered in several ways. First interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to allow for the information to be reviewed multiple times and by multiple people. During coding, transcripts were reviewed several times (once prior to coding and at least twice during coding) to ensure thoroughness and accuracy. The categories and themes generated from the interviews were identified and agreed upon by the researcher and principal investigator, Dr. Charles P. Chen. To further improve the trustworthiness of the data obtained in this study, the researcher reflected on and clarified her biases at the beginning of the project and throughout the study. The extensive use of quotes were also used to help minimize researcher interpretation. Very detailed participant profiles were included in APPENDIX I to provide sufficient context for participant narratives.

The Role of the Researcher

Within qualitative research interviews are meant to be one-sided conversations between a researcher and participant with sole emphasis on uncovering the participant’s perceptions of their own unique experience (Berg, 2007). With emphasis on the participant’s experience and the meaning that they attach to it, interviews are not meant to be a traditional dialogue between equal parties, but rather the goal is to obtain information from the participant. As such, the role of the researcher is to facilitate the participant’s telling of their story by guiding them through the use of flexible open-ended questions. Although quantitative researchers often strive to remain distant and maximally
independent from the subject being researched, qualitative researchers may seek to partially minimize the distance between themselves and their participants by acknowledging their own personal background (Crestwell, 1994). Where quantitative research does not discuss the researcher’s values and biases, a qualitative researcher acknowledges the value-laden nature of research by reporting on his/her values and perceived biases. Maintaining an awareness of one’s subjective experience while conducting research is also critical to minimizing the impact that personal bias or beliefs can have on meaning interpretation (Chen, 1998).

*Personal Biography, Biases and Feelings about the Topic*

The current researcher was born and raised in Canada by parents who were also born and raised in Canada. Without first hand-experience with immigration, the writer is somewhat personally removed from the topic of investigation. Despite not having personal experience with immigration, this topic is considered to be very important to the researcher because of the known stressors associated with immigrating to a new country and adapting to a new culture.

The current researcher became interested in this topic several years ago while working on a similar research project (under the supervision of the principle investigator Dr. Charles P. Chen), which involved investigating the initial adjustment experiences of new immigrants to Canada. During that project, while coding transcripts the current researcher was struck by the amount of resiliency displayed by many immigrants who faced seemingly insurmountable challenges (e.g., isolation, discrimination, culture shock etc.). The researcher then became increasingly interested in learning more about the experiences of immigrants after working in a hospital setting during a Ph.D. practicum
and encountering several young adolescents who were struggling to overcome issues with acculturation stress. As a counselling therapist, the researcher is interested in the topic of resiliency because the ability to overcome challenges has relevant implications for assisting individuals to develop their coping skills.

The researcher’s lack of direct personal experience with immigration has disadvantages as well as advantages. In particular, a lack of experience with immigration may make it more difficult for participants to identify and/or connect with the researcher; however, the researcher’s training in counselling psychology likely helped to facilitate a climate of warmth and trust in order to facilitate more open dialogue from participants. In addition, a personal lack of experience with immigration may have helped to ensure that the researcher’s own experiences did not contaminate the information collected in this study. In particular, without personal experience with immigration, it is less likely that the researcher’s own experiences affected the area of focus for the study and/or the thematic codes that emerged during data analysis. As a result, data analysis is more likely to be based solely on the experiences of the actual research participants.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: Pre-Immigration Experiences and Expectations

Results Chapters at a Glance

The interview responses and narratives of the twenty research participants were analyzed at the cross-case level utilizing a grounded theory approach. The following six chapters will present the themes generated during the analysis, which reflect the immigration and career development experiences of professional immigrants. The semi-structured interview guide (see APPENDIX F) provided an organizational framework for general themes, such as pre-immigration experiences, adjustment experiences and retraining experiences. Additional themes related to career and adjustment experiences that naturally arose within participants’ narrative responses will also be presented. For organizational purposes, the emergent themes that arose from the professional immigrant narratives will be broken down into six chapters: Chapter 4) Pre-immigration Experiences and Expectations, Chapter 5) Post-immigration Initial Adjustment Experiences, Chapter 6) Initial Canadian Work Experiences, Chapter 7) The Pursuit of Canadian Retraining, Chapter 8) Canadian Educational Retraining Outcomes, and Chapter 9) The Career Development and Resiliency of Professional Immigrants. For an overview of the presented themes see APPENDIX G.

This chapter presents and discusses the themes that arose related to pre-immigration experiences and expectations. First the pre-immigration career development experiences of participants are presented. Then the factors that led to a decision to immigrate to Canada are identified. Participants’ pre-immigration expectations regarding their Canadian career development are then offered.
Pre-immigration Career Development Experiences

For a detailed description of the educational and career development background of each participant, see APPENDIX I. All of the professional immigrants in this study attended university in their home country and most felt very positive about their pre-Canadian career development experiences. In particular, nineteen out of twenty participants had positive things to say about their previous career. For example, talking about her former career as an accountant P17 said: “Oh, I loved it. I really loved it”! Talking about her career satisfaction as a human resources coordinator, P3 said: “I felt very accomplished. It was the peak of my career where I really felt myself as a valued asset. I was developing the business and was involved in different projects, and I was really happy”. Discussing her pre-immigration career satisfaction as a veterinary assistant, P13 said that she was: “extremely satisfied. Very much so”. Meanwhile talking about her former career as a financial controller P8 echoed: “It was very good. I was lucky with the teams I’ve worked with… Good experience for the fifteen years I worked in Albania”. Reflecting on her career as a food microbiologist P18 said: “It was challenging in the sense that they demand sometimes, but you get training and supports to cover that. But I found it very satisfying”. Similarly, talking about his career as an accountant P4 said: “I was happy, and I was fine”. Another accountant, P11 shared: “I was really satisfied. I was being promoted basically every year, and I was thinking if I didn’t leave the Philippines, most of my colleagues were Vice Presidents already”.

Although most participants worked in a business or industrial environment (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P14, P16, P17, & P18), some participants worked in an educational (P2, P5, & P12) or medical (P13, P15, P19, & P20) setting. Three of the
participants (P15, P19, & P20) even went to medical school and reported that they had
derived a high level of satisfaction with their career as a doctor. For instance, discussing his
former career satisfaction, P19 said: “It was very satisfying. I liked everything about it”.
Another former doctor P15 shared how he was satisfied with his career as a doctor and
particularly enjoyed helping individuals in remote areas and teaching others.

Only P7 indicated that he disliked his previous career as an electrical engineer. When
discussing pre-immigration career satisfaction P7 stated: “I was not satisfied with my career
in China because the company had some problems with the business”. Although all of the
other participants reported being quite satisfied with their pre-immigration career, some
participants offered details about drawbacks to their previous job. Most of these drawbacks
centered on job-related tasks, long hours, low pay, stress, commuting time and slow
advancement. For instance, discussing the undesirable aspects of being a professor P12 said:
“Sometimes I disliked grading tests and preparing the exams before-hand. It was very time
consuming”. Citing pay issues P5 recalled: “the pay was not good”. Talking about her long
work hours, P14 said: “in El Salvador you usually work on Saturday mornings too, so it’s
forty four hours per week, not forty like in Canada”. Although quite satisfied with her
former career, P11 also complained about her long work hours and the high level of stress
that she encountered working in a bank setting. Meanwhile, P9 disliked her long
commute and the length of time that it took to advance within the company.

Despite sharing the above complaints, most participants reported a high level of job
satisfaction and cited many positive aspects of their former job, such as level of
responsibility and prestige, opportunities for growth, the people that they worked with
and their sense of career identity. In addition, most participants reported that their career
was very central to their overall life. Only two participants said that their previous career was only “somewhat important” (P10) or “not really important” (P9) because they tended to focus on their family as a priority in their life. In sharp contrast, referring his previous career P19 said: “That was my life. Without a career, man is nobody”.

Factors That Led to a Decision to Immigrate to Canada

Despite a high level of career satisfaction amongst most participants, all participants decided to immigrate to Canada to start a new life. Participants were asked why and how they made this decision. Participants were also asked whether work-life was a factor related to their decision to immigrate. Only six participants (P12, P10, P5, P14, P7, & P15) said that their work-life was related to their decision. The other fourteen participants based their decision to immigrate on other factors. According to participant responses, the factors that prompted a decision to immigrate to Canada can be broken down into: 1) a desire for an improved standard of living, 2) career development and/or to pursue higher education, 3) to provide opportunities for their children, 4) a desire for safety and/or greater freedom/liberties, and 5) relational influences. Although many participants offered several reasons for choosing to immigrate, most participants cited a desire for an improved standard of living (P2, P10, P8, & P18) or better career/education opportunities (P12, P5, P1, P3, P6, P13, P14, & P16) as the main reason for immigrating. For many of these participants, wanting access to greater career opportunities seemed to go hand in hand with a desire for an improved standard of living.

Discussing how his decision to immigrate to Canada was related to a desire for a better life, P10 responded: “the quality of life definitely”. Similarly P8 said: “We wanted a better life”. P2 stated: “It was the lifestyle”. Aside from an improved lifestyle, several
participants also talked about wanting greater access to career opportunities in order to enhance their standard of living. For instance, explaining why she chose to immigrate to Canada P18 said: “Because we hear it is ‘the land of opportunity’. And so I came to take advantage of those opportunities”.

Several participants also wanted to pursue educational opportunities in Canada. P16 wanted to learn more about architecture in other parts of the world and said that he chose Canada because he believed his family could have a better standard of living here. P6 also decided to immigrate to Canada to pursue further education. P6 recalled: “So my future was like okay, I’ll go to Canada, I’ll study something, and I may join my uncle’s business after that”. P5 chose to immigrate because he wanted to advance his career as a teacher and have a higher standard of living than he had in Uganda. P5 also liked the idea of pursuing a PhD in Canada.

For some participants, a desire for a better life centered largely on them wanting to provide a better life for their family. In particular, four participants (P4, P11 P13, & P19) stated that one of the main reasons for immigrating was to provide better opportunities for their children. P4 said: “The main decision I have to say is for my child. I have children and they were getting to be teenagers and we heard that Canada is a nice country for teens”. Echoing this, P13 explained: “I wanted my kids to have some foreign education”. P19 stated: “Just this thought that my children should grow up in a multicultural environment with a wider perspective because I want their mind to be free of all constraints”. Similarly P11 said:

Because of my children, that’s why we decided to immigrate to Canada... Because we’re thinking about what’s good for the children, what’s good for their future... Canada being first world compared to Philippines which is third world, there are more opportunities for them to grow and for their future (P11).
Aside from wanting to provide better opportunities for their children, one participant made the decision to immigrate to Canada with her husband because she was concerned about being able to raise her future family in a safe and secure place. Discussing how she noticed that North America seemed like a safer place to live than Israel, P17 said:

There is not such political intensity. There is no breaking news every hour, no buses exploding, no terrorist attacks. The first time we came to the U.S., it was two months after September 11… So, of course, every one was still under the effect of that disaster. But still, I mean, it’s just one-time event. In Israel, people live with this fear every single day. So just very different environment. So I said- I don’t want to live in Israel anymore. I don’t want to raise my family in this country (P17).

Also seeking greater security for his family after observing conflict in India between Christians and Muslims, P10 mentioned that he was attracted to Canada because he viewed this country as “fair” and “secular”. For similar reasons, P7 decided to immigrate to Canada because he desired more personal freedom, saying that he viewed Canada as: “safe and peaceful”. Discussing his decision P7 explained: “There is still some restriction of freedom in my home country, so I choose to leave my home country and come to Canada”. P2 was also concerned about living in a safe environment. Discussing her decision to emigrate from the United States, P2 recalled:

There was a really desperate situation developing between the rich and poor… when I left, it was just starting to get bad, and I started seeing the writing on the wall, and that things weren’t changing… I think it was a lot of the violence that was created because of the lack of resources, and I just felt that I couldn’t have a place I could feel safe (P2).

P2 also wanted to feel secure in the event that she got ill and so she was attracted to Canada’s healthcare system.
Several participants suggested that family or friends had influenced their decision to immigrate to Canada. For some participants family was central to their decision (P20, P3, P4, P11, & P13), while for others family was only partially related to their decision (P16, P2, & P8). P20 described how her decision was based entirely on the fact that she was engaged to a man who had decided to immigrate to Canada. Meanwhile a desire to be closer to her son influenced P3’s decision to leave Russia. P3 explained: “First of all, my son has chosen the United States the country of his living, and for me to immigrate to the U.S. was much more complicated than to immigrate to Canada which has a skilled workers problem”. Also mentioning the role of family influence in her decision, P13 explained:

I had a mentor who was my husband’s uncle, who was very fond of the United States for some reason and he had a home base in St. Louis. He said ‘if you come to Canada, I’ll take you’, so I said ‘okay, that’s a good thing’. But he mostly encouraged me. He was an engineer who had worked in the U.S. and India, so he helped me make the application and so on (P13).

For some participants who wanted to leave their country of origin to explore opportunities abroad and/or seek out a better standard of living, family seemed to still play a role in influencing the decision to specifically choose Canada over other places. For instance, P6 talked about how family support directly influenced his decision to chose Canada when he explained: “I picked Canada because my uncle was here and he had a well developed business”. In addition, P16 primarily wanted to leave India in order to pursue an international education; however, his family influenced his decision to specifically choose Canada. P16 explained:

After my marriage, I didn’t want to go anywhere alone around the world, so I have to take my family. And to take my family along, I thought Canada was the best place to be. So a) I would say my initial pursuit of getting into higher education outside the country was ingrained in my mind; and b) because I got married, I had to get into something which would take me and my family together (P16).
Meanwhile, although P14 left El Salvador because she wanted to explore opportunities abroad, she saw an opportunity to migrate as the most feasible way to achieve independence from her family. P14 explained:

At the age of twenty-five, possibly twenty-six, I was already too old; I was already an old maid, so I had no job prospects, no social prospects. My girlfriends were already seeing people steadily and my parents were very, very strict. They pretty much told me what to do and when to do it. So I felt that I had no way out. So, I started to look for opportunities to get out (P14).

Aside from family, it seems that acquaintances or friends can also influence people’s immigration decisions. P5 explained that his decision was prompted by a Canadian acquaintance who had encouraged P5 to immigrate to Canada to earn a higher standard of living. P5 said that the acquaintance even completed his application paperwork. P5 explained: “he did everything. He applied on my behalf, and he said ‘sign here’, and I did”.

Overall, professional immigrants who come to Canada seemed to be influenced by either a desire for a better life or a desire to be with family. Regardless of the specific reason participants chose to leave their country of origin, it seems that many participants chose Canada specifically because either they perceived Canada to be relatively safe and desirable and/or because Canada’s immigration policy facilitated their relatively quick immigration process. In supporting the idea that Canada’s relatively open immigration process is attractive to many immigrants who desire migration, P12 stated: “at that time, it was easier to come to Canada, and I applied as a skilled worker”. P10 said: “It was a country that offered opportunity and it still does. The immigration process was a lot quicker, and I had heard positive things about it from the people who I had approached”.

**Pre-immigration Expectations of Canadian Career Development**

In discussing their pre-immigration expectations of their Canadian career development, participants felt either: 1) very optimistic and confident about resuming their desired career in Canada, 2) neutral or partly confident about being able to resume their desired career within an entry level position or 3) not confident about resuming their pre-immigration career.

Overwhelmingly most participants reported that they felt either quite confident or somewhat confident that they would be able to continue working in their desired profession upon arriving in Canada. In fact, some participants reported feeling extremely confident. Talking about his pre-immigration expectations P1 said: “I was very confident. Too confident”. Similarly P7 stated: “Yeah, I thought it would be easy to find a job in Canada when I was in China”. P17 was also confident that she could continue in her field and said: “I knew for sure I’ll find something but I also didn’t want to settle… I was determined to find a job in accounting”. Meanwhile former teacher P5 said: “I was expecting to get a job, the way I had a job in Uganda. To have a permanent job, beyond that job, excel how I was excelling in my country”. Also anticipating continuing to have a similar career in Canada, P13 explained: “We led a good life in India… so we thought that we would continue to have that or better”. Based on her English language skills and American experience and education, P2 also felt very confident that she would find work in her desired field in Canada. P2 said: “I felt like, because of my training and English is my first language, there should be no issue”. P14 also expected that her previous training prepared her to work in Canada. P14 maintained:

Business is pretty universal, there is nothing sophisticated or complex about it. It’s not engineering, and it’s not medicine…The four Ps in marketing are the same in
Latin America as they are in North America… business is business. Nothing to it (P14).

In addition to feeling confident because of their previous training and experience, some participants reported that they felt confident in part because of Canada’s point system, which recognized their foreign education and skills. P19, a former medical doctor from India recalled: “When I immigrated, it was pretty easy for me because of my background and the interviews that they had, I thought I would succeed here; there was no reason for me to suspect otherwise”. Similarly P15, a medical doctor from China, said:

I had a high expectation when I came here because it’s a new place; I never been here before. So I decide to apply to immigration because there’s a score system, like if you have minimum score, I can apply. So I find out I was above the minimum score, so I applied. And I believe I have enough education and training to make me qualified to find work (P15).

Receiving encouragement from other people also seemed to contribute to people’s confidence. In highlighting the influence of others P3 stated:

I was 100% confident that I will find employment very fast, and I was confident I can find professional employment because when I worked for the University of Freebourg, I had many clients who worked in North America who encouraged me. They told me, ‘When you’re forty-three, it’s still okay. You can still land a new career in Canada, so it’s fine’. And they encouraged me (P3).

Also echoing the impact of social influence, P12 said: “When I was there [Columbia], I felt very confident. I had heard that in Canada, you could get a good job”. Similarly P18 recalled:

People would say, ‘Oh, it’s easy. Go to Canada with your qualifications, it’s easy to find work’. And also, the advantage of Canada is that with time you can become a citizen. So I thought, oh, here is an opportunity. Let me go to Canada (P18).

Although not all participants were as optimistic in their expectations before immigrating to Canada, many participants suggested that they felt either somewhat neutral or partially optimistic. P10 indicated that he anticipated that he would at least be able to find
minimum wage work right away. Similarly, P4 talked about how he expected that he would have to look for entry-level positions, however, he felt optimistic that he could work his way back up. P4 explained:

I knew that initially I could start some steps down, so I don’t need to start as an accountant but I can start as an assistant, see how things are done here. For sure, country has different rules, different way of doing things... So I was not expecting to be an accountant here, but yes, assistant or clerk. Something that can introduce me and see how things are done here so I can learn because I feel I’m capable to learn things very quickly (P4).

P16 also experienced a mix of optimism with a realization that he may have to start over. P16 recalled: “I was not really afraid that I will not find work, but I was not even sure what kind of work will be waiting for me… I knew I had to re-root myself”. Echoing the idea of not knowing what to expect yet somehow feeling optimistic P17 said: “I knew nothing, really. I had no idea. I just knew deep inside myself that it will work out”.

Rather than having optimistic or neutral expectations, some participants suggested that they tried not to form any expectations. For instance, talking about employment expectations P9 said: “I didn’t put too much expectation on that”. Discussing her pre-immigration expectations for employment P20 said: “I didn’t have expectations. I was in love and excited. I knew that somehow I have to go into healthcare. If not healthcare… something related to human science, human development”. P6 also reported not forming expectations:

I did not have any kind of expectations. The job market wasn’t that bad at the time I came here in 2004. So, I wasn’t really worried, but I was not expecting at the same time… I knew that I was going to get something in Canada for a job. I was open to work for any kind of job which I had to do (P6).

Overall, most participants were fairly confident about finding work in Canada and continuing to work in their professional field. Although many participants also
anticipated that they may have to start in entry-level positions, most expected that they
would not encounter great difficulty at least finding entry-level work in Canada. Only
two participants (P8 & P11) reported that they had not been confident about continuing in
their desired profession. For instance, P11 recalled:

I really expected that I wouldn’t be able to go into the same field because my relatives were saying that you cannot be a branch manager right away. You have to take the exams and the like. There was no expectation that I would be doing the same thing (P11).

P8 also expected that she would have to start over in her career:

I knew that when I come here, I have to start from zero. From scratch. I was very well aware of this thing. So it’s a good thing to be prepared for what you expect. Even though when you apply, they ask you for credentials and everything… but when you come here, it’s zero. You start from scratch (P8).

In addition to being asked about their pre-immigration employment expectations, participants were also asked whether or not they had anticipated completing educational retraining in Canada. Most participants reported that they either thought that they would not have to complete educational retraining (P2, P5, P12, P14, P17, P18, & P19) or that they would only have to complete some minor (e.g., one or two courses) retraining (P1, P4, P11, P15, & P20). For instance former medical doctor P19 said: “I didn’t think it was required, actually. I could train most of the Canadians… I’m very, very well trained”. P18 stated: “No. I didn’t think it was necessary”. P17 also did not expect to have to re-take her education, however, P17 realized that she would have to go through a review process in order to apply for a local designation as an accountant. P10, P13 and P16 were also aware about the need to have their credentials re-evaluated, however, they were unsure of whether or not they would be required to complete any educational retraining.
In contrast, several other participants (P1, P4, P11, P15 & P20) anticipated that they might have to complete some retraining. Discussing his expectations for Canadian retraining P1 said: “A little bit, but I didn’t anticipate I was going to have to train too much. Since I had U.S. experience, I didn’t expect to have to go through the whole process again”. Similarly, P4 recalled: “for myself, I was not initially planning to do the whole career again, so I thought those times would be very short”. Even former medical doctor P15 said: “I heard I needed to do a little bit training, but not alot training”. Only five participants (P3, P7, P6, P8, & P9) came to Canada with clear expectations of completing full educational retraining in Canada.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS: Post-immigration: Initial Adjustment Experiences

This chapter will present and discuss the themes that arose in relation to participants’ initial experiences in Canada. First, participant’s initial impressions and encountered difficulties will be highlighted. Then the impact of encountered difficulties on participant’s well-being and self-esteem will be discussed. Lastly in this chapter, participants’ coping strategies will be identified.

Initial Experiences and Difficulties

Participants in the study were asked about their initial impressions and experiences in Canada. Many participants (P2, P5, P6, P7, P8, P12, P15, P16, & P20) reflected on how they initially felt quite happy and/or excited to be in a new country. Talking about how she felt initially P20 said: “I was very happy”. Similarly reflecting on his initial experience, P5 said: “I felt very happy, the country looked great”. P6 echoed: “I enjoyed that moment of the new environment”. Aside from feeling excited about being in a new country, participants who reported feeling initially quite positive about their immigration experience seemed to be impressed by things such as Canada’s scenery, spaciousness and well developed infrastructure. For instance, P8 recalled: “when I moved here, the first place that I ran by was the lake, it was beautiful there”. P15 also talked about how he was impressed by the green spaces and relative lack of crowding. Impressed by the infrastructure, P16 recounted: “I was excited, mostly to see the infrastructure part of it. Especially I do recall the expressways, the roads; I was excited to see all those”. Also surprised by the infrastructure, P13 remembered: “When I came here, the most surprising
aspect was I saw so much development here. It was busy, and the buildings and
technology, I thought why is Canada not known to the rest of the world?”

Although many participants felt quite positive about their initial experiences,
some participants (P9, P11, P18, & P19) reported that they initially felt very
uncomfortable, sad or disappointed. For instance, talking about her initial discomfort, P9
said: “Canada was kind of not as comfortable a feeling as home”. P11 discussed feeling
sad initially: “I felt so depressed because… It was depressing because we arrived on
Christmas and winter is depressing”. P18 felt disappointed and recalled: “It was very
disappointing. If I had a way of going back, I would take the next flight back!” P19 also
suffered initially because he felt that getting things set up (e.g., a driver’s license) was very
challenging. Recalling his difficulties P19 said: “Getting set up, it was just an awful
experience. The most awful experience of my life”. Even some participants (P2, P8, &
P20) who initially felt positive also recalled having negative feelings early on. For
instance, P8 stated: “To be honest, the first day or two, you feel lost. You’re lost. You
come into a new country, a new culture, a new climate. Everything new”. Similarly P2
recalled: “I felt happy and relieved in some ways… And then I felt a little lost”.

Regardless of the degree to which participants felt positive and/or negative about
their immigration experience, all participants in the study reported that they encountered
some initial problems or difficulties when they first arrived in Canada. Overall, these
challenges can be broken down into: 1) adjusting to a new climate 2) locating desirable
housing, 3) financial difficulties/ reduced standard of living, 4) relational difficulties 5)
prejudice/discrimination 6) culture shock and/or acculturation stress, 7) language barriers, 8)
navigation and transportation difficulties, and 9) difficulty finding work.
Most participants (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P17, P18, & P20) first arrived in Canada during the fall or winter months. It is not surprising then that when asked about their first impressions or difficulties in Canada, many participants mentioned that they experienced difficulty adjusting to the cold weather. For instance, P12 recalled: “We came in wintertime, in March, so it was still very cold. Oh, my God. I couldn’t believe it. Even though we have some parts of Colombia which are cold, but this is very, very cold!” Also comparing Canada’s climate to her home country, P14 said: “Vancouver is very rainy. Very, very, very, very, very rainy. In El Salvador, there is a rainy season, but when it rains, it’s this thunderous shower, and then it stops. In Vancouver, it’s constant”. Also taken off guard by the weather, P17 shared: “When we came, it was really, really cold. It was the end of January… and then February came which is extremely cold. So it was such a shock in many ways”. Coming from Zimbabwe, P18 also found it very challenging to adjust to a cold climate. P18 recalled in detail:

Coming here, it was cold. I had my jacket. I thought it was warm, but it wasn’t. So my first year, I struggled... Back home, you had the same pair of shoes from January to December. You only throw it away if it’s torn. As long as it’s still in good condition, you wear it. You wear the same sweater January to December. Here, you buy clothes according to the season. What you wore in January is not the same thing you wore in the summer or in September; it’s different. So, somehow I was not prepared with that because I didn’t do my homework because I just thought... you know, those are some of the things we tended to overlook (P18).

Also coming from a much warmer climate in Uganda, P5 recalled the adjustment he had to make: “I came in December, weather was a very big problem. I had to put on a thief mask... I was hiding myself. That was the first hardship I endured”.

When asked to describe any challenges they faced after arriving in Canada, several participants (P1, P2, P11, P12, & P14) also mentioned the difficulty they encountered with locating desirable housing. P12 mentioned how financial barriers impacted on his family’s
search for housing when he said: “we didn’t have any idea that we had to pay first and last month, so financial issues were the most difficult”. Difficulties with finding affordable housing may lead many immigrants to share housing, which can create further challenges. For instance, P11 discussed the stress of having to adjust to shared accommodations: “The stress of living with relatives, and you’re not used to two families in one house. Although they are relatives you still find you’re uncomfortable living with them, and that added to the stress as well”.

Aside from sharing housing, immigrants may also end up settling for sub-standard housing. Highlighting this issue, P2 said:

There’s so many basement apartments, and a lot of times I think the immigrants will get the last bits of stuff. So, my first place I had mould, and all that kind of stuff, but I was so busy trying to get myself financially stable, that I just let that part go (P2).

Sadly, due to housing difficulties some immigrants may also be vulnerable to housing scams and/or mistreatment. P14 identified this as an issue when she said:

I discovered early on that it’s quite the shock, and that I have to figure out my own apartment. I can’t live in a hostel forever… I tried to go through one of those for-profit companies that look for apartments for people. But it’s more of a scam (P14).

Even when immigrants manage to secure housing, financial difficulties may make it difficult to furnish their home. P14 recalled this type of challenge:

You know, you find an apartment and then you realize ‘this is empty, I have to go furnish it’… I didn’t buy a bed, someone gave me a bed. But I got a bed five months later, so I was sleeping in my sleeping bag (P14).

In fact, many participants (P1, P11, P12, P13, P14, & P20) specifically mentioned that they faced financial difficulties after their arrival in Canada. Identifying financial concerns as a primary challenge P12 said: “That was one difficulty, the financial one, because we didn’t bring too much money with us”. Similarly P13 stated: “Let me be very honest. Ten years ago the first and foremost difficulty I experienced was, whatever money we had brought
was about a thirtieth… one dollar was about thirty rupees at the time”. Most often financial challenges lead to a reduced standard of living. For instance P1, who had lived briefly in the U.S before immigrating to Canada, said: “I had come from a level standard of living in the U.S. which I thought I was going to keep here, and then I got kind of hit with reality. It was tough in the beginning”. P11 also highlighted the issue with facing a reduced standard of living:

The first two years we were coping with having no vehicle. When you go to the grocery we experienced putting all those canned goods in the backpack. How many blocks? It’s so heavy, and it’s discomfort, and it’s winter time. You have to walk, and you will cry….We were living, nine of us, two families, in a two bedroom apartment. And not to brag about it, but we had all the comforts back home [Philippines]. We had three helpers; I had three girls with one nanny for each. We didn’t have to cook, all of those menial jobs you have to do when you get home. After work you’d just have to eat. Here, after work you have to cook, fix things, when you’re going to bed after three hours and you have to clean everything up. So basically five or six hours of sleep (P11).

Aside from having to adjust to living with more people in a smaller apartment, several participants mentioned facing other types of relational adjustments and difficulties. A couple of participants (P11 & P13) shared that they experienced some difficulty due to seeing their own family members struggle with the stress of immigration. For instance, P11 mentioned experiencing additional stress due to knowing that her children were having difficulty adapting:

There was one time when my eldest asked me ‘mom, why are we here? We are living like rats here’! They were getting emotional about it… The kids [were] coping with a small place, and they used to have all of those comforts. You see them and they are depressed as well. It added to the stress for me (P11).

Reflecting on the impact that her husband’s difficulty had on their family, P13 said:

It was my husband who had the coping difficulty. So he became sort of a force that pulled us back. That had a lot of impact on the family. Those first couple of years went very quickly, but soon, back around 2004, 2005, he couldn’t cope at all… So he became more and more depressed. He had to return [to India] eventually (P13).
P13’s husband ended up staying in India and she had to make the very difficult choice of remaining in Canada on her own with her two teenage children.

P18 had to contend with a different type of family difficulty. Since she immigrated on her own to Canada, P18’s family remained in Zimbabwe and P18 recalled experiencing pressure from her family to send money after she first arrived:

The pressure was mostly home cause each time you call to check on people, it’s like you hear all these problems… ‘Oh, you forgot. One month has passed, you haven’t sent us anything. You forgot the children’. Like you have to explain that ‘I’m trying, I’m trying’, but nobody understood. So it was really heartbreaking (P18).

Separation from family and/or friends after immigrating was stressful for other participants due to feelings of isolation and/or loneliness. Identifying disconnection from family as an initial challenge P6 said: “Away from the family was one thing, I was kind of homesick for a few months”. Recalling his own feelings of separation after having to come to Canada initially without his wife P10 said: I had a negative point because I missed them. At that time, we didn’t have any children, but I missed my wife, I missed my extended family; I had to actually be alone”. Similarly P2 said: “I felt a little lost because I didn’t have friends around, I didn’t have family, I was really alone”. P14 was also used to living with her family and said: “The thing is, for better or for worse, my dad always did everything, so I had to figure out how to do those things on my own”. Being away from family and friends was also difficult for P11 and her family. Recalling this challenge P11 said: “We moved here and we’re just down to a small group, we didn’t have many friends and relatives here, and we were so, so, so sad. Even the kids wanted to go home within the first weeks”.

Experiencing a separation from family and friends could be especially difficult for individuals who encounter difficulties forming new relationships. Unfortunately, quite a
few participants (P2, P3, P17, P18, & P19) reported that it was not very easy to make
new friends because they did not generally find Canadians to be very welcoming and/or
friendly. Reflecting on her initial experience with Canadians P18 said: “They’re not
friendly at all. I couldn’t believe it”. P18 further explained:

Where I come from, it’s different. Yes, you live with strangers, but they are not
completely strangers. Like here, you live in an apartment, but you have no clue who
lives where, what floor. Where I come from, you would know everybody by their
name, who are their families…Where I come from, you would not walk for a few
minutes without stopping to chat and say, ‘Hi’. You chat with everybody, and it’s
happy/happy. And everyone notices: “Oh, I didn’t see you on Monday. Where were
you?”… but here, you are with people and you are alone. I think it was the first time
I realized the meaning of the word ‘lonely’ (P18).

P2 also talked about feeling lonely after she arrived in Canada. She recalled: “I didn’t
really feel accepted. There was ‘welcome to Canada’ when I first immigrated, but
otherwise, it was like no I wasn’t. There was always a distance… Between me and other
Canadians…The first year was very, very difficult”. P17 echoed similar sentiments and
said: “I found that people were cold, too. Nobody was willing to help you, really”.

Similarly P3 stated:

These [Canadian] people are very tough in terms of the – how to say – being
sympathizing and sympathetic… Unsympathetic and very vulgar. Russians are very
emotional people, but still, the culture I worked for was always very formal. And
here, I had to face this informality (P3).

More than unsympathetic, P19 said that he found some Canadians to be quite “rude”.

Referring to Canadians P19 said: “some of them are good, but some of them were
extremely rude, contrary to what I had heard about Canadians”.

In addition to having experiences with finding Canadians to be unwelcoming and/or
rude, many participants (P4, P5, P7, P10, P15, P16, P19, & P20) talked about experiences
they had with prejudice or discrimination. Discussing prejudice as an issue he faced, P4 said:

I don’t know if the right word could be ‘respect’, but what I was when I came here, it was a huge difference. People admired me there, and when I came here, things were all the opposite. Because you are an immigrant, you are nobody… Once I got in one of my survival jobs that I had initially, I remember somebody make a math equation and I resolved it right away. And the guy said, ‘Ah, don’t listen to him. He’s an immigrant; he doesn’t know anything’. And then nobody talked to me... I feel bad (P4).

P10 also talked about experiencing prejudice and/or ignorance from others:

The shock came that certain Canadians thought that you were coming down from the boonies when you came over here, and they spoke to you as such… And it’s like you’re shell shocked because, not only were the questions quite offensive, it’s the level of ignorance that really hit you in the head. What do these people really think we are? Of course, there are all sorts all over the world, and we have our elements as well, but it’s like ‘excuse me, we are all people, we exist’ (P10).

Sharing her experience, P20 said:

People look at you very strange. They didn’t understand. They don’t have same reality as immigrant faced. Like, I met several people. When I told them my experience with interviews, they couldn’t relate cause they never had it. I think it’s due to double standard in hiring processes of immigrants or people who graduated here. Or it just culture of nepotism and favours. Its big time, everywhere… So, it’s not my own fault that I’ve been mistreated. Its just common practice which relate to this population. Just unfairness of life, right? (P20).

Sharing his views and experience with prejudice, P16 stated:

I have come to realize that peoples’ prejudice is something which kind of becomes a barrier. I have a colleague of mine who, we were working in the office for a couple years together, and one day he comes to my desk and he wants to wish me for Ramadan… Probably because I keep a beard, because of my looks, he assumed that I’m a follower of Islamic religion… What might be the factor that made him come and actually wish me and actually believe that I am Islamic follower? Is it just the beard? And that’s just a prejudice he might be keeping, right? (P16).

Based on his own experiences with prejudice, P5 concluded: “Here, it is bias[ed]. You may not believe it, but I’ve seen it. Biasness in employers… Because of religion, race, colour… You may not like it, but it is there. I’ve faced it”. Echoing this sentiment, P7
said: “I think there is still a virus for a new Canadian or immigrant. I was not born in Canada; I feel sometimes there is an embarrassed for us”. Also speaking about prejudice and discrimination, P15 stated: “this is a problem here, in Canada that affect[s] a lot of immigrants. Before I came, I saw Canada as fair place, fair country; now, I feel opposite”.

Experiences with prejudice and/or discrimination can heighten difficulties with having to adjust to a new social environment. Having to adapt to many changes and challenges relatively quickly can lead to culture shock, especially when newly encountered norms and practices are quite different from what one is used to. Several participants (P2, P3, P12, P14, P18, & P19) mentioned having difficulty with adjusting to Canadian culture. For instance, P14 discussed the difficulties she has faced in trying to “fit in” even ten years after her arrival. Discussing her concerns P14 said: “In some ways, I’m still an immigrant; I still cannot connect to society. I find it so difficult to fit in and to date. I find that the values are different”. P3 has also experienced a lot of difficulty adjusting to new cultural values and norms. Talking candidly about her difficulties, P3 said:

First of all, I had to work in the social group which is different from the social group before. I worked at call centre, and I totally misunderstood people. I totally misunderstood the type of behaviour which was accepted on the floor, the type of interactions between supervisors and the customers, representatives. I didn’t understand this teamwork; I didn’t understand some things which really seemed to me to be very rude, acceptable here. And I felt like destroyed. Every time I had to work I felt destroyed because I didn’t understand people (P3).

In particular, coming from a socialist country [Russia], P3 found it difficult to adjust to individualistic values. Describing this challenge P3 said:

I think I was shocked for the first three years, always. Even when I found the first professional job, I was shocked because of competition. Even when you are INSIDE the company, everyone is competing for what? The job shouldn’t be your god. It’s okay to have a job, but it’s not a god, everything in life, right? (P3).
P19 also suggested that he experienced culture shock. Recalling his difficulties with seeing his children exposed to new values P19 shared: “It was very difficult. I almost lost both my sons because of the cultural shock that we had and some of the misleading that certain people gave to my children”.

For other participants, culture shock came in the form of having to adjust to a new diet. For example, P12 highlighted food as an adjustment issue when he said: “Some change would be the food because we were used to eating typical Colombian food. Meals, special dishes and this and that. But here, if you can find them, the taste is really different”. Similarly P18 stated: “the food … I wasn’t prepared cause where I come from, the food… it’s different. The way we eat things, like you are coffee people and tea; I eat my cornmeal, here eat rice, yesterday’s chicken. But the taste is different; everything is different”. Even a switch from American food to Canadian food proved challenging for P2 who recalled: “it was like getting used to eating different foods. The States is so close to Canada, you wouldn’t think… But it is, it’s so different. The food is completely different. Even the taste of milk is different”.

Adjusting to a new language and facing language barriers was another challenge identified by many participants (P4, P7, P8, P9, P12, P15, P9, P17, & P20). For instance, when asked to describe the greatest challenge he faced after he arrived in Canada P7 said: “I think it’s the language”. Agreeing, P9 stated: “The language, I think the communication, yeah, it’s kind of fairly tough. Here, you cannot say what you want to say, because it’s a different language, and then also the culture is different, so I think you need to adapt to that”. P8 also found it difficult to adapt to a new language and recalled:

When I came here, I was looking at people’s mouths, what they’re saying, understanding nothing, almost nothing. And I had to stay home because my younger
son was two years old. So I didn’t have contact in the first months with a lot of people, but I went to the bank, and that was the first thing that I had to think of it is to understand, even though I studied English, but it’s different if you don’t talk (P8).

Facing her own challenges with adapting to a new language, P20 stated: “I knew that I had to learn English, get very, very close to the culture because the way people express themselves in Ukraine and in Canada, very different”. Reflecting on his struggle with language barriers P4 said:

Sometimes in my language, I say words that doesn’t sound completely bad to me because English is not my first language. Oh, the other day I said ‘cooker’ instead of ‘chef’… The other person said, ‘You say cooker. What you talking about?’ So then I realized if you have as a first language, sometimes when you say something that is wrong, you change it because sometimes doesn’t sound too bad to you. And for me, I have that sense. So that made things difficult (P4).

P9 referred to the need to speak in a new language as an “invisible pressure” that many immigrants face. Even P12, who has well-developed English Language skills, talked about how his children struggled with adapting to a new language. Referring to his children, P12 recalled: “It was a shock for them at the beginning because of the language barrier”.

Difficulty with navigation and transportation was another main challenge identified by some participants. Recalling the challenge of finding her way around P17 said:

We didn’t have the car; we didn’t realize how distances are bigger here and how undeveloped the transport is. In Israel, it was so easy in terms of moving yourself from place to place, even though we didn’t have subway, but things were in one place. Here, it was all over, and it was so big (P17).

P18 recalled facing very similar difficult challenges in trying to navigate a new place:

Looking at the transportation system, I remember the first few months, I didn’t know that you transfer… Our buses don’t talk. You get in, if you want to get off you shout to the driver, ‘That tree’ or ‘that stump’! Here, you have to maybe watch or you listen and use the map. Like, where I grew up in that area, so there’s no need to think of a map. So here, going through all that process, because I wasn’t prepared, it was very, very intimidating. A lot of times I find myself crying! (P18).
P10 also identified navigation and transportation as significant hurdles. When asked to describe the initial challenges he faced P10 said:

Distance in physical terms. For example, unless you’re living in a city like Toronto and you have access to the TTC, which is, for an immigrant who cannot afford a car at that point of time… You want to be able to get from point A to point B the least expensive available, because you’re coming with only so many dollars. I was in Brampton, and we had the bus stop there… I would be looking around saying ‘where the hell am I? Is this Canada?’ (P10).

Overall participants described facing several challenges when they first arrived in Canada, however, the most commonly cited challenge was difficulty with finding work. In fact, nearly all participants identified finding work to be a significant initial challenge. For instance, describing the main initial challenges he faced after arriving in Canada, P4 said: “I think the major one is find a job. Far away is finding a job … the worst thing”.

Echoing this sentiment P7 answered: “The most difficult thing is about the employment opportunity. It’s tough for the English as a Second Language people”. P7 ended up not finding any work for the first six months after his arrival. Facing the same initial difficulty P9 had thought to herself: “if you can find job, that may be a miracle”. P1 also found it difficult to find work in Canada. Recalling his difficulty P1 said:

Finding a job was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. I went to Mississauga and drove around Toronto, saw the amount of companies here. Did a job search and saw so many postings, I thought that with my experience and my language skills I should be getting a job in no time. But it took nine months instead of three weeks (P1).

P2 found it so difficult to find a job in Canada that she ended up crossing back into the United States on a regular basis in order to work. Recalling this struggle P2 said:

The first year was very, very difficult. I was also going back and forth too. I think that made a difference because I wasn’t just plopped down, I had to go back and forth to keep my other job because there was really no job opportunities (P2).
P11 not only found it difficult for herself to find a job after arriving, she also mentioned that it was difficult for her husband to find work. Remembering the difficulty they both faced P11 said: “we were stressed out looking for a job, we’re stressed from having those financial concerns”. Six months later P11 was able to find a job, however, her husband remained unemployed for a full year. Similarly P17 also reported that she and her husband both found it difficult to secure a job after arriving. P17 recalled:

It was sad because… we still can’t find a job, so what’s wrong, right? I spoke to my husband and he was in this complete state of shock, that what he though, ‘Oh, if it went for too long, I would have just come back’ because I can’t spend all my money because the bank accounts, because the life insurance policies … we withdrew all the money that we had from the savings… so all the savings we had, we just took with us when we moved here. And he said, ‘Well, I’m not going to waste all this money in order to not find a job for next six, eight, ten months. There’s only so much I can take’ (P17).

Impact of Difficulties on Well-being and Self-esteem

The stress of not being able to find work and/or encountering all sorts of other difficulties, such as adjusting to a new culture, being separated from family, and/or facing prejudice and discrimination can take a toll on people. After discussing the initial adjustment challenges that they faced, participants were asked to talk about the impact that any encountered difficulties had on their well-being and self-esteem. Only a few participants (P6, P8, P12, & P16) indicated that their immigration and adjustment experience initially had a minimal and/or positive impact on them. For instance, P12 reported: “I believe we engaged into the new environment easily. There was not much difficulty”. Similarly P16 said: “No, there was no impact on my well being”. Meanwhile, P6 talked about feeling stronger from his experience and shared: “I think it was a positive way, because, a lot of things which you have to do here is by yourself. It’s a lot of exposure, you get independent, and it really boosts your self-confidence”.
In contrast to P6’s experience, most participants mentioned that the stress they experienced during their initial adjustment in Canada had a negative impact on them. In particular, several participants mentioned that the difficulties they encountered harmed their self-esteem and confidence. P10 said: “At first, my self esteem took a beating, because I was coming from a high position”. Sharing a similar experience with unemployment affected him, P19 recalled: “It had shattered me so much that when I went for the first interview, I could barely speak”. Echoing this sentiment, P3 stated: “When I worked in my previous career in Russia, I grew with every company I worked for. I never had any doubts in myself. And here, my self esteem and personality changed drastically”. Similarly, P14 shared:

It affected my self-esteem, and I didn’t have the healthiest self-esteem because of the way my parents raised me… you know ‘put all your trust in God’. I mean, of course, put your trust, but you also have to do a lot of work, and you have to stand up for yourself. I wasn’t very good at standing up for myself (P14).

Aside from impacting on self-esteem, the stress encountered after immigration can lead to negative impacts on individuals’ physical and mental health. For example, P4 discussed how his adjustment experience zapped his energy and made him feel “old”.

Recalling his experience P4 shared:

I became very old myself. Before, I was energetic with a lot of things willing to do, then suddenly these hits or punches or whatever puts you in a state where you slow down and you start not feeling very confident with yourself (P4).

In addition, P2 mentioned how the stress affected her physical health:

I was having some physical problems because I had a thyroid disease that I didn’t know I had, so I was looking really, really thin, and I wasn’t eating properly, so when I first came, my health was going downhill because of the stress (P2).

Many participants talked about the emotional and/or psychological impacts of immigration and adjustment. Suggesting that people’s mood can be significantly affected,
P18 said: “So here, going through all that process, because I wasn’t prepared, it was very, very intimidating. A lot of times I find myself crying! Ask me why I’m crying… I don’t know. I just find myself crying”. Affected in a similar way, P7 recalled: “I feel frustration at that time, and I feel very sad about the situation”. P11 stated: “We felt depressed, we were stressed out”. P3 also suggested that the stress she encountered (from not finding work) led to her feeling depressed. P3 explained:

We moved to Toronto, and since last May… I suffered. I had almost twenty interviews over the last year, couldn’t land a job. Yes, I had periods when I felt depressed. I wanted to go to the doctor and my husband said, ‘No, don’t go to the doctor because the doctor will prescribe pills for you. We will go through this and will find a way… do exercises, walk’… What was most hard thing about this … the thing is, when you are very 100% to get the results and you never get results, you are being ruined. Sometimes I am ruined. I don’t have strength (P3).

Similar to P3, P19 also suggested that the stress of not finding work can have a long-lasting detrimental impact on one’s well-being. Reflecting on his own experience, P19 said: “Totally shattered. Like, my family almost broke up. I still haven’t recovered fully”.

Difficult adjustment experiences led some participants (P2, P5, P13, & P18) to regret their decision to immigrate to Canada and/or contemplate returning home. After encountering difficulties with finding desirable work P5 said: “That’s when I thought I should go back home”. Also having experienced doubt, P2 shared: “A lot of times I didn’t feel like I made the right decision. I felt like I really was stupid, putting all the effort in, the first two years, it was like nothing is happening, I’m worse off”. Although none of the participants followed through with actually abandoning their immigration plans, P13 came very close to moving back to India, suggesting that the stress encountered during immigration can lead some immigrants to give up on Canada. P13 reported that, although she initially adapted well to the move, her husband’s difficulties became an issue. P13 explained:
There was no problem with my children and myself. We just jumped into it, we were so enthusiastic, we wanted to learn a lot of stuff and we were so surprised that [Canada] was as good as or better than America. It was my husband who had the coping difficulty… he became more and more depressed (P13).

P13 discussed how her husband’s difficulties had a significant impact on her family:

This was a steep decline emotionally and mental health-wise. It was extremely bad in terms of emotional health and mental health, for all of us… My son also broke down. He had a very bad breakdown because he saw his dad deteriorating (P13).

In response to these difficulties, P13’s family went back to India at one point and then she decided to move back to Canada with her two children, while her husband chose to stay in India. Although she and her children have recovered, P13 reflected on another impact of immigration stress. Referring to her children P13 said: “I think the negative part of it was they lost their childhood. They didn’t have much of it, or adolescence, they became adults at once”.

Overall it seems that the stressors encountered during immigration can have not only both physical and psychological impacts, the stress can also divide families. Aside from P13, two other participants directly mentioned how the stress they encountered negatively affected their relationships. For instance, P7 shared: “I think it really influenced our psychological or mental… We feel frustration. Sometimes we argue about the life, the opportunity of our environment”. Echoing this sentiment, P9 said: “I think, a little bit effect to the family relationship, because people are not relaxed at home”.

Coping with Initial Difficulties

Although stress can lead to conflict within relationships, relationships also represent an important buffer against stress. Supporting the idea that relational support represents an important resource for coping with immigration stress, when participants were asked how they coped with encountered difficulties many mentioned that social support was a valuable
source of support. Identifying how she coped with stress, P14 said: “I called my dad and just talked”. Also noting his family to be a source of support, P4 shared:

What helped me more was the family. Family union, and they’re all in the same boat. I knew that Canada is a beautiful country to stay in, and I saw that my kids were developing, so I needed do more effort to stay (P4).

Similarly, when asked how she coped, P11 said: “Basically from the relatives. They gave us information about what to do, they gave us some things to start with, like hand-me-down clothes, everything they could hand us down”. P1 recalled: “I had my wife, so that helped a lot… And I had my brother here who helped me and guided me also a little bit on where to live and look for jobs”. Also pointing to his wife as a valuable source of support, P19 stated: “fortunately, my wife was very resilient, and she kept the family together. So, that’s full credit to her”.

Aside from family, many participants suggested that peers and friends were also an important source of support. For instance, P5 mentioned: “I contact people who lived here for long time, and then I like to talk to them because something like their experience, their perspective”. P8 shared: “We had friends, like my husband’s friends, they moved here before us, so, like a small community that we had big support from them”. Similarly, P17 recalled:

We had a friend who used to work for a Bank, and no, he wasn’t very helpful in terms of employment. But more often emotional help. He took me out to ski, for example, or him and his wife came one day and invited us out for a coffee (P17).

Some participants also specifically mentioned that it was helpful to connect socially with other immigrants who had similar experiences. Highlighting the important role of other immigrants, P20 shared: “I went to talk, to chat to people, to get other people experiences. I found it’s not just my experience. Many other people with similar
backgrounds, they had the same troubles. So, it’s not my own fault”. Similarly, P18 said:
“You tend to look for people who are in the similar situation so you don’t feel you are
losing it! So when you go to newcomer organizations, you tend to find people who are
also new and try to see how they coped”. In addition, P6 recalled:

When I started my school, in my class 80% of the students were international
students, and 80% or 90% were from India, and different parts of India.... So that
really helped because you feel that you are not the only one here. You talk to people
and you help each other out in any situation. How did you get your SIN card? How
did you get your Health Card? Whatever it is. You kind of fight together with it.
That really helped, having some friends around in the same boat (P6).

In terms of coping resources, most participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12,
P14, P15, P16, P18, P19, & P20) also mentioned utilizing community and/or immigrant
resource centres or services. Interestingly, P13 suggested that she didn’t need to follow
up with resources offered through community agencies because of having social support.
P13 said: “I went there and they said ‘if you need help even for housing, things like that’,
but I didn’t need any, I had some friends who helped me”. In contrast, most participants
found themselves relying on community resources to assist them with things such as
housing searches, language development, and job skills. Sharing her experience with one
particular resource, P11 said:

One thing I love in Canada is the employment resource centre. I am very thankful
for the program at Skills for Change. It’s free and it helped me gain confidence
going back to the accounting field. We learned Excel, Word, so not only getting
acquainted with the accounting staff here, but also finding a job, having a mock
interview, preparation for integrating yourself into the working environment here in
Canada (P11).

Talking about another program called LINK, P7 said: “This program helped me about the
job research… How to make your resume, how to do the interview, and some information
about industry”. Discussing how he utilized the library as a resource to help him prepare for
work in the banking sector, P6 said: “I did use those resources, and to my benefit, and I appreciate those”. Talking about a youth employment centre he utilized, P16 said:

I didn’t have any printer, no fax, no nothing. So they provided with that kind of facility where I can go and use whatever I had to in terms of email; I could use the fax machines; if I needed print out some resume, I could do it over there. They also provided training in terms of resume preparation (P16).

Talking about yet another resource centre, P9 shared:

One thing that helped me is called Woman’s Immigration Services. I took their workshop, and one of their counsellors reminded me to do the volunteer job in a big I.T. company. That, I believe… really helped me a lot improve my language, also I put that in my resume, really works (P9).

Unfortunately, not all participants found immigration and/or employment centres helpful. In particular, P19 stated:

Yes, I did look around. All the resources I found, what a waste. All those counselling centres and those help centres of Canada, they helped with nothing. I got a resume written by one person; the other guy said, ‘Go and trash. Who has written this resume?’ So that obviously speaks volumes of the lack of coordination, the lack of uniformity and lack of actual knowledge (P19).

Aside from community resources, some participants also relied on government financial support to help them cope with financial difficulties. Talking about his reliance on such services, P12 recalled: “When we moved, we were in the shelter for five weeks, and then we moved to an apartment, and we continued receiving money from welfare. That’s financial allowance. We also went to the food banks, which was really, really helpful”. Similarly, P11 said: “It’s a good thing we had child tax benefit. It helped us cope with financial concerns. I was only working a part-time job”. In addition, P8 stated:

It was a time that before my husband started working, we had to go and register for social assistance because we didn’t have any. No income, nothing. We came here with a certain amount of money which was spent in the first couple of months, so we had to go there, and it was a big help for us (P8).

In identifying coping resources, a couple of participants mentioned that they drew
strength from spirituality. P11 shared:

How I coped, I don’t want to sound spiritual, but we belonged to a prayer group… The prayer group helped us; actually, one of the couples helped my husband find a job. It kept us busy so our minds were occupied and then at night we could continue looking for jobs. It helped us to cope with all the stress (P11).

P13 said: “One of the things I did was I went for meditation, like an alternative therapy”.

To help cope with stress, P13 also sought out traditional support. She explained:

I went to a psychiatrist. Basically I took my son for help, and then I sought help. There was medication prescribed for my son, which I convinced him to take… I was also given something for anxiety, but I said ‘you know I’m going to try and cope, and if not I’ll take it’. I took the prescription, and I didn’t, eventually (P13).

Finally, several participants indicated that they coped with the stress of immigration by remaining positive and determined to succeed. When asked how she coped with stress P8 said: “Yeah, like I said, I’m an optimistic person, so I was looking to the future and I knew that the first years will be difficult, but I had my goals and was going to work for my goals”. Echoing this, P13 answered: “One thing was I’m a die-hard optimist”. P11 offered a similar response:

I’m a person who is goal-oriented. Whenever I want something, I always look in my mind that if my husband is not that strong, I should be stronger. Since we decided to come over and we don’t want to go back, we should really work hard on finding a job and do everything that we can. I was that go, go person. I made it a point that one of us should show that we’re determined, that one of us should be strong. If the kids can see that both of us are depressed and stressed out, they too will feel the same way. Who is the person who will be stronger? (P11).

P10 also hinted at how a resilient attitude may be an invaluable resource for coping with immigration stress. P10 shared:

It helped me learn that there is a system in Canada, and you have to learn to live by that system. It’s a question of finding out and working with it. So, that’s what it taught me, those experiences. Things don’t come overnight, you have to work towards them (P10).
CHAPTER 6

RESULTS: Initial Canadian Work Experiences

This chapter will present the themes that arose in relation to participant’s initial work experiences in Canada. The first theme discusses the importance of initially finding work and the type of work that participants intended to find upon arriving in Canada. The next section identifies the strategies that participants used to find work. Lastly, the difficulties that participants encountered in their quest to find work will be highlighted.

Importance of Finding Work and Type of Work Intended

Participants were asked how important it was for them to find work when they first arrived in Canada. Almost all participants reported that it was very important for them to locate work immediately after arriving in Canada. Only a few participants (P6, P15, & P20) said that it was not immediately important to find work. For instance, P20 answered: “So first when I came, I was just thinking about myself, to be here; not a job. It was like not a priority”. Similarly, P6 reported:

I was focusing on my studies because it was the first four months, it’s a new education style of teaching as well, I was trying to catch up the time. So I didn’t have much time, I didn’t even think about getting a job at that point (P6).

Finally, P15 said:

At first, there’s no pressure for me to find work immediately because I brought little bit of money, and I just was walking around, like find out something... But after some time [a few months], I realize I needed to find a job (P15).

For all other participants, finding a job was a more immediate concern. Discussing the importance of finding a job upon her arrival, P18 said: “That was like number one thing. If it was according to me, get off the plane, find a job”! Similarly, P2 replied: “I would say 100%”. Echoing this sentiment, P3, P4, P7, P8, P11, P19 and P20 each said that finding a job was “very important”.
Overall, the importance of finding work seemed to center on financial pressures. Highlighting this point, P3 said: “It was very important. I came here on my own. I did have savings, but it’s not the level of savings one can afford living without a job for a year”. Similarly, P13 replied: “Initially it was extremely important because we needed the money, and also to support the lifestyle”. And P19 recalled: “It was very important because I had no money, and my money went down by thirty-five times straight away because of the exchange rate, which was very, very difficult”. Further highlighting financial pressures P16 stated: “It was necessary because, you know, the funds that I got with me were getting exhausted. So at some point in time, I had to do whatever I needed to keep my family running, right”. In more detail P14 shared:

I knew that it was pretty important to get a job because…When you come to Canada, they ask that you bring $10,000, well, I knew I was not going to survive on that. I was not going to burn through that money, I was not coming here to party. So my focus was use that money just when it’s necessary, but find a job. So that was my first goal, and all my energy was focused on fulfilling and meeting that goal (P14).

Also highlighting the dire importance of finding work P10 said:

It was very important to get a job when I came over here, because, firstly, like I said, we didn’t come in with a lot of money… I came in with the bare minimum, $12,000, that’s it. To make that work, I had to work. The realization also set in that your medical coverage, your contributions towards CPP, EI, are all dependent on you working. Basically, it’s a work environment that we live in. Quite frankly speaking, to get something, you have to give something (P10).

Aside from financial reasons, for P4 finding a job was also important for re-establishing his career and sense of self-worth. Discussing this P4 shared: “Yeah, it was very important to find something, and we’re not talking about money. We’re just talking about introducing yourself, so was very important to have any worth”.

Participants were also asked what type of job they intended to find after their arrival in Canada. Almost all participants indicated that they had initially intended to find
a job that was very similar to their previous career. For example, P17 replied:

Well, I definitely intended to find the job in accounting only. I didn’t want serve food in the restaurant; I didn’t want to sell coffee at Tim Horton’s. I was determined to find the job in accounting. I didn’t care if it was an entry level job, but I didn’t want to throw all my education down the drain for the sake of finding a job. I wanted an accounting job and I wasn’t ready to settle (P17).

Also initially determined to find work in his field P5 shared:

I wanted to satisfy myself. Satisfaction meant I’ve got the money, I’m doing what I’m meant to be doing. My mother was a teacher, my father was a teacher. If you look at my blood, there is teaching in my blood. Give me another thing, I will not take it (P5).

Also set on continuing in her profession P8 said: “I was looking in my profession. Accounting or finance, because back in Albania, with the degree that I had, I did everything related to finance or accounting”. P8 also added: “We had plans, both me and my husband. We made plans that I would go for my profession, and he for the family, like doing odd jobs, whatever, just to support us”. Former physician P15 was also focused on trying to find work in his field and recalled: “I wanted [to] find something related to my training, like past experience, like in the medical field”. Echoing this sentiment, P2 replied: “Something close to what I did [an instructor]. Something that I was trained to do, something that I was familiar and that I was good at”. Similarly, P16 explained: “I was applying for jobs into my own field, into architecture”. In addition, P18 answered: “It was in my field, so I was looking at food industries which, when I look back now, I laugh at myself. What was I thinking, that I could get hired”.

Despite having initial intentions to continue working in their original field, many participants suggested that they had to adjust their expectations in the face of having difficulty finding a desired job. Adjustments seemed to be made either by looking for entry-level work, changing one’s career path and/or looking for survival jobs. For
instance, P1 initially said: “It was very important, and I was looking for management jobs in the supply chain field. And that would be logistics or manufacturing. That was my expectation”. P1 then added: “My plan was to start a job in my career, independently at what level it was. Even though I had been a manager, I would be willing to start on the lowest level and then work myself up in time”. Also describing how he later focused on finding entry-level work, P4 shared:

My first try was something related to my field. I was never expecting to be an accountant. I was just looking for a clerk position, assistant position, whatever you can… even the volunteering (P4).

P14 had decided to be open to both entry-level work and exploring the possibility of a different career path that was still somewhat related to her previous career. P14 explained:

When I came to Canada I was not looking for another consultant job. I was very open to anything… So I was very open to starting from the bottom, and that didn’t shame me… I came to Canada, and half of it was an experience, and you have to go through it, you have to roll through the punches and adapt to survive. In El Salvador I am doing one thing, but in Canada, I’m doing something else (P14).

After finding out that he could not easily continue his teaching career, P12 decided to explore a new career path as an interpreter. P12 said: “I had been doing the interpretation and I thought, ‘Oh, okay. I can continue doing this’. Then I wasn’t worried about it, and I didn’t look for any other type of job, different than interpretation”.

For some participants who encountered difficulty finding work in their previous career, a decision was made early on to go to school in order to help establish their career. Demonstrating such a shift in expectations, P11 first said: “All my applications were in the banking field and it was only for a year I was looking at any banking opportunity, but there was none”. P11 then added:

I expected I would not be working in the same field. I’d have to study so I could
move on. I don’t want to be like other Filipinos that are stuck in survival jobs because they push themselves to work because they are more concerned on the financial gain from the survival job rather than doing two things at the same time (P11).

Similarly, P20 first explained: “I was applying, first of all, for medical office because I knew medical… No, didn’t work. I found that all HRs are stuck on the Medical Office Administration Diploma”. P20 ended up taking survival jobs and going back to school.

Similar to P20, several participants mentioned that they had to adjust their expectations early on and start looking for jobs that were not necessarily related to their original field. For instance, although P13 had originally intended to work in her field as a veterinarian assistant or something similar, she said:

I was versatile so I could teach, I could sell, I could do customer service, so many other things. Anything that I could use my skills and talent in, whatever, which included customer service. I worked in a bank for a while because I knew some good math and computer skills (P13).

P16 also talked about being versatile in response to difficulties re-entering his field:

If I didn’t get anything in my field, I was ready to get into fields which needed people. Before coming, I took my licence as a truck driver. But fortunately/unfortunately, I didn’t have to use it here. But I was kind of prepared (P16).

For some participants, versatility meant having to adjust one’s expectations and look for survival jobs. For instance, after initially intending to find work in the medical field and not succeeding, P19 had to take a survival job. P19 explained:

I was looking for something in hospital administration or teaching. But that all required re-evaluation of my degrees from India, which is a process that takes about two to three years. I did not have that time, so I took a security job (P19).

Similarly, P5 was initially determined to find work as a teacher, and when this proved unfeasible, he settled for a survival job. P3 had a similar experience. After initially hoping to find work related to human resources, she soon looked for work as a hostess and then a waitress. Recalling her experience P3 said: “I took everything”.

Overall, the majority of participants (all except P7 & P9) initially intended to find work related to their previous field. For some participants (P1, P2, P5, P8, P12, P15, P16, P17, P18, & P19) this meant continuing to work in the very same role, while for others (P3, P4, P6, P11, P13, & P20) this meant looking for entry-level work in their field or a related field (P14). Participants who initially intended to continue working in their field (e.g., teacher, manager) tended to quickly adjust their expectations to look for entry-level work and/or start a new career (e.g., P12 stopped looking for work as a teacher and sought work as a translator instead). Many participants had to adjust their expectations to the point of looking for survival work unrelated to their original field. Only two participants had initially intended to look for survival work. Talking about her initial intentions, P9 said: “I understand the rules, the accounting rule, is different to back home, so I say if you get a job, that is maybe kind of surprising, so I didn’t put any expectation on that”. And P7 recalled: “When I came to Canada, I am looking for just a regular job, not a professional job. Just so I can make some money and to settle down, and that’s it”.

**Strategies Used to Find Work**

Participants were asked to identify the strategies they utilized to find work. The types of strategies that participants reported using can be broken down into: 1) job posting searches, 2) utilizing/joining organizations, 3) volunteering, 4) networking, 5) cold calling, and 6) retraining.

When discussing the strategies that they utilized to find work, many participants specifically mentioned that they checked the newspaper, job fairs and searched online for job postings. Mentioning internet searches as a strategy, P9 said: “Most jobs I think I find is through the online, there is a lot of recruiting websites”. Similarly, P15 said: “First, I
used the computer, the internet, like try to find the contact information. And then I send introduction, like my credentials and resumes and supporting documents. Later on, I also go to the different job fairs”. P6 applied to postings offered at his college program.

Mentioning the newspaper as a source, P13 reported: “The very first, I took all the newspapers, looked at all the classifieds, and applied to the animal hospitals, and I did get a job right away”. Although P13 was successful with finding a job through this strategy, stories about applying for hundreds of jobs without much success were common amongst participants. To try and overcome their difficulty, some participants focused heavily on their resume. For instance, P16 said: “I just applied with whatever I had in my hand. I kind of tuned up my resume with the help of YES and then I kept online”.

In order to receive help with developing their resume and/or finding a job, many participants (P3, P4, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14, P16, P17, & P18) talked about seeking assistance from community or professional agencies. Talking about the help she received from one organization, P18 said: “They say, ‘Okay, come. Let’s see. Let’s do a mock interview and see. Maybe something you are not doing right’. So they help me polish up in there”. P12 recalled: “I took a workshop to apply how to make a resume and a cover letter, because all of that stuff was new for me”. And P8 shared:

I went to workshops about how to improve your resume or interview, because it was something that was new for me, here, it’s different from Albania. So I had to go through those steps then to be ready to go to interviews and to look for jobs (P8).

P17 mentioned utilizing an internship program to help develop her career:

I found Career Bridge. I think it’s a non-profit organization that allows immigrants to apply for jobs, like internships for immigrants. It was the first year that Ontario Provincial Services was doing business with Career Bridge, so I was in the first interns. I did my internship for four months, and they offered me a contract, and I was in a contract for four months, and then I became full-time (P17).

Also finding a career development program helpful, P14 shared:
They go through your resume, and they tell you how to do it, and they give you the support. They’re there for you, cheering you... Just think of it as class time. You go there from nine to five, and they teach you the skills to write your resume, the interview skills... So that was fantastic because that gave me a sense of purpose, and it focused my energy (P14).

Agreeing that employment centers can be helpful, P11 said: “Those employment resource centres, they really helped us to fix our resumes and adapt it into a Canadian environment”. Unfortunately, P4 did not find the resource centers as helpful and said:

I have to be really honest in this, but I think are more noise than reality. What I mean is a lot of people willing to help you, but really very little be done. ‘Oh, you have to fix this, blah, blah, blah’. They give you all the structures, they know everything. Then when you go to the field, nothing happens (P4).

Aside from assisting with resumes and interview skills, some agencies seem to suggest volunteering as a strategy for finding work. P9 recalled:

The counsellor recommend me to volunteer in the call center, and she said ‘this will help you a lot, and this job is very common here, and you can maybe for your starting point, because it can help you to build your language skills. The volunteer job really helped me a lot improve my language, also I put that in my resume, really works (P9).

Several other participants (P2, P4, P5, P8, P12, P14, P18, P19, & P20) also mentioned utilizing volunteering as a strategy to find a job. Sharing her experience P8 said:

I was looking for places to volunteer, because everywhere I was hearing that ‘you don’t have Canadian experience, it’s important to find a job’. So I found a place, a private company, a construction company. One of my friends he referred me to that company, and I went there. So I did some volunteer there, working as a receptionist and doing some accounting. It was a good experience (P8).

Talking about her own experience, P14 recalled: “I believe in one of those meetings, one thing that came up was ‘volunteer, volunteer’ because that’s how you meet people and find a job. So I, diligently, with the blinders put on, I volunteered until I found a job”.

P18, who also followed suggestions to volunteer, had mixed feelings about it and said:
Where I come from, you say ‘nothing for nothing’. You work, you give me something. Now you come here, being told you have to volunteer. It took awhile for me to understand that. Maybe if it had been explained differently, what volunteer is all about, maybe I would have done that sooner than later. I was fortunate that later where I volunteered, that’s where I got my first job; that’s where I was hired (P18).

In fact, most of the participants who volunteered reported that it helped them to develop their career. P19 was an exception to this as he did not find volunteering helpful and he also reported difficulty volunteering in his desired field of medicine:

I tried hospital, but I was turned down... They said one way to get into them is to get into volunteering in that organization, and at Toronto General, I volunteered. All they made me do was pick up files from one place to the other, like a PMS we called them in India. And the volunteer coordinator wouldn’t give me anything else, and they didn’t use my language skills. I speak several languages. And then I stopped getting calls from there at all. Then I went to Credit Valley. Until today, I’m here nearly ten years now, I cannot get a volunteer’s job at Credit Valley (P19).

Networking was another strategy mentioned several participants (P1, P2, P4, P7, P8, P9, P16, P17 & P18). Highlighting networking as an important career strategy, P18 said: “It’s all about who referred you”. Describing his use of networking, P1 recalled:

I joined a couple of professional associations related to the industrial engineering field, to the logistics field. Also, I attended networking groups related to the Colombian or Hispanic associations. And then just in my own field, went to a couple of networking events. I was very focused on networking (P1).

Sometimes the use of networking did not lead to employment. For example, P2 stated:

“I would talk to other Canadians. I networked like crazy. A lot of times it was a dead end or… I would try it out, but they would bring somebody that they were more familiar with”. However, for most participants networking seemed to be a useful strategy. In support of this, P4 said: “Talking with people… that’s how it [first job] came up. It didn’t come from the help side; it came from a contact person”. And P16 recalled:

I also at the same time got in touch with people who were related to architecture. And there was another friend who had migrated before me. I took his help in spreading around the word that I’m looking for a job. Four months, I got a call from this office where my friend was working, and he was moving into another
organization and he was saying I should go and meet his boss. Originally I got the call because my name went through two people to him and he said, ‘Just call’…. So my networking and friends helped me get that thing (P16).

Sharing a similar story, P17 said:

So I introduced myself to many, many people… finally, how I did find the job, was a far-far relative of my husband… he said, ‘Oh, you call this number and then go see this guy’. So we went and saw him, and what he did, this gentleman, he contacted his chartered accountant, and that chartered accountant had a client who was looking for an accountant, and this is how I found the job (P17).

Aside from strategies such as applying for postings and networking, one participant specifically mentioned that she used ‘cold calling’ to help her find work. Explaining this strategy P14 said:

I would contact companies and ask to speak to… maybe manager of marketing, or manager of communications, or maybe HR. Just to get an idea of what was required to do the job, what entailed, what skills, what they looked for (P14).

A final strategy identified by participants was taking a course or completing some type of educational retraining. Although all of the participants in the current study eventually took some type of educational retraining, some participants mentioned that they decided to take a course early on specifically to assist them with finding work. For instance, P3 said: “I took ‘Reduce your Accent’ course; I thought it should help”. When P15 had difficulty finding work, he quickly decided to enrol in some courses. Talking about his experience P15 said:

After, two or three months, I just went school, get some training, study. I was told by other people, ‘Here is kinda hard to find a job’ and they say ‘Okay, but you go to school to get some training’. So I thought to go to school because some people are there, right? They advise me, they say, ‘Hey, this is a little bit related with your past experience. You go there. Maybe you get a decent job after you graduate’ (P15).

Similarly, P17 decided to enrol early on in a course to assist her with finding a desirable job. Recalling her experience P17 shared:
I also went for a course in the three months that we were jobless; we went for a course that was called ‘Skills to Look for Employment in Canada’. And they introduced us to: ‘what to ask the interviewer’ or ‘how to answer certain questions’. They also came with vocabulary that is appropriate to use during the interviews. So that was very helpful, and we played different scenarios. I would be the interviewer and you would be the job applicant. And they also talked about things like ‘small talk’. They talked about what are the appropriate things to talk about (P17).

Since educational retraining was pursued by all participants and is one of the main focuses of the current study, a more thorough discussion about retraining as a strategy to enhance one’s career development will take place under a later section devoted specifically to retraining.

*Difficulty Finding Desired Work (unemployment, survival jobs, unfair treatment)*

Despite the range of job-search strategies used by participants, all except two participants (P6 & P13) mentioned that they experienced initial difficulty with finding work. P6 was able to secure employment rather quickly because he was able to work for his uncle’s business and also obtained a co-op placement through his college program. P13 reported that within a week or two after her arrival, she was able to secure work selling newspapers. Then a few weeks later she landed a part-time job as an assistant at a veterinarian office.

All other participants mentioned that finding work was initially very challenging for them (see above section on Initial Experiences and Difficulties for more details). Although P3 was able to secure work as a hostess a few weeks after her arrival, she was not able to secure any desirable employment during her first year in Canada. Aside from P3, P6 and P13, all other participants were not able to locate any paid employment for at least one to six months after their arrival in Canada. Furthermore, with the exception of P6 and P13, no participants were able to obtain desirable paid employment for at least six months.
Discussing the difficulty he initially faced finding employment, P5 said: “I didn’t expect so many hurdles”. Similarly, P3 said: “Looking for a job in Canada is much harder. Much harder. VERY hard”. P2 recalled: “There was a point where I couldn’t even get a job at McDonald’s. That’s bad.”

Stories about not getting interviews or replies to job applications were quite common amongst participants. For instance, P17 recalled: “Yeah, I would just get nothing. People wouldn’t even bother to respond. There was only one who told ‘Well, you are not qualified since you don’t have Canadian experience’. But other than that, it was completely dead. No responses”. P20 also talked about getting few responses when she applied with her resume. P20 said: “I have interview only when I reach the high level manager, either company owner or hiring manager, but never when I send my resume”. P12 also encountered a lack of responses from potential employers. Discussing his experiences, P12 recalled: “The workshop I took made it easy. But when you go to the market and you start applying, you understand it isn’t easy”. Overall, participants’ initial difficulty with employment seemed to relate to three main problems: 1) unemployment and/or lay-offs, 2) survival work, and 3) unfair treatment.

**Unemployment**

Most participants in the current study discussed experiences with being unemployed. In particular, many participants (P1, P4, P5, P10, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17, P19, & P20) were unable to secure any work for at least one to five months, while some participants (P2, P7, P8, P9, P11, & P18) remained unemployed for approximately six months to a year or so. Talking about being initially unemployed, P10 said: “when I first came, I was unemployed,
for at least two and a half months. Because I was getting my bearings at that time, I was absolutely raw. I was not getting any calls”.

Being out of work was very frustrating and challenging for many participants. Talking about the stress associated with his initial three month unemployment, P1 said: “Since my expectations were that I was going to get a job so quickly, it was very tough to deal with. I can’t get a job, and with my wife, we’re eating up all our savings and we need to find a job. So, it was very, very stressful”. P14 also mentioned the stress associated with her three month unemployment: “So there was that stress that there is no employment, no one is looking, and I have bills and a mounting student loan. So that was stressful”. Talking about her unemployment P3 said: “it’s so frustrating to be unemployed; you don’t know what to do”. Similarly, P8 recalled: Yeah, it affects you economically and financially and mentally because you want a job, you’re looking for a job, and you know that you’re capable to do the job, it’s just not easy to find a job”.


Several participants discussed how the stress and frustration of being unemployed impacted upon their mood and self-esteem. Talking about being unemployed P20 said: “I feel very, very bad”. Unemployment even led some participants to question their decision to immigrate. For instance, referring to her initial unemployment P2 recalled: “Made me feel like I failed, I really did not make a smart decision”. Similarly, P15 said:

It impact me greatly. Impact my confidence, my decision move to Canada, and my self worth, self esteem, and self respect. And my relation with other people, how other people view you, right? It’s all affected, and how you live in Canada, you feel like worthless because you don’t have a different job (P15).

Also talking about how unemployment led to her feeling worthless, P17 shared:
There are moments when you are sad when you see it’s not going anywhere…
Why should I even try? I felt useless. Like, I would wake up in the morning, and this is the time people would go out to their job, and I had nothing. I’d wake up in the morning and look through the windows and say… ‘I’m useless. I’m no good for anything.’ So yeah, your confidence takes a hit (P17).

Sharing the impact of ongoing unemployment P3 said: “what was most hard thing about this… when you are very 100% to get the results and you never get results, you are being ruined. Sometimes I am ruined. I don’t have strength… you feel like fooled”. Similarly, talking about the impact of being unemployed for six months, P11 reported:

It lowered my morale, my confidence. It was very depressing on our part. I would say I underwent depression because if you’re not doing things, if you’re not comfortable, you’re not confident of yourself and you’re thinking ‘how come these employers aren’t taking me?’ They were saying Canada needs professionals, that’s why you’re being accepted for immigration. There are opportunities for us, so why are they not hiring us? (P11).

Even after managing to overcome their initial unemployment, many participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P9, P15, P16, P19, & P20) experienced multiple instances of being unemployed due to issues such as being fired, laid off and/or subjected to temporary work. For example, after having significant difficulty finding a job, P15 ended up working for a temp agency, where he was only offered short-term work assignments as a labourer. Referring to the temporary work, P15 said: “I don’t know if it’s employed or unemployed because you work few days, then you at home, and then you working a few days and then you home”. Similarly, P19 has worked several contract jobs since coming to Canada. Discussing how his frustration over unstable employment led him to go back to India to find work, P19 said: “Contract jobs, for just six months, three months. And then I got jobless again, then I went back to India… got fed up. I just returned last year”. Also mentioning having an unstable work history due to contract work, P18 stated: “So,
the contract where I was, finished. So I needed to move on. So it was hard, applying, applying, applying”.

Some participants who managed to secure seemingly stable work ended up being laid off or fired. For instance, after finally landing her first full-time job, P9 was subsequently laid off when the company merged with another company. P9 ended up being unemployed for an additional seven months. In addition, talking about his first desirable job working within a hospital, former physician P15 explained: “I work like half year, and then the boss let me go”. P16 also ended up being laid off from his first full-time job working for an architecture firm as an intern. Discussing the impact of the layoff, P16 said:

When I got my first layoff it was a big shock to me. I [thought] ‘What am I doing here?’ I am a professional. I have the skills required. And how can someone just take the decision that you’re not going through the door tomorrow. I was not used to the fact that people get laid off in the first place. Absolutely not. I still recall that in my parents’ generation, one job, entire life. There was nothing like lay off or ‘no work, go home’. So, that was a big, big thing for me, taking that first shot at layoff… I literally had to get my emotions out, kind of get used to the fact that there is something called ‘layoff’ in this country. It took time; it took awhile…. It made me feel angry, and it made me feel a little bit dejected. I couldn’t take it (P16).

Both P2 and P3 both shared experiences with being fired from jobs. Talking about her experience, P3 recalled:

I worked as a waitress in a restaurant for five days. I was terminated. I’m not a waitress, unfortunately! I worked as a landscaping worker. It was okay; I loved it. I think they needed just more skilled people. That’s why they discontinued working with me (P3).

**Survival Jobs**

At some point during their search for desirable work, most participants (except P6, P8, P11, & P17) mentioned settling for survival work in order to pay bills and/or gain Canadian
work experience. Talking about how encountering difficulty finding desired employment led him to start looking for survival work, P15 said:

I try to find a job in my field. And then there’s not much coming back. Then after some point I was thinking I needed some money to survive. Some people said to me, ‘you have to find some survival job. Not only the job in your professional field’. And then I start to reconsider this. And then I started to find a surviving job (P15).

In the face of not finding desirable work, most of the professional immigrants in the current study took jobs as labourers, cleaners, security guards, restaurant workers, retail workers, call centre workers etc. Participants discussed how these types of survival jobs are difficult because of issues such as low pay, undesirable and/or long hours, and lack of career identity. For instance, mentioning the necessity to work as a cleaner, P2 said: “the jobs that were available to me were mopping other people’s floors, which was paying me nothing”. Similarly, P12 recalled: “I worked with cleaning companies... I didn’t like that job because it was all night”. Although P11 did not mention working a survival job herself, she shared her husband’s experience by saying: “For financial survival, my husband was trying to help the family even though he was an engineer back home. He came here and he started delivering pizza. Just willing to do everything to support the family”. This allowed P11 to focus on establishing her own career in accounting. P10 was not as lucky. Discussing his experience with survival work, P10 said: “I took survival jobs... I was working at McDonald’s, Subway, and Tim Horton’s, all at one time. I used to work from 5am to 1pm at McDonald’s, and then from 3pm to 11pm at Subway, and on the weekends at Tim Horton’s as well”. Recalling how he worked two survival jobs at a call-centre, P16 said: “So the mornings I used to go to one place, and afternoons, I used to go to the second place. So I worked two call centres in a day. My day used to start
early in the morning, up late at night”. Talking about how she had to commute long hours just to get to her job working in a fast-food restaurant, former physician P20 said: “I have to give up because my job took me two hours to get there one way.” Suggesting that she felt belittled by survival work, P3 stated: “hostess is a job for retired people or very young girls. I needed something”.

On a positive note, at least one participant suggested that they were relieved to find survival work. For example, when discussing his initial unemployment P1 shared:

Definitely it hit me a lot in the beginning, but as eventually I started a survival job in order to get some money, I started to feel a little bit better. But I had come from a level standard of living in the U.S. which I thought I was going to keep here, and then I got kind of hit with reality (P1).

However, overall, participants were far from positive about their experiences with survival work. To start with, two participants (P16 & P18) suggested that survival work may actually prevent people from securing work within their desired profession. As a result, these two participants actually opted to work for either less pay or even no pay in a position related to their desired field. For example, P16 talked about how he left a survival job to take a lower paying job in order to get into a role related to architecture:

So I go there for the interview and the person asks me, ‘Okay, so what do you do’? I said, ‘I’m working in a call centre’. ‘You want to get into the profession’? ‘Yes.’ ‘You’ll not get paid as much as a call centre.’ I said, ‘Okay, that’s fine with me, I wanna get into the profession’. And I take that. I take the first job which pays me less than a call centre but allows me to get my foot into the profession (P16).

Similarly, P18 quickly gave up survival work and decided to look for a volunteer position related to an area of interest. Talking about survival work P18 shared:

I think I went for three days and stopped ‘cause you’re going the whole day, you get money, you come out at night so there was no time for you to find what else is going... Yes, while you may get money immediately, but think about what you want to be in the future; what you want to be tomorrow. If you focus on those survival job… how do you know what else is going on out there? (P18)
Aside from the possibility of being side-tracked from finding more desirable work, survival work also seems to lead to feelings of frustration and/or humiliation. When discussing survival work, most participants mentioned the negative psychological impacts of survival work. For example, in addition to his above comment, P1 said: “It was low wage and it was kind of frustrating, but I did it just because I needed to make some money”. P5 recalled “I was tired of going to the factory. Because when you stand up, I felt very embarrassed and very dehumanized… It is terrible”. Talking about his own experience, P19 stated: “I ended up doing security job which further shattered my self esteem totally”. Similarly feeling degraded by her survival work P14 shared:

I worked at a call centre, which was hellish. Ugh, that was the worst job… It’s prison. You have to follow a script and take in all the abuse you get from people, and you cannot stand up for yourself. For someone with no self-esteem, it was easy to do that job, but it was hellish, it made me feel worthless and insignificant (P14).

In addition, P2 recounted:

Because I was desperate for anything, I took cleaning jobs. Never do that. It was... No. You don’t get paid, and you don’t go anywhere. You’re just basically a slave. And when they found out that I was an immigrant, it was like I was easy pickings because they felt like ‘well, she doesn’t have anything else, so she’ll take this’ (P2).

Unfair Treatment

Employment problems and/or the need to settle for undesirable work may lead to immigrants being vulnerable to unfair treatment in the workplace. In fact, several participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P10 & P20) specifically mentioned concerns about being treated unfairly by employers. For example, P2 recalled: “I had been fired from several jobs because I wasn’t being treated fairly and I was standing up for my rights”. P20 also talked about being treated unfairly when she worked at a retail store. P20 explained:
The guy who was working at the same job was paid a percentage of sale. He got double what I did, and I asked them, ‘Would you please change my [pay] …?’ No, they didn’t. I was going to apply for tribunal because it’s unfair treatment on the gender basis. But as I say, ‘Okay, I’m new here. I don’t have enough references’ (P20).

P3 discussed several instances of being treated unfairly by employers. In one instance, P3 attempted to talk to her supervisor when she was experiencing difficulty adjusting to Canadian workplace norms (e.g., informal attire). P3 shared:

I was in tears because I couldn’t overcome this. Once I complained to the supervisor. I didn’t know it will be very informal. I complained to the supervisor that I can’t work with prostitutes because on my right, I had a lady who behaved as if she was a prostitute. And the supervisor told me ‘You are too old to complain. You will never find a job in Canada. You have to integrate to our culture, and you shouldn’t call them prostitutes’ (P3).

P3 also described being misled by another employer who changed her work agreement without consulting her:

I was told, ‘Okay, we have the full-time position’. I said, ‘Okay, that’s fine, full time. Perfect’… Next day when I came to the job, I didn’t sign any agreement, he was not at the place, and the receptionist told me that she’ll be teaching me and that actually they don’t have the full-time job right now because she’ll be leaving just in September to school. So now, it’s just thirty hours (P3).

In addition, P5 talked about feeling persecuted by his supervisors at school where he taught briefly. P5 recalled:

When I got a job, the principals of the school… they were talking of how they came here, they suffered. I don’t know why they were telling me that... Either they were trying to pass it over to me, I don’t know. The final analysis, I found out that I was separated at first. Principal A was talking to Principal B… They were asking whether I was born in Canada, so I saw they were very malicious questions to me, and I had no way to actually bring up my problems (P5).

P5 reported that the principals ended up accusing him of things he did not do (e.g., sleeping in class) and P5 ended up quitting his job because he felt persecuted and unwanted. P10 developed concerns over receiving fair treatment after he started working for
a small company and his supervisor threatened to fire him if he pursued paternity leave to help his wife take care of their twins. P10 shared:

Certain things have come to light which are alarming, compared to working for a big company, where they don’t do certain things, and they can’t get away. But smaller employers take certain liberties which need somehow to be checked. I feel that, personally. I’ve seen them exploiting, and people don’t know better, who work, they don’t know their rights, they don’t know (P10).
CHAPTER 7

RESULTS: The Pursuit of Canadian Educational Retraining

This chapter presents and discusses the themes that arose in relation to participants pursuing educational retraining in Canada. First, the type of retraining that participants took is identified. Then the reasons for pursuing retraining are highlighted. Relational influences on retraining decisions are then discussed. Next, the barriers that participants encountered while pursuing their retraining are explored. The supports and resources that participants utilized during their retraining experiences are identified. Finally, participants’ perceptions of their Canadian retraining are discussed.

Type of Canadian Retraining Taken

In the face of employment difficulties and/or in order to help establish their career in Canada, all of the participants in the current study took some form of educational retraining some time after arriving in Canada. In fact, half of the participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P14, P15, P17, P19 & P20) decided to pursue retraining within the first six months of their arrival. Only P6 enrolled to take retraining before arriving in Canada. A few participants (P7, P8, P11 & P16) decided to take retraining within six months to a year of their arrival. One participant (P12) made a decision to complete retraining within a year and a half after arriving, while several other participants (P1, P2, P10, P13, & P18) made their decision two or more years after immigrating to Canada.

Overall, most participants (P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13, P16, & P17) decided to pursue retraining at the college level. Several participants (P1, P2, P10, P11, P15 & P19) chose to pursue retraining through a professional institute or organization and some participants (P5, P14, P18 & P20) sought retraining through a university. A full diploma, or
certificate was pursued by most participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P17, P19 & P20), while a couple of participants decided to complete just a few courses (P4 & P16). A full university degree and/or equivalent was completed by only one participant (P14), and a university graduate certificate was pursued by one other participant (P18).

Only four participants (P5, P11, P16 & P17) regained their previous education by going through a credential re-evaluation process and completing the necessary requirements. At least three other participants (P15, P19 & P20) initiated the re-evaluation process and then gave up due to feeling discouraged by the requirements. For example, former physician P19 started the re-evaluation process and then gave up after encountering difficulty with the first required exam. Discussing the re-evaluation process, P19 said: “M.D. was a 4-year process. It takes on average between three to twelve years for a doctor to get into the stream here. And I came here at fifty-two; I didn’t have that kind of time”. Also feeling discouraged by the re-accreditation requirements and/or not feeling sure about the outcome, P20 said:

I knew from the very beginning that residency program are very limited in numbers, so I didn’t want to invest my time, money and everything cause I know some people who has highest English test scores with very good MCEE results… they still living here without any jobs, their personal life… they’re still going to Toronto U of T Library study group, and they are nowhere (P20).

Whether or not participants obtained formal re-accreditation of their foreign degree or diploma, most participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P14, P15, P16, P17, & P19) pursued Canadian retraining that was somehow related to their previous career. However, a number of participants (P1, P2, P7, P12, P13, P18, & P20) pursued an education that was relatively different than their former education. Overall, the college,
university or professional courses pursued by participants were related to business or accounting (P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P14, & P17), health (P13, P15, P18, P19, & P20), insurance (P1), human resources (P3), teaching/instruction (P2, P5), language interpretation (P12), architecture (P16) or hospitality (P7).

Most participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P18, P19 & P20) did not attain as high of a level of education as they had prior to immigrating to Canada. While some other participants did manage to obtain an equivalent or very similar level of education (P5, P16, & P17). Only two participants (P6 & P14) actually surpassed the level of education they had prior to immigrating.

**Reasons for Pursuing Retraining**

In order to better understand the motivations of professional immigrants who take retraining in Canada, participants were asked to discuss the main reasons that they decided to pursue their retraining. The main reasons offered for retraining consisted of: 1) to allow them to find work in their desired field, 2) to enhance their Canadian career opportunities, 3) to enhance their knowledge and skills.

The vast majority of participants initiated retraining because they encountered difficulty entering their desired field and saw retraining as a way to establish a more desirable career in Canada. In particular, many participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, & P20) found themselves working survival jobs and wanted to enter a more desirable career and/or obtain a better salary. Explaining her decision to retrain, P2 said: “Because I wanted to have better job opportunities. Better job, better opportunities, better pay”. P5 recalled: “I made the decision because I was not having much to do. I didn’t have work, jobs to do, and I was tired of going to the factory”.

Similarly, P4 shared: “I was going to be stuck forever doing survival jobs if I don’t do something because no one was believe in my profession if I can’t prove I have something Canadian”. P7 explained: “Because I think I need to do something to get a job, to start a career, so I decided to get a retraining”. Talking about her decision to pursue retraining, P8 said: “I had my goal to go and find a job in my profession, so that was the way to start”. In similar vein, P11 explained: “Retraining is basically the main reason for me to go into the job that’s really fitting with my career back home. Without the retraining I don’t think I’d be able to go into the same field”. P9, who tried to secure employment by volunteering first, decided to pursue retraining to re-enter her career in accounting.

Discussing her decision P9 said: “Because I think I tried, after the volunteer, I tried applying for some jobs, but I find I can’t… I still want back to the career which I had back home, so I decided to get the kind of similar job”. Similarly, after encountering difficulty finding a desirable job, P14 decided to go back to school. Referring to her decision, P14 said: “it became very evident that if I wanted to get rid of the stupid ‘you don’t have Canadian experience’, I knew that I had to do an MBA and get this university degree from Canada”. Meanwhile, P17 also pursued retraining after finding herself unable to find any work. P17 explained:

I had to do something with myself. The job search wasn’t going anywhere, so I had to come up with some idea of getting out of the house, and so this trip would have a purpose at the end. At least I would get to know some people (P17).

Aside from wanting to find employment and/or escape survival work, a couple of participants (P1, & P13) who were able to start a career in Canada without retraining later decided to pursue retraining because they were dissatisfied with their job and wanted to change their career. Explaining how she decided to go back to school and switch to a new career, P13 recalled: “so I worked for a while at a bank. But I wasn’t happy with sitting
down at a desk, bound to a computer. I like free work, so I retrained in nursing”.

Similarly, after working in Canada and feeling dissatisfied, P1 decided to switch careers. P1 explained:

Basically, it was after four years of being here that I decided to retrain in the insurance field. And it prompted me… the opportunity of having my own business and not having to deal with the politics… bureaucracy, I guess… of the corporate world. And the financial opportunity was a factor, too (P1).

The two remaining participants (P6 & P16) reported that they pursued retraining in order to advance their knowledge and skills. For instance, P6 immigrated to Canada with the intention of pursuing an ‘international education’. Although P16 didn’t arrive in Canada with intentions of pursing an education, he later decided to enrol in college courses to enhance his knowledge. Rather than needing the retraining to establish his career as an architect (he only needed to take exams and complete internship hours), P16 pursued courses because he wanted to gain a better understanding of North American architecture. Explaining his decision P16 said:

I’m just telling you what made me think I should go to college here. So, I was coordinating with the city inspector to kind of get approval for a project... And the mechanical engineer asks me a question. And I go open up a standard handbook for different kinds of wall assemblies, and I take the pages, I photocopy them and fax them to him. He’s like: What are you doing? I don’t need this! And that made me think… I didn’t know the actual technology that goes into a wall assembly, right? I said, you know what, I have to understand this very well… I went to one of those courses on wood frame construction because wood frame construction is not something that is practiced back in India; there it’s all concrete and stuff (P16).

Relational Influences on Decision to Retrain

When participants discussed their decision to retrain, many of them mentioned that their decision was at least partially influenced by acquaintances (P12, P15, & P20), friends/peers (P4, & P14), family members (P1, P6, P13, & P9) or professionals (P13, &
P19). For instance, mentioning the influence of an acquaintance on their decision to retrain, P12 recalled:

I spoke to a person who was a resident here in Canada, a citizen. He told me ‘you can be an interpreter, or you can take this’ and, because I had that in mind, volunteering at a non-profit organization, I was doing interpretation. Then that person told me I could go to this agency and take training, and I did it (P12).

Similarly, P15 also talked about being influenced by others to pursue retraining. Recalling his decision-making process P15 said:

Because I talked to some people and they said, ‘Oh, you come here. Then you go summer school, get some training with English and then get some certificate. You don’t expect too high. If after training you get into this field, like a job in this field, you are good compared others because a lot of people don’t even have this level job. It’ll be good’. Then I said, ‘Okay, I go to school’ (P15).

P9 suggested that an acquaintance influenced her decision to choose a particular college program when she said: “I know one of my sister’s friends, she had same experience as me, so that’s why I talk to her. I think that’s one of the major reasons that I choose that college”. P4 also suggested that his friends influenced where he chose to take courses. P4 was experiencing difficulty deciding because he had wondered whether some schools were only interested in making money. P4 explained how his friends’ opinions helped him feel more confident about selecting a college to take courses through and said: “So when your friends are telling you, ‘Oh, I went to that place, I went to the other place, blah, blah, blah, you start trusting them because you know it is not somebody who wants your money”.

Aside from peers, family members were also mentioned as an important influence for some participants. For instance, P1 discussed how his wife directly influenced his decision to retrain in a new field (insurance) because she was working at an insurance office and introduced him to her boss, who was recruiting insurance brokers. In addition,
P13 mentioned that her daughter influenced her decision to retrain in nursing. P13 explained: “My daughter had pursued that field already and she said- it’s a good life for you”. Interestingly, P13 further suggested that her family also had an influence on her decision to specialize as a mental health nurse. Recalling this career decision, P13 said: “when the family health issue became a mental health issue, I specialized in mental health. So that was how the career took its shape”. Similarly, P9 mentioned the influence of a relative and said:

I believe I got the suggestion from a relative, they said ‘take college program, it’s more practical because you already have the degree back home, and you don’t need to do the overlapping, and college program is less costly, and more practical. It’s easy to help you rebuild your career here’. I believe that is influence (P9).

Professionals’ advice was another relational influence identified by at least two participants. For example, P13 discussed how talking to teachers at a potential college influenced her decision to pursue retraining there. P13 said: “I also did a little bit of research myself, spoke to some of the teachers and I realized that Humber had more extensive teaching, so I chose Humber eventually”. P19 also suggested that his retraining decision was influenced by a professional, however, in his case the professional deterred him from proceeding with intended retraining. More specifically, P19 mentioned that he decided not to continue to pursue his MD equivalency because a medical doctor had suggested to him that once P19 passed all his exams, he would still have to secure a residency and this would be nearly impossible due to his age.

*Barriers to Canadian Retraining*

Participants were asked to discuss any barriers and/or difficulties they encountered in pursuing their retraining. Overall, the barriers mentioned relate to: 1) age, 2) language barriers, 3) accessing retraining, 4) cost, and 5) work-life balance.
Since most professional immigrants are adults when they take retraining, age may be a factor that could potentially make retraining more difficult. For instance, P19 identified age as a barrier when he discussed how he was given feedback by a Canadian doctor that he would have great difficulty securing a residency due to his relatively older age. Recalling the doctor’s discouraging words, P19 said: “He said- If there’s a 26-year-old MD and you, and you were in my chair, who would you choose? So that made me decide, I’m not going to get into the system”. As a result, P19 decided not to pursue his MD equivalency in Canada.

Even when some of the older participants in the study were not deterred from pursuing their desired retraining, some participants still identified age as a potential barrier to successful retraining. For instance, P17 indicated that her relatively older age made her studies more difficult:

The age factor is there. You can’t deny the fact that when you’re older, in your forties or fifties, that’s also the reason that my husband kept holding on the decision of pursuing the designations because, as in my case, if you’re reading a topic that you used to absorb and comprehend in an hour, now you double it because you’re aging, so you absorb it in two hours instead of one hour (P17).

Similarly, P11 reported that she found it more difficult to study due to her age:

I’d been out of school for, how many years? I’m forty-eight; I was forty-two when I took it, so I was already in my forties. My last formal education, having a course like that, I was twenty-five. So after twenty years I’m studying again and thinking- can I still study, can I still retain whatever I’m studying? (P11).

The language barriers facing many professional immigrants may be another barrier that can interfere with the retraining experience. Although most of the participants in the current study had fairly well-developed English language skills, several participants (P1, P4, P7, P8, P9, P15, & P17) suggested that language barriers could interfere with retraining and/or career development. For example, referring to language as a barrier P15 stated: “It is tough for the people who want to go back to school, because of the language
barrier”. In addition, P17 recalled: “just because of the language, it was a difficult for me, because it was highly professional; the terminology I never learned in a class… but, you know, just to be able to pass the exam, its one thing”. Also identifying language as a potential barrier, P1 argued: “If you don’t improve your English skills, it’s going to be so much tougher to really succeed in what you’re wanting to do”.

Participants generally found out about retraining opportunities online and through peers. Although some participants reported difficulty with selecting a suitable retraining option (P9 & P18) and/or not knowing if they could trust their chosen educational institution (P4, P5, P15 & P18), most reported difficulties related to accessing retraining pertained to difficulties with enrolment. In particular, several participants (P6, P8, P15, P16, P18, & P19, P20) specifically mentioned the difficulty they encountered when obtaining foreign transcripts and/or going through a credential re-evaluation process. For example, discussing how she faced difficulty getting her transcripts from Zimbabwe, P18 said: “To begin with, they wanted you to send transcript directly from your country of origin. So, you left that country; you have no connections. You have to find somebody to go… it’s not easy”. Also mentioning the difficulty of getting foreign transcripts, P19 said: “getting transcripts from India is hell of a problem, hell of a job. One hell of a job because, as opposed to universities here, each university over there has tens of thousands of students”.

In addition to the difficulty of tracking down foreign transcripts, some participants also discussed how it can take a very long time to go through a credential re-evaluation process in Canada. For instance, P16 stated: “in my profession, it is very bad. People apply, and it takes years for them to really get the accreditation done”. Talking about the
long length of time associated with a credential review, P19 said: “Your degrees are not recognized. You get them recognized through W.E.S. and I’ve been doing that for the past three years, and I’ve not reached anywhere”. Unfortunately, even once the re-evaluation is completed, some immigrants may find themselves disappointed with the results. For instance, P8 recalled: “So, I went to CGA, and I was so disappointed when I went there because only one or two of my credits was recognized, and I had to start from scratch”. Also taking about feeling disappointed by the lack of recognition of her foreign education, P18 shared:

It’s an awful frustrating process. And then even after doing that, I thought I would go for nursing. Then I was told ‘you don’t have Grade twelve’. I was told I have to go do English, math and chemistry. So I’m saying okay, you’re asking me to do all here. I have the first degree, and you want me to go back and do that? (P18).

Overall, the credential re-evaluation process seems to be frustrating for many professional immigrants. The process also seems to be quite confusing for some individuals. As an example, the following discussion revealed how P15 is very unclear about what he needs to do in order to have his former medical degree re-evaluated:

I: Have you ever done anything to get your credentials from China recognized, in terms of your medical degree, and finding out what you would need to do?
P15: Yeah. I went to the World Transcription Service… But so far, I still haven’t received it. It take long time.
I: So, you haven’t got the results back?
P15: No. They’re asking me to provide some documents, but still I’ve come back to the office, ‘How come my credentials not…?’ Say, ‘Okay, you have to contact your educational minister or something’.
I: So, is it confusing or not clear what is required?
P15: Yeah, they ask for some more information, like… I still didn’t get any letters from them. I need to go there sometime again.

Aside from difficulties with transcripts, issues with other application materials were also raised. Talking about the overall application requirements, P6 said:
The English test, and then the application process is way too long, the amount of documents required. You have to show your financials, your statement of purpose, there were a lot of documents which are required. Running back and forth with the documents, it was quite big, two, three month process (P6).

Talking about the required pre-entry exam for applying to complete her MBA, P14 shared: “With the grad school, they ask for a GMAT score. They wanted me to do the MBA, so they asked me if I could take my GMAT again, so I had to take it. I hate the GMAT”. In addition to transcripts and pre-entry documents and exams, at least one participant identified lack of references as a barrier to higher education for some professional immigrants. Discussing lack of social connections as a barrier P18 said:

So even trying to go to the universities, finding which professor is willing to work with you, you don’t know those people and you don’t have somebody to refer you, to link you with those people... I haven’t developed those relations. Unlike somebody who’s gone to school here, they did their first degree here, they know that professor, they know this one, they know that one (P18).

Application and language difficulties aside, the cost of retraining was another barrier commonly mentioned by participants (P2, P10, P11, P13, P14, P16, & P18). Cost issues seemed to start with the cost of having foreign credentials reviewed and continued with the cost of tuition and then living expenses while attending school. For instance, P16 said: “So my degree could have been accredited while being back home, but I didn’t have enough money to do that”. Then, referring to cost as a potential barrier to retraining, P13 stated: “The first barrier was money, of course, because I didn’t want to take student loans… We didn’t want to be burdened with debt”. Also concerned about the cost of retraining, P12 shared: “Financial matters are the most important now. How can I get the money to pay the registration fees, and buy books and all that stuff”? Similarly, P7 said: What I didn’t like was the tuition, the tuition is high. For me, it’s a big deal. But then I got a student loan from the government, but I still have to pay back”.

Aside from the cost of a credential review and then tuition, the cost of living and/or supporting a family while going to school is also problematic. Referring to this concern, P10 said: “I’m looking at survival as well. I’m looking at starting my family and my home and settling down, making Canada my own”. Detailing this concern further, P11 said:

It shouldn’t be a hindrance for you to move on and go to university, just because you don’t have the financial capability to do so. For retraining, most of the concern of new immigrants is- will it be feeding my family first, or doing the retraining… Should I feed my family first, or think of my career? (P11).

Unfortunately the cost associated with retraining in the face of ongoing living expenses may deter and/or delay some professional immigrants from pursuing desired retraining. In fact, many participants (P2, P8, P10, P14, P18, & P20) hinted at the possibility that cost issues shaped retraining choices. P14 shared: “If money was not an issue I probably would have done a Masters in Literature”. In addition, P10 said: “It took me two years after touching in Canada and then I started on my studies… It was a catch twenty-two situation in the sense that I wanted to study something, but because of the cost, I wouldn’t want to”. Similarly, P5 recalled: “I tested at York, I went, I passed and I was cleared to do courses, but because of the finances I couldn’t go ahead”. Also mentioning how cost influenced her retraining decisions, P2 said:

Sometimes the cost of retraining was a factor, so I didn’t go to things that were going to cause me to have to pay back a loan… yeah, you can get this loan to retrain for this, but then you have to pay it back, and you have interest, and so I tried to find things that were accessible financially (P2).

The cost of retraining led at least two participants (P4 & P18) to feel suspicious about retraining programs. Highlighting this issue P18 shared:
Sometimes you wonder whether... Do they accept [me] because they just want money from us? How come at the university or college they are refusing but you took me... is it just to enrol me and make money, or is it really something? (P18).

Another important barrier to successful retraining involves the difficulty of maintaining an adequate life-work balance while attending school. This barrier may be especially salient for individuals with children. For instance, P8 revealed how she had to put off her retraining due to having a child to take care of. Discussing how life-career balance issues led her to delay retraining, P8 said: “Not in the first year, because my son was two years old and I had to support him. I had to take care of him, and day care was very expensive, so I stayed with him”.

Perhaps due to the financial constraints often facing new immigrants, most of the participants in the study reported that they had to work while completing their retraining. In fact, many participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, P13, P16, P17, P18, & P19) even had to work full-time during their studies. Many others (P2, P7, P9, P12, & P20) had to work part-time, while only three participants (P6, P14, & P15) reported that they did not have to work while they pursued their retraining.

Participants who worked while completing their retraining seemed to face difficulties such as increased fatigue, difficulty concentrating, distress related to sacrificing time with family and a general difficulty maintaining a balance between work, school and home life. The need to work while retraining also seemed to have an impact on some people’s retraining choices. For instance, some participants mentioned having to take evening courses and/or shorter programs. Highlighting this issue, P13 said: “I had a full-time job already, so I had to finish work and then go to school. I had to choose some evening courses”. In addition, P13 stated:
I couldn’t do the degree because it would have been four years. It would have been two years if I had taken it full-time… However I couldn’t do that for reasons of, again, I had to support my husband… so I went into a diploma course which was a two year course, but I took three years to complete it (P13).

Aside from affecting initial retraining choices, working while retraining can negatively impact on the retraining experience by leading to fatigue and reducing study time. Recalling his experience, P12 said: “I remember by then I was working at Canadian Tire, I felt tired, particularly after going to college. Very long days”. Talking about the impact of balancing work and school, P4 recalled: “Yeah, it slowed me down for sure”. Similarly, P10 stated: “It takes away time, and after working, you’re physically exhausted. You’re mentally drained, and when you’re mentally drained and you’re punching numbers all day, you can forget numbers”.

Having longer days is not only tiring, it may also make it harder to effectively learn and concentrate. Touching on this issue P11 said: “You have to exert more effort because your body is so tired, but you know you have to work on the assignments and the reading… You double your reading time”. Similarly, P19 stated: “I had all these other things pulling me away and I wasn’t able to focus on preparing for the second exam”.

Difficulty balancing work and school is not only tiring, it can also be stressful. Supporting this, P7 recalled: “Having to work affected my schooling because, at the time, time is always not enough for study. It makes me busy… sometimes it makes me stressful”.

Increased stress and fatigue may make it more difficult for professional immigrants to sufficiently balance work and school and/or fully enjoy their experience. Talking about how both work and school was negatively affected during her retraining, P13 reported: “I missed some classes, and I missed work sometimes”. Meanwhile, suggesting that the
need to work full-time made his retraining experience less enjoyable, P10 shared: “Hell. It was hell. I used to study on the transit. Libraries always close at 11pm... Coffee shops. It was difficult. It was a difficult balance”. Echoing P10’s experience, P19 recalled: “It was a terrible experience because it was not only work and study that could be handled; it was going home to cook, going home to keep the family together… It’s hard. You can’t be in all places at one time”.

The idea that retraining while working makes it difficult to attend to one’s home or family life was also suggested by a few other participants. Discussing the issue of work-school-home balance, P8 said: “I had to take night classes, which was one of my concerns, because at 9 or 10 o’clock, you’re finished and you have to travel home one hour... I had a family right? I had kids and a husband”. P11 shared: “My time with the family was definitely affected… how can I balance work-life, study-life? Can I balance three things at the same time? Like, work, study and family”? Also talking about the impact of retraining on his family life, P1 said: “It was tough because I had to sacrifice a lot of family time”. In addition, P13 discussed how focusing on her work and retraining had a negative affect on her husband:

Home was a bit of chaos at the time, I think maybe that was one more reason that my husband went into depression, because we were all busy. We were so busy and maybe I neglected him to some extent. When he didn’t have work, he would be at home, but we would all be out. So that impacted him in a negative way (P13).

Support and Resources

Since retraining can be stressful and/or have negative impacts on participants and/or their family members, participants were asked whether or not they relied on any resources for helping them cope with encountered difficulties. The most commonly cited coping
resources were: 1) social support, 2) financial support, 3) organized services 4) spirituality and 5) positive attitude.

**Relational support** was the most commonly cited source of support utilized by participants during their retraining experience. In fact, all of the participants in this study specifically mentioned that they found it helpful to have family members and/or friends available for emotional and/or financial support. Highlighting the role of marital support, P10 answered: “my wife, basically she encouraged me”. Similarly, P20 said: “my wife, fortunately, I’m from an Indian background where the wives are very, very family oriented. The wives believe in ‘t’il death do us part’. And so, she’s very, very supportive”. Talking about what helped him during his retraining, P16 said: “The very, very understanding nature of my family. They have been supportive all through”. Mentioning his children, P12 said: “My kids have been always motivation to cope with anything”. At least a few participants (P3, P6, P7, & P14) also referred to the support they received from parents. For example, P3 stated: “in terms of morally supporting me, my mum… well by that time, when I immigrated to Canada, she was still alive. She always supported me in my studies”. Similarly, P7 said: “My family supported me. My family gave me strong support, my mom gave me… They believe in me here. They believe I did the right choice”.

Friends and/or peers were also identified as an important source of support during people’s studies. For example, P12 said: “I had some friends, and some of those friends were with me at College. So that was motivation, too”. P13 shared: “There were friends who, when we did the group study and so on. I made a very good friend who lasted through the years”. Mentioning how he coped with the stress of retraining, P15 said: “I
called friends, called the people, talk to people”. Also highlighting the important role of friendships, P6 shared: “a lot of my friends were from different parts of India, were all international students, all new to the country. So, knowing them, socializing with them, that really helped me”. P8 also mentioned that a peer at school helped to steer her in the direction of pursuing an internship. Recalling her experience P8 said: one of the classmates, she told me about the internship program, so that was a big source of information which helped me”.

Aside from providing emotional support, it seems relational support can also help to reduce the negative impact of financial strain. For instance, P6 said: “I was living with my uncle at that time, so financially that helped me as well”. In addition, P16 discussed how his wife was an important source of support in bringing in an income while he pursued school. Recalling his experience P16 shared: “So she ended up taking a night job so she could bring funds into the house, and she can manage her time with the kids, and I had the day job and she had the night job”. Meanwhile, P13 even found her two adolescent children to be helpful in managing financial strain. P13 explained:

The main thing was two of us held full-time jobs, and the third person worked part-time, so we could manage our lifestyle as well as studying. When my daughter went to school full-time, my son and I worked full-time so she could work part-time. We made each other a deal, and it worked (P13).

Financial assistance or support as an important resource also came from non-relational sources such as the government and/or scholarship programs. Perhaps due to the high cost of retraining, several participants (P3, P7, P8, P11, P12, & P14) mentioned that financial support was an important resource while pursuing their retraining. For example, P7 said: “the government supported me the most because I got a government loan from the federal government and Ontario government”. Talking about receiving
educational support through social services, P12 reported: “The social worker paid for that training for me. That was the main one”. P8 recalled: “I looked for financial assistance there, and actually I found that they do support low-income families. I was a low-income family at that time, so I was lucky to find the financial assistance”. Finally, P14 said: You could consider the cost a barrier, but I didn’t think of it as a barrier because there are so many scholarships and loans, that it was an opportunity. So I did get scholarships, loans, and bursaries”.

Although many participants seemed to utilize organizational services to cope with difficulties when they first arrived in Canada, only one participant specifically mentioned that such services were a source of support for them during their retraining. In particular, P8 said: “When I took those courses in LINC, they had a daycare there, so it was great, a big help for me”.

In addition, only a few participants mentioned that spirituality and/or a positive attitude helped them to cope with difficulties they encountered while retraining. For instance, P5’s and P11’s involvement in a local church helped to provide encouragement and emotional support. Talking about church as a resource, P11 said: “I make it a point to go to church every day to gain strength”. Meanwhile, P13 continued with her mindfulness practice. Discussing how spirituality helped him to cope, P10 shared:

I might fail this course, but I’ve got my wife, I’ve got my family, I’ve got my kids, I’ve got a job. Something’s happening. Life’s not all about a certification or just becoming a CEO of a company. It does round you. The spirituality does help a lot (P10).

Also identifying a positive attitude as an important resource while retraining, P16 said:

You have to be passionate about your profession. At the same time, you have to be really, really committed to it. I mean, unless you are passionate and committed, you cannot kind of get that spark in you to say… I know when I am doing this exam, I
have to sacrifice a lot from the family (P16).
And P17 recalled: “I thought “I’m not going to stress myself out because of the exams. I’ll just do my best”.

Participants did not tend to spontaneously mention hobbies or activities as an important coping resource, however, participants were directly asked whether any hobbies or activities played a role in helping them to cope while they pursued retraining. In response, quite a few participants (P4, P6, P8, P10, P13, P17, & P19) reported that activities did not play a role in assisting them to cope. In particular, some participants suggested that they did not have time to pursue any activities or hobbies while retraining. For example, P8 replied: “I didn’t really have much time for fun, or either time or money”. While P13 said: “I had many more hobbies at that time, I loved to read or do crafts, things at home like renovating. This had to be taken on the backburner… Didn’t have time for them”.

Although P20 also mentioned giving up hobbies due to a lack of time, still utilized exercise as a coping resource. P20 recalled: “A lot of my hobbies died down, so I resorted to the gym, so it relieved a lot of stress and the negative things”. A couple of other participants also mentioned exercise as a coping resource. For instance, P3 answered: “Just walking. And swimming”. And P1 replied: “Exercising a little bit and playing soccer”. Movies and reading were other activities mentioned by at least two participants. P11 said: “Watching movies. It downplayed the stress portion”. And P9 replied: “I watched a movie, and read a lot of the books”. Meanwhile, P2 responded: “I would go out and enjoy festivals and stuff like that”. Two participants also mentioned turning to nature as a coping resource. For example, P14 said: “I love nature. So that was my outlet
at the time. I loved the hiking and the ice skating and the snowshoeing”. And P16 shared: “Yes. I’m a nature lover; I like to go out in nature. So in stressful situations, whenever I kind of fail to get the gist of the subject matter, I tend to go out in nature”.

Perceptions of Canadian Retraining

In order to more fully understand professional immigrant’s retraining experiences, participants were asked questions related to their feelings and perceptions of their Canadian retraining experience. In particular, participants were asked how they felt about their retraining and to comment on how the retraining compared to their foreign retraining.

Overall, most participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13, P16, & P20) expressed very positive sentiments about their retraining experience, while some also shared mixed (P1, P2, P4, P10, P11, P13, P15 & P18) and/or very negative feelings (P14, P15, P17, & P19).

Speaking positively about his retraining experience, P5 said: “It was nice, enjoyable, I liked it”. Similarly, P2 stated: “I loved it”. Also feeling very positive about her retraining experience, P13 shared: “There’s nothing that I didn’t enjoy except maybe a boring teacher or two. Otherwise I enjoyed everything… Overall, I would rate it at least a 9.5 out of 10”. Similarly, P7 said: “The new learning experience, for me, was very exciting, because I’m back to school. I’m student again. I loved that program, I loved the new career, and I feel good”. Comparatively, P3 expressed: “I love studies. If I know that it’s realizing a goal, I would study to the end of my life”. In addition, P12 shared: “even though I’m fifty-five, I like studying, so I felt very, very well, and I enjoyed it”.

One of the reasons that participants were positive about their retraining was that the retraining was viewed as a way to advance their career. For example, P11 said: “What I
liked about the retraining was that it was giving you that three-letter word after your
name which spells higher salary… It helped me meet my goals, and gain confidence and
having the respect from other Canadians and employers”. Some participants also
mentioned that they liked their teachers and thought that they were offered great
resources for learning. For instance, P12 recalled: “It was a really nice experience. Four
out of six of the instructors I had were excellent, academically and humanly speaking. I
liked them, and I liked the resources they had”. Also impressed by the resources, P1 said:

I would say I didn’t have to change my learning style, it was just an improvement.
In Colombia it was harder because of resources. Even though I was at a public
university, it depends more on you. You have to go to the library and work and
spend more time on researching, whereas here, you have all the resources on hand,
and you have just to sit down and read and search (P1).

Some participants also thought that their Canadian training was very up to date and
practical. For example, P10 expressed:

One thing I have to give credit for, the courses offered in Canada are very current in
terms of what’s happening in the market. They’re revised frequently and they’re
very up to date. I would definitely say that they correlate to what’s happening at
ground level. With practical experiences, real time case examples and case studies,
so that was definitely a positive experience (P10).

Crediting his Canadian retraining for being flexible, P10 said: “If you want to study in
Canada, there is no excuse why you shouldn’t. I found it very flexible and appealing”.

Not surprising then, when participants were asked whether they saw the retraining
as a positive opportunity or whether they resented having to complete retraining, many
participants conveyed that they viewed the retraining as an opportunity. For example, P12
and P17 both replied: “I saw it as an opportunity”. Similarly, P8 said: “it was an
opportunity for me to help me find a job”. P9 stated: “I think it’s positive, and definitely
there is opportunity later on”. P7 explained: “I saw it as opportunities because it opens
the door for other field and choices for me”. P13 also saw the retraining as an
opportunity; however, she revealed some mixed feelings when she said: “It was an
opportunity as well as a challenge. It was training to be had. I had to train”.

In fact, several participants indicated that they had mixed feelings about the
training, especially early on. For instance, P18 recalled:

“...It was exciting cause people say, ‘Oh, we want people with this, with that’… so yes,
it was exciting to say Maybe when I get it, I’ll be marketable. On the other hand,
you are not sure… Am I wasting time? Is it really good? Because everything has
been trial and error, right? (P18).

Similarly, P1 shared: “The thing I enjoyed the most was learning. The thing I enjoyed
least was just the uncertainty of jumping into something totally new with no previous
experience and wondering if I was going to be successful at it or not”. Aside from
feelings of uncertainty, some participants (P2, P4, P10, P11, & P19) also discussed how
part of them resented the need for retraining because they felt that their previous
knowledge and skills were being discounted. For example, P2 stated:

“I didn’t feel that I was being validated for the experience and the talents and the
abilities that I had… even though it was a positive experience, it was like the
validation wasn’t there for the information I had already, that I had already worked
for four years….Yeah, starting from scratch, and if I was older, I think I would have
been frustrated completely by that (P2).

In a similar light, P10 mentioned his initial resentment over the retraining:

“...At first, not acceptable. There was resistance. In the sense, what the hell do you
want me to do this course for? I completed this in the first year of university, and
you’re asking me to do this stupid thing again? It doesn’t make any sense to me…
Why do I have to do this? Can’t I do something else, instead of this? This is basic,
why waste my time in doing something basic? I can go forward; I don’t want to go
back. But then you realize that it’s important for finding a job (P10).

P11 also felt initially resentful about the retraining and shared:

Initially, I resented it. During the immigration process you were asked a lot of
points about having MBA, work experience, having so and so. Since you pass the
immigration process, and this is what they are needing… my first reaction was ‘why should I study if I have all those credentials and qualifications?’ But after six months of having no job, that was a wake-up call that we really have to retrain (P11).

Aside from feelings of resentment, some participants expressed having mixed feelings simply due to not really enjoying their retraining experience. For example, P11 discussed how she was unsatisfied with certain aspects of her retraining, such as group work:

I didn’t like the group work. So just because there are different opinions, we still have to get one output. We had a research report, a management report. When I did my own work, I got high marks. When I did group work, I got low marks. I thought ‘if I did my own, I’d have higher marks than when joining groups’ (P11).

Also having mixed and/or neutral feelings about the retraining, P15 said: “The learning experience was okay. It’s not that good; it’s not very bad; it’s in the middle”.

Unfortunately, not all participants had positive or neutral feelings about the retraining. In fact, some participants reported negative feelings or perceptions about their retraining experience. For instance, although P15 expressed feeling somewhat neutral about his retraining, he subsequently also expressed feeling somewhat ripped off by the professional institute where he retrained. Specifically, P15 stated: “Here, it’s like a business; they just want to get some tuition. Oh, you come here, something… Yeah, it’s more like business than really help you”. Although she didn’t feel cheated by her retraining program, P17 reported that she saw the retraining as just another barrier. Talking about her retraining requirements to regain her status as an accountant, P17 recalled:

Well, I didn’t like any of them. It’s just another test that I have to accomplish; it’s another obstacle to overcome. And, well, the university was really stressful for me with all these exams, because what if I don’t pass and have to write it again? But, you just do it. Do what you have to do, and that’s it (P17).

Also expressing negative sentiments about his retraining, P19 said: “I resented it very
much”. P19 further explained:

I felt very bad because I am a specialist in anaesthesia since 1983, right, and to go back and read pediatrics and gynae and… to go back and read over it again when I graduated in 1973… Thirty plus years. After thirty years to go back… so, it’s like telling every Canadian politician to do an MBA now; now that you’re going into politics, please do an MBA. Let’s see how many of them pass (P19).

Although P14 did not share sentiments about feeling resentful over the retraining, P14 expressed very negative feelings about the retraining because of the competitive and unfriendly environment:

My classmates were ruthless, they sized me up, they realized that I was no competition, and they chewed me up and spit me out… It was the most hurtful thing. I cried, and I cried, and I cried. And my last term in the MBA was the most difficult, isolating experience, and I felt very stressed, I felt that I was going to snap in two, I had no backbone, I had no self confidence, I had no self esteem. When you come in with a very weak sense of self, and you come into a country and there’s really no one and you have to figure out things on your own, and you don’t know how to trust people. That really broke me down completely (P14).

Participants were also asked to compare their new Canadian retraining to their previous foreign retraining. Many participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P10, P12, & P17) suggested that their Canadian retraining was easier than their foreign training. For example, P10 said: “It is much easier over here”, P5 stated: “Here, it was easier for me”, P4 echoed: “I think here it is easier”. Talking about his Canadian retraining, P4 explained: “Much more lighter; much more easier”.

Some participants may have found their Canadian retraining relatively easy because of studying at a lower level. For example, in Uganda P5 completed a Masters Degree in education, while in Canada he completed a PSW certificate and pursued his teaching equivalency by taking some additional courses and exams. Further supporting this idea, P12 said:

Back home it was university level. Here it was college level. Being in a college here is very easy. Back home, it was really hard. You had to eat the books to pass a test.
Here, you read it, take a glimpse, and you go test. I think it is easier here… I felt it was really easy, but I think that would be different if I had gone to university (P12).

P3 also completed a University degree in Russia and then attended college in Canada. Commenting on the difference, P3 said:

I would say that when I was taking my engineering degree, it was really learning something like… I felt that I was developing. I developed my skills, my knowledge, my overall intelligence, right? With College, I can’t say that I developed my overall intelligence; I just got the ideas how this profession works in Canada (P3).

Another reason that several participants found their Canadian retraining to be easier is maybe related to the fact that they also found the Canadian retraining to be more practical. Supporting this idea, P6 said: “I found it easier and helpful at the same time because it was more practical”. In fact, several participants (P2, P3, P5, P10, P13, P16, & P18) suggested that they found their Canadian training to be more practical than their previous training. For example, talking about his Canadian retraining, P5 said: “it involved more practicals than back home”. Similarly, P6 commented:

It was quite different. It was more on the practical side, a lot of project works and assignments, which we never did back in India. It was mainly, the style they use is more theoretical. It’s all book knowledge and they test you on your book knowledge. Here, it’s quite different, and it helped me a lot. It makes it easier to work in this industry right now, after getting that kind of experience (P6).

In contrast, P20 and P1 found their Canadian retraining to be less practical or hands on than their foreign retraining. For instance, P20 said: “I don’t like here because you formally don’t have experience while you’re training”. And P1 recalled: “before, I had to be pretty much hands-on and learn on the job. Now it was more through books”.

In comparing their Canadian and foreign educational experiences, a couple of participants also commented on how they thought that the Canadian retraining offered them greater access to information and resources. In particular, P3 said: “Textbooks in Canada are the best ones, so all the textbooks are very comprehensive. It’s very nice and
very well organized”. Also impressed by Canadian educational resources, P10 stated:

Access to information was hundred times more. Students in India struggle to get information, at least when I was studying. We literally had to use pirated copies of stuff, because if you had to buy the original, it would cost you ten times the cost. But in Canada, you just go to a library, and it’s free of cost. It’s a blessing. Of course, like I said, in Canada, the information available is phenomenal (P10).

At least some participants (P5, P9, P10, P15 & P18) also found their Canadian retraining to be much more flexible and/or informal than their previous training. For example, P9 said: “I like that it is more flexible because the thing is you can choose the subject or the course, what time: either afternoon, or night, or morning… Not like back home, it’s a fixed schedule”. Talking about how his education in China was much more formal, P15 stated: “the Chinese are more formal. It’s very rigorous, more difficult, it’s strict”. Similarly, P18 said:

I found everything to be different, you know, how people relate with the lecturers. Back home [Zimbabwe], you tend to respect authority more. Here, it’s different. You have to do things mostly on your own. You just get general outline, and then you plunge in… more self directed (P18).

Also noticing this difference, P5 said: “Back home [Uganda] it is teacher-centered. Here it is student-centered”.

For P9, encountering a student-centred teaching style in Canada was a difficult adjustment. P9 recalled: “Back home, most stuff I can get in class. I don’t need to do too much at home after the class. Here, I need to read more and find more stuff by myself”. A couple of participants (P11 & P14) also found it challenging to adjust to a teaching format that involved group work. Noticing this difference, P11 said: “The drastic difference is the group work, the group marks”. Discussing how she did not enjoy her experience with group work, P14 commented: “In Canada, it was more group work, and it was just stressful. People who want to get ahead of you”.
CHAPTER 8

RESULTS: Canadian Educational Retraining Outcomes

This chapter presents the themes that arose in relation to Canadian retraining outcomes and future directions. First, the usefulness of participants’ retraining is discussed. Next, the impact of retraining on participants’ self-confidence and motivation to pursue their desired career is explored. The impact of Canadian retraining on participants’ Canadian career identity is also discussed. The main lessons learned through retraining are then highlighted. Then, participants’ current Canadian employment experiences are discussed, including the extent to which participants’ current work roles utilize their knowledge and skills. Participants’ current career identity and satisfaction is then explored. Finally, participants’ future career plans are discussed, including their future expectations regarding additional retraining.

Usefulness of Canadian Retraining

In order to try and understand how helpful retraining is for professional immigrants, participants were asked to discuss how useful and/or important their retraining was in terms of helping them to establish and/or advance their career in Canada. Overwhelmingly, most participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, P17, & P18) agreed that their retraining was helpful in assisting them to find more desirable work. For instance, P8 disclosed that retraining helped her obtain work as a financial analyst. P8 recalled: “It helped me to find a job… Finding a job, supporting the family, and reaching my goal... It was the first step to go there”. Similarly referring to his retraining, P10 explained: “It gives you a fighting chance, it makes you more employable”. After completing her MBA, P14 was also able to find a more desirable position. Reflecting on
the role of her retraining in advancing her career, P14 said: “It was very useful. It’s been good because people no longer look at my Salvadorian experience, people look at what I’ve done in Canada now. So, it’s been very positive”. Similarly, mentioning how retraining allowed him to start a new career as an insurance agent, P1 commented: “It was very, very important because if I didn’t do that, I couldn’t have access to that opportunity here”. P6 also credited his retraining with allowing him to start a career as a business analyst and said: “It was a very good approach for me to get retrained in Canada, and that’s what helped me for getting a job, what I’m doing right now. [Retraining] was the most important factor”. P12 also saw retraining as the main reason he was able to start a new career as an interpreter. Discussing his retraining P12 stated: “I needed it. It had a great impact. Otherwise I wouldn’t have gotten the job I’m doing”. In addition, P11 saw retraining as the reason she was able to resume her career in finance. P11 explained: “I am now in my position because of my retraining, because I have my designation in Canada”. P18 agreed that retraining helped launch her new career in research. P18 said: “It helped me get a different job, and it helped me to navigate the system”. Similarly, P13 also found retraining helped her to establish a satisfying career as a nurse. P13 shared:

> It has tremendously helped. It has helped so much that anyone who asks me for any advice, I tell them ‘before you come to what area you want to, do all your research, come and retrain in an area which you feel is going to help you with your dreams’. To that extent, I’m so happy that I retrained and chose this (P13).

Finally, P17 discussed how retaining gave her more options:

> It offered me a whole batch of jobs to choose from… And I feel so empowered because now, finally, I have a choice, where before, I couldn’t; I didn’t have any. I would just take any job, but now, I get to choose (P17).

Even some participants (P2, P3 & P4) who did not manage to secure lasting employment since retraining indicated that they still felt their retraining was useful to them.
For instance, although her employment did not last as long as she wanted, P2 mentioned how her retraining allowed her to work as a trainer for several years. Discussing the importance of the retraining, P2 said: “It was vital”. Similarly, although P3 was also unable to find lasting employment since retraining, P3 said: “I think it helped me. So I’m still very positive about retraining”. In addition, although also unemployed since retraining, P4 replied: “No doubt in getting a job related to my field, useful, yes”.

Aside from leading to employment opportunities, some participants suggested that they view retraining as useful for other things such as networking, improving their language skills and increasing their knowledge. For example, although completion of a certificate in health information management did not lead to a related job, P20 spoke about the retraining by saying: “Very useful. I met many people through school projects”. Meanwhile, P7 stated: “the new retraining program improved my English”. In addition, P4 and P10 discussed how retraining was useful for increasing their knowledge. P10 explained: “The fact that in the workplace situation, or even to get ahead in Canada, you need retraining… you need to be current with the kind of changes in the financial industry which are coming out”. Echoing this, P4 said: “it was necessary in order to use the new terminology”.

Unfortunately, not everyone agreed that retraining was useful. In particular, after taking training in first-aid instruction and then mortgage consultation and still finding himself unable to secure lasting employment, former medical doctor P19 concluded that retraining is not useful. P19 explained:

When I took the courses, I thought it would lead to full-time employment, but it did not… None of the training actually helped me get a job. The retraining has led me nowhere, so there is no career. I’m just flitting from one job to the other. And
sometimes going to India, taking a six month contract over there so that I can bring money for food on the table here (P19).

Similarly, former physician P15 completed a certificate in pharmaceutical analysis and then found himself unable to find lasting employment. Based on his experience P15 said: “At that time, I would say it’s helpful; but now, after this, I would say it didn’t, not much”.

Similarly, after completing a certificate in health information management and then a degree in occupational health and safety, former medical doctor P20 found herself continuing to work in a retail job. Discussing her perceptions of her university degree, P20 said: “I’ve been told by my university’s occupational health and safety person that people get 50% rate of employment, which is not true. Not even close”.

Overall, although most participants stated that they found their retraining to be useful to them, few participants (except P3, P6, P9 & P11) agreed that the retraining was necessary for them to be competent to re-enter their profession in Canada. In fact, many participants suggested that retraining was only necessary because they would be unable to secure desirable employment without it. For example, P4 replied: “It was completely necessary; otherwise you don’t get in. You don’t have choices”. Highlighting the same idea, P17 said: “they can be competent without it, but they can’t succeed without it”.

In addition, although retraining was useful for finding work as a teacher, P5 did not agree that the retraining was necessary. Sharing his views P5 stated:

No. It was not necessary at all. I tell you there is nothing that I gained when I went for the teaching. In fact, I expected a lot, but I didn’t get it. But instead, I was giving them more of what learned from the developing world. So, I didn’t gain much, but only to give me the confidence that I trained (P5).

Similarly, P8 said: “for the accounting field, no, I don’t think it was necessary for me to do that. Nothing changed. It was the same thing”. Sharing similar sentiments, P16 felt
that although the retraining was necessary to continue his work as an architect, he did not necessarily believe he would not have been competent without it. P16 explained:

I don’t know about the competence part, but I know that unless I did it, I have no other options. If I have to get my seal, I have to do it. If I’m given the option of getting my registration without doing it, I would have chosen that way (P16).

Expressing a similar idea, P10 offered: “if retraining is required, retraining has to be done to appease the master. That’s the way I put it”.

**Impact of Retraining on Self-confidence and Career Motivation**

Participants were asked to discuss the impact that their retraining had on their self-confidence and motivation to pursue their desired career. Overwhelmingly, most participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P18, & P20) reported that their retraining significantly increased their self-confidence. For example, discussing the impact of his retraining P6 said: “it did boost up my confidence a lot” and P2 reported: “My confidence level started from like maybe a 60% and went to 125%”.

Retraining seemed to lead to increase participant’s self-confidence because the retraining either led to positive feedback from others, a higher level of acculturation and/or increased knowledge and skills. For instance, highlighting the impact of positive feedback on self-confidence, P5 reflected: “it helped me, actually, become confident… that I’m a competent teacher because when doing an assignment, I was getting very good marks, and my professor was happy with me”.

Suggesting that retraining increases cultural knowledge and acculturation, P6 said: “I think it helped me a lot giving exposure to the country. It helped me knowing a lot about Canada and culture”. Also referring to how retraining helped her to become more
familiar with North American values, P3 said that retraining allowed her: “to navigate and to be comfortable with this sort of game”.

A number of participants also seemed to suggest that retraining increase people’s self-confidence by increasing people’s knowledge and skills. For instance, talking about the impact of retraining P16 said: “it kind of boosts your own confidence, because you’ve studied it, you know the way it is done, and you can kind of stand onto it when you are doing your work in the office”. In addition, P13 stated: “It increased my confidence, yes, learning more and I could put it to use in a correct way”. Similarly, P3 explained: “I became more confident… Felt better to perform job and know how to behave, what is proper way of doing things, what is proper way of explaining things”. Also suggesting that improved skills lead to increased confidence, P12 shared: “My skills have improved. Language skills. I have learned many customer service skills. I feel more confident”. Suggesting that knowledge allows one to relate to the workplace and speak more confidently, P10 said: “In terms of local knowledge, it did help me to relate to what’s happening in business around here, it does have its practical uses. To talk the talk during an interview, it does help”.

Getting positive feedback from others and/or increasing one’s knowledge and acculturation level may not only lead to increased confidence within the workplace, but it may also lead to a more general higher self-esteem and/or sense of self worth. Supporting this idea, in reference to the retraining P7 expressed: “It’s very, very important for me. It’s getting me prepared, getting me ready for the new career. Giving me the necessary skills, and making me feel better”. In addition, P2 reported: “I gained a sense of self-
worth”. Talking in more detail about how her retraining led her on a difficult journey towards an improved sense of self-worth, P14 shared:

While my personal experience with the MBA was disastrous, and you can say that I fell flat on my face, the MBA also gave me a lot of confidence in knowing that I could do things. So before I probably felt a little bit unsure about myself, but the MBA, in terms of skills, and ability, and competency to do the work, it laid the foundation. I now feel very good about myself (P14).

Greater self-confidence and an improved sense of self-worth seemed to allow at least one participant to be more self-assertive and stick up for herself in her workplace. In particular, P18 discussed how prior to the retraining she did not have a clear sense of what was appropriate in terms of employer expectations. After retraining, P18 had a better ability to set reasonable limits at work. Referring to her employer P18 reported:

They take advantage of your ignorance. But then the training opened my eyes. At least I could argue with them because I was now informed. You have to know your rights. It helped me to question certain things without fear of losing my job… Now I can argue because I know that I’m not wrong, I’m right, I’m not a dummy (P18).

In contrast to the majority of participants who indicated that retraining had a positive impact on their self-confidence, a few participants suggested that the retraining did not lead to a difference in their self-confidence. For example, discussing the impact of retraining P8 stated: “it helped me with the communication, but professionally it wasn’t that different. I knew what I knew, I had the experience. It didn’t change anything”.

Echoing this, P19 replied: “No difference at all”. In more detail P17 explained:

Well, it didn’t change. It’s just that now I get exposed to something else here, but having that particular designation does not change my skill set. It’s just a few letters after my name. That’s it. It’s the experience that counts. This is what I value the most. But people are so focused on this designation. Again, it’s lucky that I have it (P17).

Although P17 did not feel that her retraining experience changed her skill set or increased her self-confidence to perform her job as an accountant, P17 did mention that several
years later her retraining journey has indirectly increased her self-worth. P17 shared: “To have the ability to inspire others. That gives just tremendous, tremendous belief in myself”. Retraining may have had a greater impact on P17’s self-confidence than she initially realized because at another point, P17 also said: “I proved to myself again that I can. And I am worth it”.

Since retraining either directly or indirectly led to an increase in self-confidence amongst most participants (all except P4, P15, & P19), it is not surprising that most participants reported that retraining led to them being more motivated to pursue their desired career. For example, P11 indicated that retraining increased her motivation to re-enter her field as a financial consultant. P11 said that she felt: “More encouraged, because the competency is now recognized, and since it is recognized, you believe you can move on to the next ladder”. Several participants also suggested that retraining increased their motivation to pursue a new career. For instance, discussing the impact of retraining on his motivation to pursue a new career in hospitality, P17 replied: “It encouraged me, yes”. Similarly, P2 stated: “It led me to be more encouraged to pursue my career. I think if I’d stayed in the service jobs I’d not be a happy person”. Suggesting how retraining helped solidify a new career path, P6 said: Yes, it did, on the financial side. After I went through the whole course, it caught my interest. So it did help me to concrete that path. In addition, P10 explained how his retraining reaffirmed that a career change is possible:

Meeting people during retraining, that has helped me in a big way. To see how people make career changes, to see that change is possible in this society, to see that how even people when they’re forty-five, fifty, come in for retraining and start a new career then, that is reinforcing. That definitely helps you pick yourself up and move ahead (P10).
Aside from increased motivation to pursue a career, at least one participant suggested that his retraining encouraged him to pursue further education. More specifically, P5 said: “It actually encouraged me more to be… I thought I was a good teacher, and it encouraged me more. In fact, if possible, I would leave this country with a Ph.D. And this is my ambition now”.

In contrast to most participants who felt more motivated after pursuing retraining, a few participants suggested that their retraining experience may have led to feelings of discouragement. For instance, P14 described that during her retraining she initially felt discouraged because of the negative social climate within her program. Fortunately she eventually became more motivated to pursue her career in business once she realized that she was able to access greater opportunities as a result of retraining. Discussing her experience P14 shared: “I felt discouraged of having done it, which is pretty funny, but that opened up doors, and it gave me opportunities and it gave me employment, so, good and bad”. Similarly, P4 also felt initially discouraged by his retraining. P4 explained: “I would say discouraged a little because when you start realizing the things are not much different than what you know, then you start saying, Oh, my God. Why am I spending so much effort and money on this?”

On the other hand, former physician P15 initially felt encouraged by his retraining experience, however, after continued difficulty finding employment related to his certificate in pharmaceutical analysis, P15 now feels very discouraged. P15 shared: “I design to work in my previous field, but this certificate, this training, not very much helpful for designed the field I wanted to get into”. Sharing a similar experience, former physician P19 discussed how despite taking retraining he feels very discouraged to
pursue a career related to medicine or instruction. Talking about his retraining as a first-aid instructor P19 said: “I felt discouraged, all right! Because, despite the training, I am nowhere. It only gave me a certificate”.

*Impact of Retraining on Canadian Career Identity*

Participants were asked to discuss the impact that retraining had on their sense of a Canadian career identity. Not surprisingly, since most participants suggested that retraining led to an increase in their self-confidence and motivation to pursue their desired career, most participants also said that retraining had a positive impact on their career identity and self-perception as a new Canadian worker. In particular, many participants indicated that their retraining helped them to acculturate and/or become more familiar with Canadian culture. For instance, P3 experienced significant difficult initially adapting to North American values and workplace norms. In commenting on the impact of her retraining on her experience as a new worker in Canada, P3 said: “it helped me to understand values. While studying, I met different people from different social groups, and I understood well the values of this society, and I started to appreciate them”.

Sharing a similar perspective on retraining, P6 stated: “I think it helped me a lot to give me exposure to the country. It helped me knowing a lot about Canada and its culture”. Echoing these sentiments, referring to retraining P5 said: “it assimilated me to the system”. Aside from learning about culture and values, retraining in Canada may assist immigrants to adapt to North American work-life. Highlighting this idea, P9 said: “For myself, I think it’s just a learning procedure to let you know more about this country and to adapt life, working life here”. Similarly, P18 stated: “Now I know what’s expected of me and what’s expected of others and the importance of my role”.
Part of the process of acculturation and adopting a new Canadian identity may involve a growing sense of belonging within the new culture. Interestingly, several participants indicated that their retraining ultimately helped them to feel more accepted in Canada and/or to identify as Canadian. For instance, highlighting the impact of her retraining on her status as a Canadian P14 shared: “It’s been good because people no longer look at my Salvadorian experience, people look at what I’ve done in Canada now. So, it’s been very positive in that sense because people now look at what I’ve done in Canada”. In addition, P14 said: “It’s one way of belonging to Canadian society, because you belong to a school”. Similarly suggesting that retraining helped her belong to Canadian society, P20 commented: “Like now, I’m very much relaxed. When I came, I didn’t know what it’s all about. I saw these flashy stores, these people running the subway, I heard these conversations... I wasn’t belonging to here”.

Discussing how retraining gave him a new start in Canada and helped solidify his life here, P6 said: “Retraining overall helped me 100% to stay in Canada. I probably wouldn’t have stayed in Canada; I probably would have gone back”. Also highlighting how retraining helped him to identify himself as a Canadian, P12 expressed: “It’s a big impact, in a very positive way. I am proud of being Canadian. You have to go through all these stages in your life, but I feel really, really well”. Finally, P1 indicated that retraining, which allowed him to become a business owner, facilitated his sense of involvement in the community. Reflecting on this P1 shared: “I guess it has given me a different perspective, being a business owner. Very satisfying. And just being able to contribute a whole lot more, to the community than I would in my previous career”.

Only three participants (P15, P17, & P19) suggested that retraining did not have a
positive impact on their identity as a Canadian worker. For instance, answering the question about the impact that retraining had on his experience as a new worker in Canada, P15 said: “It’s like neutral”. P17 agreed that retraining did not necessarily shift her identity as a Canadian worker. Explaining the lack of impact P17 shared:

Not really… Well, I’m still the same accountant, just a designated one. My identity as a Canadian is not related to my retraining. It’s too different, again, the values and the culture… It comes from constitutional rights and from this country’s politics. I’m a proud Canadian, regardless of the designation! (P17).

Unfortunately, P19 could not relate to the notion of being a proud Canadian because he has not found lasting employment and has had to return to India several times to try and earn money to support his family. P19 explained:

I feel no love for anything over here. I know nothing interesting in Canada just because of this. I haven’t been able to enjoy the changing colours of fall. I know they are beautiful. When I watched them from India, they were beautiful; here I have not enjoyed them. Because at the back of my mind is the constant worry, ‘when is my next job coming’. Part of another reason why it would be hard to feel like a Canadian: I’m having to leave the country to support my family and get work. Yeah, leave the country which is supposed to be my country here and leave my family. I don’t feel like a Canadian, honestly, because if I’m not given my due. I mean, if you don’t respect me, I don’t respect you. Period. That’s how I feel about it. It is very sad. I hate to say that, but that’s the actual feeling that I have (P19).

Self-Discovery and Main Lessons

Participants were asked to discuss the main lessons they learned from retraining. Overall, the answers offered by participants can be broken down into the following themes: 1) self-efficacy, 2) tolerate uncertainty, 3) personal discovery, 4) skills/work-life balance, 5) importance of retraining, and 6) persistence.

When discussing the main lessons gleaned from their retraining experience, the most commonly offered answer was related to self-efficacy. This is not surprising considering that most participants indicated that retraining increased their self-confidence. It seems that
maneuvering through the challenges associated with retraining teaches some individuals that they have what it takes to overcome difficulties. Supporting this idea, several participants mentioned that retraining taught them that they can succeed. For example, talking about the main lesson taught to her from retraining, P17 stated: “First of all, it proved me again that I can; doesn’t matter how hard the circumstances are. I’m going to succeed. That’s it”.

Furthermore, P12 said that his main lesson was: “That you could do what you want to do. Sometimes you are facing challenges, that you don’t really know how to do something. But you learn. It’s learning by doing”. Similarly, P13 replied: “The lesson was it taught me more about myself, that I could do things, that I hadn’t lost the capacity to work and to put my knowledge to work. Basically it was all positive. That’s all I can say”. Also discussing how retraining helped instil a greater sense of self-efficacy, P14 answered: “To not be afraid of people. To not be afraid of myself. To like who I am. To not ask for validation from others. And that I’m actually competent to do the job”. Also highlighting how retraining taught her self-worth, P18 said:

That there’s room to learn new stuff, that I’m flexible, that I’m still okay, because I’d been crushed/reduced to nothing, I thought I was worthless. But then the retraining made me realize that no, no, no, you are still valuable. You can still do it (P18).

In addition to teaching P8 that she could succeed, retraining also taught her that she could learn a new language. Reflecting on her experience P8 shared: “I discovered that I was able to study again, going back after twenty years to university. So I was surprised with myself, doing that in a second language. It was good”. Through retraining, P9 also discovered that she could learn a new language. P9 explained: “I find myself, a little bit surprised. I catch the words fast, and I copy what the people say, so for me, I find myself learning language skills much better than I expected”.

Not knowing what to expect may be somewhat inherent to immigrating to a new country and pursuing retraining. In line with this, at least one participant suggested that retraining taught him to tolerate uncertainty. In particular, P1 said retraining taught him:

Kind of learn how to start all over and not know what I was getting into… Learning how to tolerate uncertainty and learning how to deal with not knowing. Before, I had experience and I knew what I was doing; now I was brand new and didn’t know very much. That was kind of one of the main things (P1).

Immigrating and starting over is also likely a humbling experience. A couple of participants suggested that one of the main lessons taught to them by their retraining was to be humbled. For example, P2 took retraining to be an instructor for foreign medical doctors to assist them for preparing for their equivalency exams. Reflecting on the lessons gleaned from her retraining experience P2 said:

Well it allowed me to see immigrants from different countries, and their struggles. And how it hasn’t been that difficult for me. But what I really, really have seen, that most people don’t get to see this, I see people from Pakistan, the Middle East, India, China, and I see really how much they struggle, and I’m like ‘whoa’. There’s so many that are amazingly trained, but they’re not working (P2).

Also talking about being humbled by his retraining experience, P1 shared: “One of the things would probably be that I had to be humble again after having a kind of status in my previous jobs; I had to humble myself again to start from scratch and be no one in my new field”.

For some participants, the main lessons learned from retraining related to personal discovery. In particular, P4 discussed how retraining changed his personality. Referring to the retraining P4 said: “Again, it’s something that goes inside your personality. So, for sure it changed my personality; make difference in my personality”. Also highlighting personal change or discovery as a lesson that came from retraining, P14 shared:
I discovered that marketing is something that I enjoy, but I’m not a fluffy person. I really don’t care about puffery, which is a lot of marketing. I enjoy marketing, but I realize that’s not my strength, not my fit… I realize that I enjoy coordinating. I enjoy knowing how things are, and moving things forward… I’ve learned what I actually enjoy doing (P14).

Another theme that arose in response to having participants talk about main lessons from retraining was related to skill development. For example, P7 said: “I understand how to do professionalism in my career. Understanding of professionalism is the main lesson. To do things professionally, to perform professional, this is a main lesson for me”. P15 similarly referred to his enhanced knowledge as a main lesson: “I find that my knowledge field lacking in some areas, like pharmaceutical areas. Like I didn’t have knowledge in that area, and after training, I would have ideas about the area”. In addition, P11 indicated that retraining helped to develop her skills with time-management when she answered: “Having a work-life balance, time management is important”.

Aside from learning the importance of a work-life balance, a few participants also suggested that retraining taught them about the importance of retraining. For instance, P12 responded: “It’s very important to have a certificate, or a degree, or a diploma in Canada in order to get a job. It’s a must to go to a college or university educational institution”. In addition, P9 replied:

If you want to resume your career, either here or in another country, I think you need to learn. Get retraining either from a program or just from a casual one because, basically, maybe the rules, the company rules, they are running the same thing, but they have many different details you need to learn from that. So I think whenever you think you can handle this or that, I think that in different countries, you need to learn new stuff to adapt (P9).

P8 seemed to agree with the idea that retraining is important. When she discussed the main lessons she learned from retraining P8 said: “That I needed to go through the training”. Talking about how retraining taught him the importance of learning about
different approaches to architecture, P16 replied: “From my academic retraining, I did learn the technological differences that we architectures practice in this part of the world… Certain requirements exist. I don’t know for what end they serve, but they exist and you kind of have to apply them”.

A final retraining lesson highlighted by some participants involves the value of persistence. For instance, discussing the main lessons gleaned from retraining, P20 said: “Be persistent. Do not agree on the first what people tell you. Always look for second opinion. And if it doesn’t work, just go for something else. Don’t be stuck”. Also identifying persistence as a lesson, P15 said that he learned that it was important to be persistent early on in finding a job: “The lesson I learn is I should find a job not too long after I complete the training. If wait longer, it’s become harder, harder, harder to find the job”. After failing some of his exams, P16 said that retraining taught him:

Perseverance. A lot of it. And that I could rediscover my passion for my field of architecture, that I knew I had to commit myself to it. Unless you put yourself to it, it doesn’t come… Even though I failed so many times. So, to have that kind of a very, very strong will in yourself to be something, other things are not possible. Unless you have that target in front of you, for me it is like that: I know I want my seal, I know I want to be recognized as an architect here. So I’ll take all that is required. If I didn’t have that in me, I don’t know what I would be (P16).

In a similar light, P17 shared that her main lesson was:

That you don’t give up. Doesn’t matter how hard it is, you just don’t give up. You come up with a solution, and you get to it. You get it done. Some people that I know, they’re ten years in their profession and they still didn’t finish the designation, for whatever reason. And there’s always an excuse, right? ‘Oh, my kids are too young’; ‘my wife doesn’t work’… Well, this is just an excuse. Just go and get it done. Period. It will open doors for you. Isn’t it worth it? (P17).
Current Work Role and Skill Utilization

In order to help understand the current and/or ongoing employment experiences of professional immigrants who have undergone retraining, participants were asked to discuss their current work role and comment on the extent to which their skills are being fully utilized. Participant responses can be categorized as: 1) full-time, skills mostly utilized, 2) full-time, skills not fully-utilized, 3) part-time, skills fully utilized, 4) part-time, skills not fully utilized, and 5) unemployed, skills not utilized.

At least seven participants (P1, P8, P9, P13, P14, P16 & P17) reported that they are currently working full-time and feel that their skills are being more or less fully utilized. For instance, even though P1 is currently utilizing different skills as an owner of his own insurance company branch, he discussed how he more or less uses his skills:

I think all my skills are being used. Obviously in my previous life, it was more like analyzing processes, developing reports and working on things that were not really people issues. Now it’s more understanding where people are coming from and trying to develop a relationship. So, it’s very different (P1).

In addition, P8 currently works as a senior financial analyst. Discussing her role, P8 said:

It’s like a division of seventy people, and we have a budget of 1.2 billion dollars that we manage for the public service. I’m responsible to control that budget and make sure that everything complies with the rules of the accounting principles (P8).

Although P9 was on maternity leave at the time of her interview, she reported that she now works as an accountant and feels that most of her skills are utilized. Discussing her current job P9, said: “It’s like an accountant role, in a smaller-medium sized company, so daily job is doing the bank statements, reconciliation, daily transaction, and also the bookkeeping stuff, and using accounting software”. Now working as a mental health nurse, P13 reported that although she now works with people instead of animals, her current job utilizes most of her skills. Talking about her current job P13 said: “It gives me
a certain amount of standing, that I am using my knowledge, that I’m knowledgeable, that I have resources to get more knowledge. There’s growth. Even at this age I can still grow, I still have opportunity”. After completing her MBA, P14 landed a job working in a bank. P14 is currently in her third position within the bank and is now a manager. Although for a long time since coming to Canada P14 did not feel that her skills were being utilized, in light of her recent role as a manager she said: “Thankfully, I do not have that feeling anymore”. P17 was also recently hired as a manager for an accounting department at a large company. Suggesting that she finally feels her skills have been recognized, P17 said: “I feel fulfilled and fully utilized”. Although P16 is still working on finishing his equivalency requirements to obtain his official seal as an architect in Canada, he reported that he thinks that most of his skills are being utilized. At the time of his interview, P16 was about to move to Alberta to start a new job that he felt would better suit his interests in institutional design.

Although P2 is only working part-time due to cut-backs at her workplace, she also feels that most of her skills are utilized in her current role as a trainer/facilitator. Commenting on the extent to which her part-time job utilizes her skills, P2 said: “Before I was operating on like, maybe 45%, now I’m operating on all six cylinders”.

Not all participants (P6, P7, P10, P11, P12, P15, P18, & P20) who had either a full-time or a part-time job agreed that they were fully utilizing their skills and knowledge. For example, P6, who now works as a business analyst, reported: “A lot of qualifications are not used in my work life. Skills I’ve already probably lost them by now, but I gain new skills”. In addition, P10 currently works as a customer service representative in a bank and discussed how his foreign MBA renders him overqualified for his job:
This job I got by downgrading my qualifications and because I knew somebody who took my resume in. If I had just applied for it, it just requires maybe high school, first two years of university, or one year of university. Basic accounting jobs are not that difficult. This only uses a quarter of my skills, my training (P10).

P11 felt similarly about her job and suggested that her current job as a financial consultant does not utilize many of her skills. P11 explained: “Because I’m not a manager here, while back home I was already five years as a manager”. Former physician P15 also strongly felt that his skills are not utilized in any way in his current job working at a grocery store. Referring to his current job P15 stated: “Not much related. This is just labour job”. Although P18 was able to obtain a job related to her retraining in research, she still feels that many of her scientific skills are not utilized. Discussing how she would like to find ways of using more of her skills within her current role as a research assistant, P18 shared: “That’s something that I have to advocate for because … so, with this study, I could be drawing blood and doing some lab analysis. So that’s something that I’m familiar with. So I’ve asked if when they’re busy, if I could also help”.

Several participants (P7, P12, & P20) who work part-time also agreed that their current job does not utilize most of their skills and knowledge. For instance, P7 recently decided to upgrade his Canadian college diploma in hospitality and tourism to a University degree in the same subject. To support himself, former engineer P7 works part-time at a restaurant within his university during the school year. Although P7 stated that the job is just “a student job”, he still expressed positive sentiments about how the job gives him work experience. P7 said: “The current job… I do the customer service for the food and beverage, and it’s very good for me. I think I gain experience and gain work hours to graduate. It’s very important for me”. P12 also reported that he works part-time as an interpreter. P12 stated that he wished he was able to work more hours. Discussing
the extent to which his skills are being utilized P12 said: “My qualifications as an interpreter, all of them are used. My qualifications as a previous worker back home (professor of economics), no, of course they are not used”. Former physician P20 also reported having a part-time retail job while she attends university. When asked whether her skills are being utilized in her work-life, P20 responded: “Of course, no”.

Several participants (P3, P4, P5 & P19) reported that they have recently been unable to secure full-time or even part-time work and are actually unemployed. For instance, about a year ago P3 moved to Toronto from Sarnia Ontario and has found herself unemployed ever since (with the exception of being let go from a couple of short-lived jobs). Discussing her situation P3 shared:

I didn’t think moving from the country- from the small town in Ontario to Toronto would actually make me unemployed for more than a year. I’ve never lived unemployed before. Never. Even in the very tough economical situations in Russia, I worked. So this is the first time, right now, in my life when I’m here. It’s just very natural for me to work! (P3).

P5 also reported being unemployed for approximately a year since the private school that he worked for ended up moving to the United States. P5 has ended up doing some relief work as a personal support worker to help pay his bills and he is continuing to look for work as a teacher. P4 has also recently struggled with unemployment ever since his employer downsized about three months before his interview. P4 has been looking for work related to accounting and discussed his concerns:

I’m starting to get very concerned because I have another item working against me, my age. I’m that much older than when I came, and things like my age, looks like employer doesn’t like consider that, because I’ve been called for several interviews already, and I feel the interview goes perfect, goes fine. But somehow I’m not elected. So start thinking, ‘What’s going on?’ My job developer said, ‘Sorry, but your age is not’. And the economic crisis this moment, two factors (P4).

Former medical doctor P19 has struggled with long-term unemployment. At times
has worked as a security guard and he has occasionally gone back to India to try and earn some money to help support his family. Discussing whether or not he has been using his skills and abilities in his work-life in Canada P19 said:

I’m not using my abilities at all. None of my qualifications or strengths are being used. I’m just being used as a labourer. And I think that was perhaps at the back of the immigration guys, and they just want labour. And they should say so very openly rather than call qualified people in, and then make them work as labour (P19).

The following discussion illustrated the potential impact of being unemployed:

P19: It’s killed me. Killed all my love for this country, love for life. I was a very full-of-life person, and being an army man, a soldier, you can imagine we are very full of life: we do all kind of duties, fun activities, job-related activities. I was head of a hospital; I want to use my skills. I feel very, very, VERY frustrated. It is the worst period of my life... Very, very stressful. I wonder why I haven’t gone back… Frustrated, discouraged totally. And I feel it’s the end of my life.

I: Your career?

P19: Of my life, not career. My career has been finished already. The end of my life because I don’t see anything on the horizon. It’s a very, very negative factor. You have nothing to look forward to... Work is the only important part in a man’s life.

Canadian Career Identity/Career Satisfaction

In addition to asking participants to describe their current work role and whether or not their skills are being utilized in their Canadian work-life, participants were also asked to discuss how they felt about their current work role and whether or not they derived a sense of identity from their work. With only one exception (P6), participants’ reported level of work satisfaction and career identity seemed to be closely related to the degree to which participants’ reported that their skills were being utilized (see section immediately above). In particular, participants who reported that their skills were more or less being fully utilized (P1, P2, P8, P9, P13, P14, P16, & P17) tended to report that they felt either satisfied or neutral with their job and that they had a sense of career identity. In contrast, participants
who reported that they were not fully utilizing their skills (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10, P11, P12, P15, P18, P19, & P20) tended to report not feeling very satisfied or neutral with their job and indicated that they had little or no career identity.

In discussing job satisfaction and career identity, some participants (P1, P6, P8, P13, P14, & P17) indicated that they had very positive feelings about their job and/or a high level of career identity. For example, conveying a high level of job satisfaction, P17 said: “I love it. The people are great, and the company is awesome, and the building is absolutely beautiful, and the view of the lake is amazing; it’s right on the lake. And oh, I just … I love it”! Similarly referring to her job satisfaction, P14 responded: “Very happy, very positive. I feel very, very happy at work”. In addition, discussing her job P8 shared:

The work that I do, I feel very good. I am appreciated. I got promoted every year in my performance, I have the maximum, so I’m very, very satisfied with the job that I have. It’s the end goal. I was thinking about finding a job that is financially rewarding and related to my training, so my competence can be utilized. This position is fulfilling all of those objectives (P8).

Also very content in her current job as a nurse, P13 replied: I like everything about it. It’s my dream job, really”. Echoing these sentiments, P1 said:

I’m very satisfied because Canada has given me the opportunity to do things I never would have even imagined being able to do back home in Colombia or in the U.S., really. I feel so much better being able to have my own business and being able to give a work opportunity to other people; I help other people to have a career, so it has really raised my level of satisfaction (P1).

Even P6, who had suggested that his skills were not being fully utilized, reported being very satisfied with his current job. Discussing his feelings about his job as a business analyst, P6 stated: “I feel pretty good. It’s a bit different from what I was doing before. It’s challenging, at the same time I see a lot of opportunity to grow in this job. I can say that I’m doing what I want to do at this stage”.
Not surprising, participants who were very satisfied with their current job also reported feeling a sense of career identity. For example, when asked whether he/she had a sense of vocational and career identity from their current employment experience in Canada, P6 replied: “Yes, I do. It’s a fairly good identity to get attached with a good company. You do gain some value”. And P13 answered: “Yes. I think the nursing part is in me, it’s part of me, and I’m just expressing it. I’m nurturing it”.

In contrast to the above participants who were very positive about their career in Canada, two participants (P15 & P19) expressed solely negative sentiments about their current work role. In particular, commenting on how he felt about his current job, former physician P15 said:

The job, the supermarket one, decreased my self esteem. It’s kind of hard or shameful when I talk to my relatives in China. It affects me greatly, my life, because I wanted to move here, I wanted to immigrate here, I want to find a decent job here. Now I feel like I’m a loser, right? I don’t have a decent job; I don’t have a family; and I lose my previous professional field (P15).

Not surprisingly, when asked whether he had any sense of career identity in his current job, P15 answered: “No, it’s just surviving job”. Similarly, after finding himself unemployed in Canada, former medical doctor P19 also described losing his sense of career identity:

I was a five-year-old when I decided I have to be a doctor. So that meant I had a passion for it. I still do have a passion for it. I’m a pain-relieving doctor – anaesthesiologist, because I have a passion to alleviate suffering from humankind. If I had my way, no human being would be with pain. But Canada has shattered that career. My sense of identity is shattered here, and I feel very, very bad that I took this step. But unfortunately, there’s no retracing (P15).

Interestingly, despite also being unemployed, former teacher P5 reported that he was able to still hold on to his identity as a teacher:
P5: I’m not ashamed to say I’m a teacher, wherever I am. I’m not ashamed, because that’s what I am. And I know that I’m going to get a job again in the teaching profession.

I: So despite having difficulty finding another job as a teacher, you still have an identity as a teacher?

P5: Yes.

Overall, aside from participants who were either very positive (P1, P6, P8, P13, P14, & P17) or very negative (P15 & P19), most employed participants (P2, P7, P9, P10, P12, P18, & P20) found both positive and negative things to say about their current work role.

For instance, discussing how he felt about his part-time job as an interpreter, P12 shared:

I like that I help people. That’s the most important. Secondly, it’s $27, $30, $35 per hour. I don’t like the fact that it’s not stable. It’s not full-time, it’s not part-time. You don’t have insurance coverage or benefits. If you get sick, you don’t get paid (P12).

When asked whether he felt a sense of career identity, P12 responded “no” and then explained: “Vocational in the sense that I deal with people. But it doesn’t fulfill my expectations, mainly salary expectations. That’s my main concern. And it’s not stable”.

Discussing his part-time job as a food service worker at his university campus, P7 also had both positive and negative things to say:

This current job is a program related job. I really like this job because it’s related with my program, it makes me feel connected with the industry, and through this job, I get to know a lot of people. The thing I don’t like is the rate, because it’s still minimum wage. It’s not a highly paid job. This is just for a student. This is what I don’t like (P7).

Also referring to both positive and negative aspects of her retail job, P20 said:

It’s a difficult job; not many people want to work there. It’s very challenging. And it’s very stressful sometimes, but my manager, she’s very intelligent woman. She knows how to calm down. When you have very good supervisor, you feel very good (P20).
When asked whether she felt a sense of vocational and career identity from her current employment experience in Canada, P20 replied: “Of course. I’m always there”. P2 also had mixed feelings about her current work-life. In particular, P2 reported that her current job created financial stress because she had very limited hours as a trainer and the business she was trying to develop in theatre arts was not yet generating an income. Despite these concerns P2 said: “having to start up again, that is rough, but I found a place to be happy”. Although P9 didn’t specifically identity positive and negative aspects of her job as an assistant accountant, she expressed having neutral feelings about her work-life when she said: “For me, it’s like kind of a neutral thing. Not like that much, not dislike much, so it’s more peace of mind for me”. P10 also suggested that peace of mind can increase job satisfaction. In particular, P10 talked about how, although he doesn’t derive a lot of satisfaction or identity from his current job, he feels fortunate to be working:

I’m happy to have a job, because I know many people don’t. Though I know I could do better, at the same time, my company right now is in financial turmoil. They’ve downsized terribly. Our particular unit has gone from thirty-five to twenty people, so I feel lucky. But, I feel lucky to survive, I don’t feel lucky in the sense that I couldn’t do more, that’s the downside of it. But, like I said, I look at things in balance, so it doesn’t frustrate me so much (P10).

Future Career Outlook

In order to understand how professional immigrants feel about their future career prospects in Canada, participants were asked to share how they feel about their future vocational development prospects and discuss their main concerns and/or needs for the future. Overall, participants indicated that they were either optimistic (P7, P8, P12, & P13), neutral/mixed (P1, P9, P11, P16, & P17), or pessimistic and/or very concerned (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P10, P14, P15, P18, P19, & P20) about their future.
Despite having current concerns with the lack of available work hours and under-utilization of their skills, a couple of participants appeared to be very optimistic about the future. In particular, although former engineer P7 currently works part-time as a food and beverage server, when discussing his future career prospects P7 said: “I think with the economy growing, there will more opportunity, a better opportunity for me to work in this industry. I feel positive with my new career”. Also demonstrating a positive outlook, despite feeling worried about the instability of his work hours as an interpreter, P12 replied: “Very optimistic, very positive. Even though I don’t have the Canadian experience in the field that I would like to work (teaching), or the Canadian education I would like to have, I still feel very optimistic”. Satisfied with the prospect of continuing her career as a nurse, P13 shared: “It’s very good. As it stands, I have a permanent full-time job, and benefits, and growth opportunities”. Talking about her future, P8 said: “I don’t have any concerns”.

Most participants did not appear as optimistic or care-free about their future and expressed neutral, mixed or pessimistic thoughts and/or feelings. For example, although P1 first appeared fully optimistic when he replied: “I’m very optimistic about where we’re going to be”, P1 also added:

I think that one of the things we need to decide, is on the financial side of what we’re going to do as far as investing, or go further into debt to fund my business. The industry is going through tough times, so it makes me wonder how long these tough times are going to last. And are the goals that I had in the beginning really going to happen, or are we going to have to struggle more other years? (P1).

Also revealing mixed feelings about the future, P9 responded: “The future… that is tough… I think sort of optimistic and sort of concerned”. P16 also expressed mixed
sentiments, seeming slightly optimistic on the one hand, while concerned about the possibility of future unemployment:

As I will be committed to my profession, I will be keeping on working. I will be keeping on upgrading myself, I’ll be producing profits to the place I’m working, I’m good. The day I stop doing that, I’m zero. So, I don’t know how it goes, because employees are probably the biggest cost to any employment place (P16).

P17 shared how her concerns about the future center on health and/or the ability of she and her husband to continue working: “If something goes terribly wrong, if I become very sick/disabled, if my husband becomes very sick or disabled, then we won’t be able to provide. Other than that, we’re okay. In terms of designations, degrees and certificates, we are fine”.

The remaining participants were not quite as balanced in their feelings about the future. For instance, although P3 first responded by saying: “I have zero idea. I don’t have any feelings”, P3 later revealed the extent of her worries by adding:

I just want to find a steady job. It can be part time, twenty hours, $15 an hour. It’s okay. Sometimes when I feel really depressed, we think, ‘oh, we have to move to South America’. Just I don’t want him [P3’s husband] to move because he has a good job, and I think it’s unfair. I have to be patient (P3).

Overall, participants such as P3, who appeared worried about the future, expressed concerns related to: 1) not finding work, 2) not making enough money, and 3) not advancing in their career. For example, P3, P4, P5 and P19 were unemployed and expressed concerns about finding a job. Discussing his struggle, P5 said: “some people said I should go into financing, because it is more inclusive than teaching. I said ‘no’. I love teaching. I will die a teacher, and I should continue struggling to see how best I can earn a job as a teacher”. P19 demonstrated how concerns over unemployment are tied to concerns for financial survival. Discussing his concerns P19 shared:
My main concern is just getting enough money to support my family. Like I told you, I feel career wise, I’m finished. Life wise I’m finished. I just want to make sure some of my skills are utilized. This is my country, and I would want not to be a burden on the country… I want to give back, but I find no ways to give back. I volunteer with half a dozen organizations, but volunteering doesn’t give me the capacity to contribute positively to the development. I want to say ‘this brick in the Canadian building is laid by me’. Unfortunately, I’m unable to do that (P19).

Although P2 had a job at the time of interviewing, she too expressed concerns about financial survival because of limited hours and/or low rates of pay. For example, P2 responded: “Financial concerns. Major. I’d like to see the work I’m putting forth and expending, I’d like to see that recuperated by financially having some stability”.

Closely related to financial concerns, some participants also expressed worries over a lack of career progression. For example, although they were both somewhat content with their current job, both P6 and P11 discussed how they worry that they won’t be able to advance any further if they do not take additional retraining. In addition, P20 and P15 worry that despite retraining they may not be able to secure desirable employment. Discussing her concerns former medical doctor P20 said:

Three years I’ve been trying. I’m not applying for senior roles. I’m applying for basic ward clerk; research assistant, file clerk… Last time I applied in May, they had patient safety audits, administrative job through Career Edge. No answer at all, like I’m not existing. Never called on interview (P20).

Sharing a similar story, former physician P15 indicated that he is worried about not being able to secure a job related to pharmaceuticals and having to remain in his survival job. P15 attributed the issue to a systemic problem and felt worried about his future job prospects: “I think the systemic reasons need be addressed to make Canada a fair place… Like, at least you give people interviews. I’ve been here for so many years and I don’t even get a reply for interview. That’s unbelievable”.
Anticipated Future Actions and Expectations for Future Retraining

Participants were asked to discuss what they intended to do to enhance their career development in Canada and whether they planned to pursue any future retraining. In terms of future anticipated career enhancement strategies, participants’ responses can be broken down into: 1) networking, 2) improve language skills, 3) volunteering, 3) applying for more jobs, 5) entrepreneurship, 6) relocating, and 7) additional retraining.

Several participants (P1, P4, P14, & P18) suggested that they plan to focus on networking to help improve their career development. For example, P14 replied: “I know that if I want to go somewhere else, I’d rather continue networking, whether it’s informally, or formally in the bank, or while doing my courses”. In addition, P1 said:

In my field, the more people I know, eventually, many of those people will become my clients. Hopefully. So, the more people I know and the relationships that I develop, the better. But I know if I will be so much in the office, my opportunity to meet more people is limited. So, for the future, that’s what I need to do (P1).

However, not everyone had the same intention to focus on networking. In fact, P19 said:

I’ve done networking and all, but networking doesn’t get me to any job so far. They charge you ten or twenty bucks every time you go to a networking meeting. So, twenty bucks there and twenty bucks for parking is expensive. So I’m not in a position to waste forty bucks for every meeting. I’d rather not go there, then (P19).

A couple of participants (P10 & P15) suggested that they intended to focus on improving their communications skills as a way to improve their future work-life. For example, P15 said: “The thing I do is continue to improve my communication skills; I go to different conversation groups, like English class or even the Toastmasters International, like different places to improve my communication”. Also highlighting communication skills as a future career enhancement strategy, P10 responded: “I want to do some French courses and become bilingual if possible, bring my French up to speed,
because it will make me more employable here”.

Aside from networking and language skills, volunteering was specifically mentioned by several participants (P3, P14, P13, & P18) as another career strategy. For instance, P18 discussed how she planned to be more strategic in utilizing volunteering to find desirable work: “maybe volunteer at some professional organizations that I’m aligned with, what I would want to be in the future and not just volunteer for the sake of volunteering”. P13 also mentioned that she would like to volunteer in the future, although more so for personal interest than for career development. P13 explained:

Career-wise, not so much, because I’ve worked a number of years, and that’s good. Now making money is not going to be the primary concern. My kids are employed and settling down now, so I don’t need to be contributing anything to their financial needs. Basically, I would like to work as long as I can, but most probably in a volunteering sort of thing (P13).

Applying for more jobs was another strategy mentioned by at least two participants (P3 & P7). For example, P7 replied: “Find a job, that’s my plan”. And P3 said: “I’ll keep on applying. I hope maybe September there will be more positions because students are back to school. I hope to find something in the future”.

Rather than look for additional jobs, a few participants (P1, P2 & P19) suggested that they may focus on running their own business. For instance, P1 was already focused on building his business as an insurance broker and P2 was just starting her own business using corporate sponsorship to convey messages using theatre arts. When asked about her intended future plans P2 replied: “Build my own business, and work for myself”. In addition, P19 mentioned that he might continue trying to generate an income through medical tourism. P20 explained:

Medical tourism… you know they’ve got a lot of wait times over here? So, because of my position in India, I can get treatment done with the snap of my finger in some
of the best centres and, perhaps you’re unaware, Indian hospitals, the corporate hospitals that I refer to, are JCA accredited. It’s an international independent body which assesses hospitals on the level of care, and Indian hospitals are better than 90% of US hospitals. Can you believe that? (P20).

Relocating was another strategy mentioned by a few participants (P3, P16, & P19).

For instance, P19 suggested he may return to India to earn some money if he continued to have difficulty finding work in Canada:

I’ve lost all sense of direction. I’m waiting to see what opportunity can come my way. I think maybe I’ll go to India, earn 10,000 or 20,000 bucks every year and bring them back. Yes, it contains a certain amount of separation, but then I asked for this. Nobody else did (P19).

In addition, P16 reported that he was about to move to Alberta to pursue a new job related to institutional architecture. Discussing his plans, P16 said:

As we talk now, I’m in between job situations. I’m joining a new job in November, and that’s in Alberta. I was given my examination, so I’m kind of into that, too. But the new job is promising. Although it’s in Alberta, I think I’m going to get into projects which I want to get into. They’re in more educational… they’re doing commercial, too. So that’s what I’m looking to get into (P16).

Although P3 didn’t have any set plans to relocate, she suggested that if she continued to have difficulty finding a job she might leave Canada. Sharing her plan P3 stated: “if my knowledge expertise, if my previous experience is not required by any company in terms of hiring me as a professional, then I will learn Spanish and move to South America”.

Aside from strategies such as relocating or networking, many participants mentioned additional retraining as a way to further improve their work-life in Canada. In fact, most participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, P17, P18, & P20) suggested that they planned to or were contemplating taking future retraining. Aside from the participants (P7 & P20) who were already enrolled in university and planning to finish their degree, several participants suggested that they would like to enroll in future additional
retraining. For example, P12 said: “I will take more retraining”. P1 replied: “Yes. In the insurance and financial services field, there’s the opportunity to be licensed in other areas as a certified financial planner, so that’s something I’m looking at doing in the near future”. In addition, when asked whether he planned to take more retraining P5 replied: “Yes, I intend, because I want knowledge, and knowledge is power. And especially in the field I want, which is teaching”. In particular, P5 hoped to one day pursue a PhD in education. Former medical doctor P20 responded: “I want a medical career, so of course”. And although P12 had already retrained as an interpreter, when asked about his plans for future retraining he said: “Yes, Absolutely. I would like to take retraining in economics so I can teach again. Initially at college, because it would be less expensive, but I would like to take a master’s degree at university level”. P18 also hoped to pursue a Master’s Degree. In fact, P18 had recently enrolled in a university program.

Other participants were less sure of their plans for future retraining. In particular, several participants indicated they were still contemplating pursuing additional retraining in the future. For instance, P11 said that she was thinking about pursuing an MBA, but felt uncertain due to the need for balancing her family life. P9 also suggested that she would like to pursue future retraining but felt uncertain due to the difficulty of balancing her family life. Although for different reasons, P4 also felt uncertain, yet open to, retraining and said: “I’m confused in this moment, but for sure if this situation with me becomes firm unemployment, for sure I need to. I don’t know specifically what. I have many options, and I stay open for other options”. P14, who was already completing a certificate in project management, also appeared open to future retaining when she responded: “Will I be taking another course? I hope not. But that’s what I said after I
finished my MBA, and look at me now”. Finally, although P17 didn’t have any future formal plans for continued retraining, she stated that she would continue to take training courses related to her job: “Only if it’s specifically applicable to the job I am doing… well, for my CA and my CPA, I have to do forty hours every year of professional development in order to maintain the designations. This is what I’m doing, that’s it”.

Only a quarter of participants (P2, P3, P8, P15 & P19) suggested that they did not plan to take any future retraining. For instance, on a positive note P8 said: “I’m happy where I am right now, but in the future maybe I’ll look for other opportunities”. On a less positive note, P3 replied: “No, just because I feel myself overqualified for very many positions already”. After also responding “no”, P2 explained: “Why not, it’s because I spent a lot of time for the other thing, and it’s a lot of effort and work to retrain”. Also hesitant to retrain any further, P15 explained: “Because I have a retraining experience; I know how results will come out from that. I hear stories, people who get the retraining, just spend tuition on the school then they don’t have ability to repay that loan”. Finally, P19 said:

I would love to, but I don’t know what that would lead to, in view of past experiences with the training. And to start a course at the age of sixty, when will I complete it? When will I start earning? The immediate concern is food on the table. How long can I have my wife’s slender shoulders bearing the brunt? (P19)

When P19 was asked whether or not he would try to do anything to regain his medical degree he replied:

I’m not going to pursue that anymore because of what that doctor told me, that no matter, even if you clear them, there’s no chance of residency because of my age. Whether we like it or not, that’s the truth. And why should I be doing two years of studies, spending 10,000 bucks and having nothing to look forward to at the end of it? (P19).
CHAPTER 9

RESULTS: The Career Resiliency of Professional Immigrants

This chapter presents and discusses the themes that arose in relation to the career development and resiliency of professional immigrants. This chapter starts by comparing the pre-immigration and post-immigration career attainments of participants. Then, the usefulness of participant’s foreign credentials and work experience is explored. Next, both the factors that facilitate and hinder the career resiliency of participants are identified. Relational influences on the career resiliency of participants are then discussed. The role of attitudes and personal growth in the development of resiliency are then examined. The impact of social comparisons and relative deprivation is then highlighted. Finally, the suggestions that were made by participants to improve the adjustment experiences of immigrants are detailed.

Comparison of Pre-immigration and Post-immigration Career Attainment

Overall, how do relatively new professional immigrants’ Canadian career attainments compare to their pre-Canadian career attainments? In order to help answer this question, participants were asked to discuss how their current work role compares to their work-life prior to immigrating to Canada. Overall, participants indicated that their Canadian work-life was either better (P1, P6, P7, P14, & P17), comparable (P8, & P13) or worse (P2, P3, P4, P5, P9, P10, P11, P12, P15, P16, P18, P19, & P20) than their pre-Canadian work-life. Overall, most participants suggested that a move to Canada did not result in a better career outcome.

Highlighting how a move to Canada could result in a lower career attainment, all three former physicians (P15, P19 & P20) reported that their Canadian career achievement was
far below what they had achieved in their home country. For instance, in Canada, despite retraining in pharmaceutical analysis, P15 found himself unable to secure a job related to medicine. Instead, P15 has been working in a grocery store. Talking about the personal impact of his career downgrade, P15 said: “The job, the supermarket one, decreased my self esteem. It’s kind of hard or shameful when I talk to my relatives in China. So I’m not proud of myself”. Suffering his own career downgrade after coming to Canada and finding himself only able to teach first-aid, former medical doctor P19 stated: “Ha-ha! Compare it? Yes. Comparatively, it is very, very low. A survival job, if you like. There, I was teaching post-graduate students. So here, not even medical students; just medical office assistants”. Although former physician P20 seemed more optimistic about her Canadian career development because she reported having a sense of career identity in her retail job, she still responded by pointing out the advantages of working in her home country. In particular, P20 explained how in the Ukraine employers are more open to feedback, they have better health and safety programs and a superior vacation package where the government pays for people to stay in a resort for up to a month.

Many other participants who were not former physicians also indicated that their foreign work-life was better than their Canadian work-life. For example, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P12 reported that they were now either unemployed or underemployed due to either not being able to find a lasting job or having only part-time hours. Highlighting this issue P2 said: “My work in the States, I was happy with. My work in Canada, not so happy in the beginning. A nice bright spot with the doctors and the retraining, but it didn’t last, I wish it did”. A couple of other participants, who had experienced or witnessed a lack of job stability in Canada also made comments about Canadian work-life being unsteady. For
example, P9 said: “Here is more challenge, because in China, when I held a job, the company was really stable, as long as you’re alive, you can stay, maybe stay forever. But here, the company is more private-owned, so you never know”. Echoing this, P16 shared:

I guess the biggest difference is the expense for any employer over here is the employee. So the first impact of any business happens on the employee here. In India, no matter what the business is going through, the employee will be the last to get affected. The infrastructure will be reduced, but the employee will not be (P16).

Aside from a lack of job attainment or stability, several participants also suggested that their Canadian work-life is comparatively worse because of the extent to which their skills are now being under-utilized. Highlighting this issue P10 responded:

It can’t be really compared because what I was doing over there was intellectually challenging, much more than what I’m doing over here. It was more growth-oriented, more appreciated were my skills. This only uses a quarter of my skills, my training. It’s a different ballgame totally (P10).

Similarly, P4 said: There I was a professional chartered accountant, giving advices to any kind of company. Here, I was just part of a company, participating, so it was different things (P4). In addition, P11 replied: “I’m not a manager here; while back home I was already five years as a manager”. Meanwhile, explaining why her current contract job as a research assistant is less desirable than her previous position as a food microbiologist, P18 said:

My standard of living back home was higher, like I had almost everything I dreamt of: you have your job, you have your family, right? You decide what you want to do. But here, I’m not there yet. I’m like a graduate who’s just fresh from university (P18).

Two participants (P8 & P13) seemed to suggest that they are neither better nor worse off in Canada in terms of their career development. Suggesting her career in Canada is equally satisfying to her career in India, P13 said:
If I weigh it in terms of satisfaction, it’s the same. I worked with sick animals becoming better, I worked with mess. Things became better for them. Now I see people rehabilitating, coming in sick to the hospital. The comparisons are there (P13).

In addition, P8 said: “I think I’m at the same level now that I was there. Being a controller there, and a senior financial analyst here, I think they’re comparable, the same, so I’m very satisfied with what I have now”.

Some participants (P1, P7, P14 & P17) even suggested that they are more satisfied with their career in Canada. For instance, comparing her work experience in El Salvador and Canada, P14 responded:

They’re very similar in the stress, the prestige, the dealing with clients, the dealing with multiple priorities and multiple and stressful deadlines. The difference is that in El Salvador, they treat you like a slave, and you can quote me. Jump. How high? They have no respect for people, there’s no such thing as a life-work balance. If you ever bring that up, you get fired. But, in Canada, there is a respect for the life-work balance, there is a respect for your career, and your progression, and your training. It’s better, there is a respect for who you are (P14).

Feeling optimistic about starting a new and very different career in Canada, former engineer P7 commented on his new job working in the service industry by saying: “I think it’s totally different, but I like the employment here better than China. Because this is a new career, I have a passion in this new career. I communicate with people, I feel very good”. Similarly, P1 reported being more satisfied with his new career in Canada due to the fact that he now owns his own business and works with people:

I guess in my previous employment, I was very dedicated to processes and machines, and it was not so people oriented. Now, it’s more relationships and meeting people and understanding people’s needs. I think that’s a big difference. I guess it’s better. I think it’s about the flexibility and the freedom versus the stress level; I think it’s higher where I’m at now. But I know that the rewards down the road are going to be much bigger than what I would have been as an employee (P1).

Lastly, P17 suggested that she is also more satisfied with her career in Canada:
What I appreciate here is just the huge market. I finally feel that I am at this international level. Israel is a small country of seven million people. I mean, how can you be in the front line? But here, I feel like I’m in front line. I work with big firms, with best firms in the world. This is the centre of all business-related activities, that’s for sure. This is what drives the world. So to have an opportunity to work with these people is just mind blowing (P17).

Usefulness of Foreign Credentials and Foreign Work Experience

Participants were asked to discuss the extent to which they found their foreign credentials and work experience helpful to their career development after they arrived in Canada. Overall, participants seemed to suggest that their foreign credentials were either directly helpful, indirectly and/or somewhat helpful, or not very helpful. In addition, participants indicated that their foreign work experience was either directly helpful, indirectly and/or slightly helpful or not very helpful.

Only three participants (P1, P7, & P20) suggested that their foreign credentials were automatically recognized and/or directly helpful for getting a job (not necessarily a desired job) in Canada. For example, P1 replied: “Yes, because I had my undergraduate degree in industrial engineering, and I had worked with some international companies, too. So that helped me”. P1 was able to secure work as distribution centre engineer based on his foreign degree. In addition, P20 suggested that her medical degree was helpful in getting one of her initial jobs with a medical supply company. As P20 explained: “when I got that job, they asked me to bring my documents and they asked if I had a medical terminology course”. Finally, P7 indicated that his foreign degree may have helped him to get his first job working at a restaurant. Discussing the usefulness of his foreign degree, P7 said: “Actually, I think so. It helped me, because I am a graduate, and they believe me. They trust me. They think I can do the job, and then they hire me”.

Several other participants (P3, P5, P6, P11, P13, P16, & P17) suggested that their credentials were indirectly and/or somewhat helpful. For instance, several participants indicated that although their foreign credentials did not directly lead to work, the foreign credentials did allow them to fast-track their Canadian retraining. Discussing this issue P17 said: “Well, they recognized, when I said that I am CPA from the States, they said: Well, that’s good”. In addition, P5 responded: “Yeah, after doing the tests”. Similarly, P8 stated: “Only when I found this coordinator jobs which I found through the Career Bridge program, yes. It was helpful”. And P11 explained:

For CMA, they have the accelerated program which is if you had a four year course back home, you’re considered eligible to take the accelerated program. Since I am a CPA back home, I had all the pre-requisites to go into the accelerated program (P11).

P16’s credential review was more straight-forward because his degree was recognized relatively quickly and he just had to focus on completing internship hours to obtain his seal. He was hired as an intern-architect soon after his credential review process. Finally, P6 explained how his foreign education allowed him to pursue a post-graduate diploma, which led to his first job with a co-op placement. Recalling his experience P6 said: “Having the financial background did help me to get the job, the co-op initially. Indirectly, also, it helped me because I had to do my Bachelors to do my post-graduation, and co-op”.

In contrast to participants who found their foreign credentials either directly or indirectly helpful, many participants (P2, P4, P8, P9, P10, P12, P14, P15, P18, & P19) did not find their foreign credentials to be much use to them in their career development in Canada. For instance, although P8 went through a career bridging program she did not find her previous credentials to be very useful because as she explained: “Not much, no, because when I went to CGA, they just recognized one or two credits, that’s all”. Offering a
similar response, P9 said: “I would say a little bit, not really useful”. Also not finding her previous credentials helpful in Canada, P2 responded: “Not really, because of the work I was actually getting, they didn’t care”. Similarly, P14 answered: “Not really, because I had to deal with ignorant people who asked me questions like ‘oh, I don’t really know if you’re qualified to do this job, can you really do this?’ Come on, it’s business”. Reflecting on his own experience P4 expressed: “No, we don’t have no recognition… because a person who, even though I have experience to show, they say: But this guy doesn’t have this designation”. Even two of the previous medical doctors (P15 & P20) did not find their previous degrees helpful at all. Referring to his foreign medical degree, P15 said: “Those qualifications have not helped me to get a job here”.

Not only did P10 not find his previous MBA helpful, but he also suggested that he felt that he had to discount his previous degree completely. Discussing his experience P10 said: “when I removed my MBA in finance, I got more calls. Like my current job. I removed my MBA, and when I mentioned it to my supervisor after getting permanent, he said: I would have never hired you”. Explaining how this made him feel, P10 shared: “It’s like taking off part of your body because you go through hell to get the designation”.

Unfortunately, many participants (P2, P3, P7, P9, P11, P15, P18 & P19) also suggested that their foreign work experience was not very helpful for their career development in Canada. For instance, when asked to discuss whether his foreign work experience as a professor was useful in Canada, P12 answered: “No, because I didn’t have a job as a professor here in Canada. I haven’t yet”. Similarly, P2 responded: “I don’t think it was very useful”. P3 even said: “Honestly, nobody cares”. Echoing this, P19 replied: “Zero. Nobody’s recognizing”. And P15 stated: “Now I’m doing the surviving
job, right? The supermarket or the factory; it’s not related. It’s just surviving job at minimum wage”. P11 also found her previous work experience unhelpful to securing work in Canada and said:

It was not useful. In my case, ten years of my work experience is in the banking industry, but I’ve never worked in bank here. It was not a factor. I am now in my position because of my retraining, because I have my designation in Canada (P11).

Discussing her concerns further, P11 stated: “I’m an immigrant and they don’t consider my experience before coming over. That’s my perception. I think it’s the concern of most immigrants, how come Canada isn’t recognizing the education and experience back home”? When P18 found that her previous experience as a food microbiologist was not relevant in Canada she also became frustrated. Discussing how she felt, P18 shared:

It was frustrating to come to realize that my work experience wasn’t being valued. Because they are the same people who come to our country to teach us, because we were colonized by the British, so the exams we did were based in UK (P18).

Although P9 felt that her previous work experience was slightly more valued, she too said: “I would rate sort of useful, not much”.

Others (P6, & P16) appeared somewhat unsure of whether or not their foreign work experience was helpful in Canada. For example, P6 suggested at first that his experience may have helped him, however, he also indicated that he thought his employer had been looking for “a fresh one”. In particular, P6 said: “It may have. They knew when they were hiring that they were looking for a fresher. That’s what they’re expecting. They didn’t want anyone with five, ten years of experience. They were looking for a fresh one”. In addition, P16 replied: “Yes and no”.

P16 and several other participants (P4, P5, P10, P11, P12 & P17) seemed to suggest that although their former work experience was not very helpful for obtaining work in
Canada, the foreign work experience did help to indirectly prepare them for a career in Canada by providing them with knowledge and skills. For instance, P11 discussed how her foreign work experience taught her how to work with people:

I would say that it’s more considered on the non-qualitative aspect. Non-verbal, sort of like how I deal with people, how I communicate, how will I handle a certain situation? My managerial experience does help with those things, but as far as my work back home is concerned, I don’t think my qualifications and education were considered or helpful here (P11).

In addition, although P5 was unsure of whether or not employers considered his foreign work experience, he felt that his pre-Canadian work experience was indirectly helpful to his career development in Canada by teaching him skills. In particular, P5 said: “It has been very useful because now, I cannot fail any job interview if it is concerning teaching, because, I know what it takes to be a good teacher, and that’s what they want”. P17 also seemed to suggest that her former work experience is what gave her the skills needed to be an accountant. Discussing her experience P17 said:

Accounting is accounting, and it doesn’t matter if you write from right to left or left to right; it’s still accounting. So the principles are the same, the terminology is the same, only it’s called, in English, the taxes are slightly different but still, there are taxes… The structure is very similar, its just called different things (P17).

Commenting on the extent to which he gained most of his knowledge and skills during his foreign work experience as a chartered accountant, P4 said: “I would say that most of it comes from there [Argentina]. You cannot say 100%, but most. Okay, the Canadian experience is important to understand the Canadian way; just to understand people”. P12 indicated that his foreign work experience as a professor helped prepare him for a career in Canada by improving his communication skills. P12 responded: “In learning English, yes. I learned English there, and that was really useful here”.

In contrast to the sixteen participants who felt that their foreign work experience was either not helpful or only indirectly helpful, only four participants (P1, P8, P13 & P14) thought that their foreign work experience was directly beneficial to them in terms of locating work in Canada. For example, P1 answered: “Very useful, but it was perhaps as useful or more useful what I did in the U.S. because it was like… okay, this was in North America. Colombia… that sounds good, but it’s just Colombia”. P13 suggested that her foreign experience as a veterinarian assistant was directly helpful when she said: “Yes. That was one of my jobs right? The veterinary assistant”. P14 also suggested that her foreign work experience with a large international corporation helped open doors for her when she replied: “The fact that I worked at PWC opened up interviews for me”.

Finally, talking about her foreign work experience P8 responded:

> It was useful because, when I was looking for jobs here, I would see what was required and the work related to finance and accounting from my job experience in Albania, so, yeah, it helped me (P8).

**Factors that Facilitate Canadian Career Resiliency**

In order to better understand the factors that shape the career development of professional immigrants, participants were asked to discuss the factors that both negatively interfered with and/or enhanced their Canadian career resiliency. The factors that seemed to enhance participants’ career development after arriving in Canada relate to:

1) transferability of skills, 2) English language skills, 3) social support/connections, 4) a positive attitude, 5) individual action, and 6) retraining.

**Transferability of Skills**

As mentioned above, some participants (P1, P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, & P17) did find their previous experience and/or skills to be somehow helpful to
them for establishing a career in Canada. However, only one participant directly identified transferability of knowledge or skills as a factor that facilitated their career development. In particular, P14 commented:

I think I was very fortunate that I studied business, and that I did an MBA. It wasn’t complicated. Had I studied something different in El Salvador, like, for example, medicine or engineering, I’m sure that my perspective, my experience, and my feelings would be very different. So I think I’m very fortunate (P14).

**English Language Skills**

Some other participants (P1, P12, P13 & P16) did however specifically mention that well-developed English language skills helped to advance their Canadian career development. For instance, P1 responded: “I had the ability to express myself well in English. So, that helped me a lot”. Similarly, P13 reported: “In my job-search, the primary thing was fluency in English”. Discussing how a previous education in English prepared him to work in Canada P16 said: “Because English speaking was the requirement and my education was in the English medium, it was not much of a trouble”. And P12, who utilized his language skills in his new career as an interpreter stated: “I think the change was not that difficult for me, because I spoke a little English. Then I felt very confident speaking English”.

**Social Support/Connections**

Well-developed English language skills may make it easier for individuals to form social connections after they arrive in Canada. In support of this idea most of the individuals (P1, P13, & P16) who identified language skills as a contributor to their career development also identified social support and/or social connections as an important resource for assisting them to get established. For example, talking about what factors assisted him to get a job P16 said: “my networking and friends helped me get that
thing”. Overall, some participants (P1, P13, P14, P16 & P17) suggested that social support and/or connections contributed to the development of their career either by leading to job opportunities or by encouraging them to persevere. For example, P14 recalled:

Along the way, I found supportive people. Whether the job counsellor, a boyfriend at the time, or the school itself, and even with my own classmates. And at work, having mentors. I guess it’s really the network, right? When I did my internship during my MBA, I grabbed my rolodex of contacts from the Consulate (P14).

P17 also found that her career was advanced by being socially connected. P17 explained:

“Well, easier was definitely the fact that we had this relative who set me up with his chartered accountant”. P17 further discussed how the contact not only gave her a job, but also increased her self-confidence:

And that lady, she was very warm; she was very welcoming; she encouraged me and she said, ‘Well, I see great potential in you, and you are very smart and I really liked you right from the beginning and the questions you asked’. So this encouragement from people, that helps a lot (P17).

Echoing the idea that social relationships can be encouraging or motivating P1 expressed:

“having good relationships with other people. I really think helping other people helps you to be motivated”.

*Positive Attitude (Optimism, Flexibility, Persistence)*

Aside from skills and social support, quite a few participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P9, P10, P13, P14, P16, & P17) suggested that a positive attitude was important for their career advancement. For instance, having an optimistic attitude seemed to help some participants cope with difficulties such as unemployment. Discussing what factors facilitated his own career development, P1 responded: “being hopeful and having faith that if I do the right actions, I’ll get to where I need to be”. And P17 answered:
I think it comes with maturity and age, but I thought I’m not going to stress myself out because of the exams. I’ll just do my best. I thought, you know what? After so many exams I passed in my life, one more exam? I can do it. I can do it (P17).

In addition to optimism, a flexible attitude also seems to facilitate the career development of professional immigrants. Supporting this notion, when asked what factors facilitated her career development, P2 answered: “being open to things coming to me”. P9 responded: “I’m very flexible and adaptable”. P10 suggested his motto was: “take what you get until you get something what you want”. In addition, P16 said: “I would say my flexibility in terms of being ready to accept a completely new culture, a new way of understanding structures… unless I was open to that, would have been difficult”. Finally, P14 talked at length about the importance of openness:

Well, one of the reasons I wanted to do this interview is because, from anecdotal experience, there’s a lot of disappointment, and resentment and anger, that the immigrant experience has not been positive, that people need to retrain, that employers don’t accept the qualifications. There is a lot of anger. I have been very, very fortunate, but also because of who I am, that I decided to just be open and accept whatever the universe throws at me, and make do with. I think that you need to be flexible. I think that’s a strength I have, I’m very open to opportunities (P14).

Aside from optimism and openness, enthusiasm or passion seems to be another quality that makes up a positive attitude and contributes to career development.

Supporting this idea P5 declared: “what has influenced me to be successful is my enthusiasm, my competence, my love for the teaching”. Also highlighting the importance of enthusiasm, P13 argued:

You have to put in a certain amount of effort, and a certain amount of positivity, because if you don’t go with that verve, that kind of enthusiasm, the interviewer is not going to look at you as if you’re going to do his work for him (P13).

P16 referred to his enthusiasm as “passion”. Discussing what factors he felt facilitated his career development P16 offered:
I would say, you have to be passionate about your profession. At the same time, you have to be really, really committed to it. I mean, unless you are passionate and committed, you cannot kind of get that spark in you to say you want to pursue this and then it starts feeling like a burden (P16).

Perhaps passion and enthusiasm lead to determination and perseverance, two other qualities which seem to be important for career development. Highlighting the important role of determination, P17 recalled: “I was determined that I will get to the end and I will get it done, no matter how. It doesn’t matter how many attempts it will take me… my ability just to pursue my dream. Not to stop, even if it’s hard”. In addition, P16 declared: “It’s all about how much commitment you have. You have to commit yourself to these things; you just cannot get things easy. Perseverance: big, big, big, big thing”. Discussing further how he persevered despite failing an exam twice, P16 added:

You fail exam and before you get into the dejections of failing exam, you say ‘No, I have to prepare for this. Get back to preparing. Wipe yourself off the failure; get into the study and prepare for the exam. And not once, not twice: as many times as required’ (P16).

**Individual Action**

A positive attitude and/or characteristics such as enthusiasm, perseverance and self-determination may be important because they lead to individual action. Highlighting the link between passion and individual action P16 said: “My first job was based on my, I would say… because I was just so passionate about my field, I was willing to do anything to get my job”. In addition, P18 also suggested a link between determination and action when she said: “I would say maybe determination also. Like, you have to have that determination. Now that I’m here, I might as well! Push, push, right? Because you can only try. No one will kill you for trying or asking”.

Showing initiative and/or following up intentions with self-directed action is a factor thought to influence career development. In support of this idea, a number of participants (P2, P13, P14, P16, & P18) specifically identified their own actions as contributing to their career development. For instance, commenting on the factors that facilitate career success, P13 said: “I think one has to put in effort to get a job that you want”. Similarly, highlighting the importance of self-directed action for one’s career development, P14 shared: “I’m a little type A person, focused on doing my career. That is a big strength, because I marketed myself… A lot of it was innate, like, I have to do things to improve”. Explaining further what she did to improve her career P14 said: “It’s very straightforward. I did the job hunting aggressively when I came here. I did my interviews, they liked me, they hired me”. Discussing the role of his own actions in regaining his status as an architect, P16 stated: “That is a tough part of this because you have to dedicate time. Unless you dedicate time to it, you just can’t get through it”. In addition to putting in time and effort, part of “doing anything” to succeed might also involve making sacrifices. Supporting this idea P16 shared:

When I am doing this exam, I have to sacrifice a lot from the family, and the family has to sacrifice a lot of their time. They don’t get my time and they know I’m doing the exams, which they know will eventually be beneficial for all of us (P16).

In further support of the importance of individual action on career development, when participants were asked to discuss how important their own actions were for successfully completing their retraining, every single participant suggested that their actions were important. For example, P10 responded: “Very important. You’re totally responsible for yourself”. P7 answered: “It’s… Definitely, it’s up to me. I made the decision on my own. I chose to do that”. P12 said: “They were very important, because if you don’t take that
seriously then why are you wasting your time? You have to take everything you do seriously”. P2 replied: “I think it was at least 99% for me to embrace it and to take it”.

P15 stated: “Oh, my action is important. I have motivations and energy to complete this program because I need to make efforts, right?” And P1 responded:

Extremely important because it was my own actions as defining when I was going to do it and the amount of time I needed to dedicate to make it happen and then knowing what was going to happen after I made that move; just having that discipline of not giving up, I guess (P1).

*Retraining*

Self-discipline, determination and individual action all seem very important for getting the most out of another important career enhancing strategy: educational retraining. In support of the idea that retraining is an important factor that facilitates professional immigrants’ career development, quite a few participants (P3, P6, P8, P9, P11, P12, P14, & P18) specifically identified retraining as a factor that enhanced their Canadian career development. For example, identifying the factor most responsible for her career success P11 stated: “It’s the retraining”. Agreeing with the idea that retraining helped to facilitate her new career in Canada, P8 said: “Going back to school, being a CGA and that program helped me to find the job”. Similarly P9 replied: “I think the retraining definitely I’ll say is very important. Every job what I took for the past years I would say is definitely a help”. Finally, P6 said: “I would say this retraining program is the most, biggest factor which helped me on my career development path”.

*Factors that Hinder Canadian Career Resiliency*

Although factors such as skills, social connections, a positive attitude, individual action, and retraining can help facilitate the career development of professional immigrants, there are even more factors that uniquely hinder the career development of professional
immigrants. Supporting the idea that immigrants face unique barriers to their career development, P1 said: “There are factors that immigrants have to face coming to Canada. Sadly, many of them are very qualified professionals. PhD, doctors, engineers, and then they come to Canada and they have to just survive”. The main factors that seemed to have a negative affect on participants’ career path after arriving in Canada can be broken down into: 1) language barriers, 2) a lack of self-confidence, 3) adapting to cultural differences, 4) lack of domestic knowledge and/or skills, 5) lack of Canadian experience, 6) non-recognition of foreign credentials, 7) financial constraints/ lack of resources, 8) age, 9) prejudice/ discrimination, 10) lack of social connections, 11) competition, 12) economic recession, and 13) work-life balance.

*Language Barriers*

Language barriers were identified by many participants (P1, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P15, & P17) as a hindrance to immigrant professionals’ career development. Highlighting language barriers as a factor that can impede career progression, P1 argued:

> If you don’t improve your English skills, it’s going to be much tougher to succeed in what you’re wanting to do. A lot of people try to stay within their community and not improve their English. And that really makes it so much harder (P1).

Supporting this idea, when asked to identify any factors that hindered his Canadian career development, P5 replied: “My accent, being that I don’t speak the way people were born here speak, made it difficult”. Similarly, P7 responded: “I think it is language. Language ability, like, speaking or writing English is the most important thing in career, I think, for me”. In addition, P15 said: “I think my communication skills may be a negative factor because my English is okay but not that great sometimes. I need to improve my English”. Sharing her own experience with facing language barriers at work, P9 expressed: “you have
the pressure, you need to speak different language, not like before you’re just kind of easy. Here, it’s kind of invisible in pressure”.

A Lack of Self-Confidence

Since speaking a foreign language makes it more difficult to communicate and can be uncomfortable, language barriers could potentially undermine people’s self-confidence. A lack of confidence or self-efficacy may negatively effect career development. In particular, reduced self-confidence could make it more challenging for individuals to demonstrate their knowledge and/or skills and may deter people from going after challenging work roles. Supporting the idea that professional immigrants may face reduced self-confidence as a barrier to their career P18 stated: “Where I come from you’re being proud, but here it’s the opposite”. In addition, P3 recalled: “I was newcomer, and I was scared to speak up my mind. I was embarrassed, very often shy”. Also describing how she now finds herself doubting her capabilities, P9 shared: “Right now, I can see oh, it’s easy for me, they require to do this, to do that, maybe from the job description, you think you can handle it, but actually maybe, I don’t think I have that ability to do that”.

Adapting to Cultural Differences

Part of the reason that immigrants may doubt themselves and/or experience a reduced self-confidence may be related to the fact that aside from a new language, immigrants also face the challenge of adjusting to a new culture. Supporting the idea that cultural barriers can affect the career development of professional immigrants, when asked the question “What factors have made your career life most difficult?”, P3 replied: “Sometimes I’m really… well, it’s cultural. It’s hypocrisy related to it. Sometimes I just
don’t understand the layers”. Similarly, P4 responded: “Probably for sure my accent or my culture. To give you an example… the fact that once, instead of Prime Minister, I said ‘a President of Canada’, they said: Where this guy came from”? In addition, P18 shared:

In terms of familiarity, where I come from, it’s an environment that I know. If people do things in a certain way, just looking at them I can tell hmm, something is not right here. I shouldn’t even smile. Like, you could read certain things; you just listen to people, just observe. Where I am now, I haven’t reached that stage yet. I’m still studying cause I don’t know if they shout that or say things in a certain way or if they say ‘It’s up to you’, what that means. So I’m still learning the culture (P18).

*Lack of Domestic Knowledge and/or Skills*

A lack of Canadian knowledge or skills represents another career barrier that many professional immigrants face. For example, P9 mentioned how she experienced a lack of knowledge of North American accounting software. P9 explained:

Before we used totally different accounting software. Now here, for everything, you need accounting software to do that. The taxation back home is manual as well, so, I thought, even if I get a job, I’m not sure I if have the ability to handle that (P9).

P11 discussed facing the same challenge when she said:

More the technological updates. Back home, I didn’t do much cause I was a manager, so you would have someone else to do all the nitty gritty. You’re high level, so you don’t do all those Excel spreadsheets. Here in Canada, since I’m in the position where I do all of the worksheets, I needed to upgrade myself (P11).

Explaining how she too faced having a lack of domestic knowledge when she first arrived in Canada, P2 stated: “What’s made it difficult is that I feel like there has been a lot of closed doors. A lot of not giving information that actually allows a person to move ahead”.

*Lack of Canadian Experience*

Aside from missing out on domestic skills and/or information that may not be readily available to new immigrants, many immigrants also face the barrier of not having their
foreign work experience recognized or valued. In fact, a lack of Canadian experience was
one of the most commonly cited career barrier identified by participants (P8, P9, P10, P11,
P12, P14, P17, P18 & P20). For example, P8 said: “Especially for immigrants, you are
well aware that when you go and apply for a job, they’re looking for Canadian
experience. Everywhere I was hearing that I don’t have Canadian experience”. Similarly,
P10 responded: “The fact of Canadian experience has made it difficult. Whenever I went
to an agency they’d ask if I had any Canadian experience. Echoing this P20 stated: “every
time we went for a job they said what Canadian qualification do you have? Everything
had a certain qualification attached to it. So they don’t take into consideration any of your
experiences”. P12 summarized the difficulties he encountered by saying: “The most
difficult thing was the Canadian experience at all levels… When you go to the market
and you start applying, you understand it isn’t easy because the Canadian experience”.
P14 discussed how employers tried to take advantage of her based on the fact that she
didn’t have Canadian experience. P14 explained:

    In the beginning, it was difficult, because I didn’t have the so-called Canadian
experience. In interviews, that came up. ‘Oh, you have no Canadian experience, I’m
afraid I’m only going to pay you $6 an hour’. I said ‘I’m afraid I cannot accept that,
that is not sufficient to live on’. ‘Oh, okay, nope, we’re not hiring you’ (P14).

P18 encountered the same difficulty and she explained how she had difficulty
understanding the issue: “But I couldn’t, not even as a cleaner in a lab environment, I
didn’t even get that opportunity because lack of Canadian experience… To me, that
didn’t make sense… Work is work”.

    A lack of Canadian experience as a barrier was confusing for others too. As such,
a few participants specifically mentioned the catch twenty-two of the situation. For
instance, P17 said:
It was difficult because when I tried to look for a job, the first answer that I got, ‘Well, you are not qualified’. I told ‘Well, just give me chance’. They told ‘But then you don’t have the Canadian experience’. And then I told ‘Okay, well, how will I get the Canadian experience if you don’t give me a job?’ (P17).

Similarly, P8 argued: “so how can I get Canadian experience if you’re not willing to offer me something, right? It’s like a circle”. P11 highlighted this same issue by saying:

“Canadian experience… It’s a question again of the chicken and the egg. How can you be employed if you don’t have that Canadian experience?”

Non-recognition of Foreign Credentials

Aside from a lack of Canadian work experience being a barrier for many, quite a few participants (P3, P5, P7, P8, P11, P12, P15, P18, P19 & P20) also specifically mentioned a lack of Canadian credentials as a barrier. For instance, P12 said:

I was concerned because I was a professor of economics back home, but here, I found that if you want to go to any high school, you must belong to Ontario Teachers College, and if you want to apply to a university, you need to have a Master’s Degree from Canada (P12).

Former teacher P5 also found that he was not able to apply for teaching jobs once he arrived in Canada. When he went to have his credentials re-evaluated, he was disappointed by the lack of recognition of his foreign degree. P5 explained:

We always had the training and the retraining, so I expected that, yes. But not to say we are taking you back to school because we cannot recognize your papers, which was almost the case because I had to go do some tests to recognize my papers (P5).

P18 also found that she couldn’t continue her work as a microbiologist because of her foreign credentials not being recognized. Recalling her experience P18 shared: “The other thing was about credentials. I didn’t know soon enough that I needed to have my credentials accredited and also what that really meant, and how to do it”. Facing difficulty with having her credentials recognized, P18 reported that she gave up on trying
to enrol in a Canadian Master’s program. P18 explained: “I didn’t go that far because I was stuck with the credentials… you know what? I just forget it”. After encountering difficulty having his foreign medical degree recognized, P19 also gave up on the process. Explaining the impact of this barrier P19 said:

Our qualifications are zilch, zero… my qualifications were not recognized. I was looking for something in hospital administration or teaching in some college. But that all required re-evaluation of my degrees from India which is a process that takes about two to three years. I did not have that time, so I took a security job (P19).

Although P8 didn’t give up on regaining her qualifications in accounting, she too felt dismayed and said:

I don’t know why I had to go and none of my credentials were recognized here. It’s accounting. It’s the same thing. I went back to school doing the same old school, the same thing, after twenty years… Like, you know, I had a degree, and I had fifteen years of experience. It’s ridiculous you come here and you go back to school for a credit in finance or accounting, to start from scratch (P8).

Financial Constraints/ Lack of Resources

Financial constraints were another career barrier mentioned by quite a few participants (P1, P2, P8, P10, P13, P14, P16, P18, P19 & P20). For instance, P1 responded: “I guess now the toughest thing is really the financial part of it”. In particular, sometimes financial barriers make it difficult to overcome the credential barrier. Highlighting this issue P19 said: “One doesn’t have the resources to take exams repeatedly… When will I start earning? The immediate concern is food on the table”. In addition, P16 recalled:

The exam fees were like $300-400 for one exam sitting. So my wife, we had planned to take care of the children because we cannot afford putting them in the daycare. She ended up taking a night job so she could bring funds into the house. She can manage her time with the kids, and I have the day job and she has the night job. Those hardships are there, and one has to work through them (P16).
Aside from financial constraints making it more difficult to pursue retraining, P10 also suggested that financial constraints can impede career development by making you less appealing to employers. P10 explained:

Not having a car and being in that area, that was a really negative point, because, to get around, employers don’t want you… If you’re applying for a job somewhere else, and living where you’re living, you need to commute, and they know that, and that was another negative point (P10).

Age

Aside from finances interfering with the pursuit of retraining and/or career development, age was another barrier that was identified by a number of participants (P3, P4, P13, & P19). Suggesting that older age can hinder retraining, P4 said: “But when you come to the step, when it hits you, those words that I was told ‘your age is a big factor why you cannot get a job’, then I say Oh, my God. Why I’m going to Study”? In addition, explaining how she decided not to pursue further education, P3 stated: “I have to be realistic. I’m a mature person; I’m over forty coming to the new country, and even if the age of retirement is sixty-five, I don’t have enough time”. In addition, P13 responded:

Main concern is age. I came here when I was forty-five. I wish I had more time to work here. I would have done my degree; I would have done a Bachelor of Science in Nursing if I had the time, but now I’m working towards retirement, so I don’t want to study again (P13).

P19 also identified age as a significant barrier to his Canadian career development:

Most difficult has been my age… They said ‘Yeah, do your M.D. first’. M.D. was a four year process. It takes on average between three to twelve years for a doctor to get into the stream here. I came here at fifty-two; I didn’t have that kind of time. So I’m not going to pursue that anymore. Age is not on my side now, if I start from scratch (P19).

Aside from hindering future retraining, P3, P4 and P19 also suggested that older age
may also make it more difficult to obtain jobs. For example, P4 said:

I have another item working against me, I think, is my age. I’m that much older than when I came, and things like my age, looks like employer doesn’t like consider that, because I’ve been called for several interviews already, and I feel the interview goes perfect, goes fine. But somehow I’m not elect. So start thinking, what’s going on? My job developer said, ‘Sorry, but your age’ (P4).

*Prejudice/Discrimination*

The fact that potential employers may overlook people because of their age highlights another barrier commonly faced by immigrants: prejudice and discrimination. In fact, many participants (P2, P5, P7, P15, P16, P19 & P20) suggested that prejudice and/or discrimination have interfered with their Canadian career development. Identifying this barrier P16 stated: “I guess lately I have come to realize that peoples’ prejudice is something which kind of becomes a barrier”. P5 reported: “My colour, being black, made it difficult… Here, it is biasness. You may not believe it, but I’ve seen it. Biasness in employers… Because of religion, race, colour. You may not like it, but it is there. I’ve faced it”. Similarly, P19 said: “perhaps the Indian name itself screens out 40% of the jobs for me”. In addition, P2 shared: “it was- ‘you’re not Canadian, so why should we give you the job? Especially a job that’s going to pay”. P7 explained: “I think there is still a virus for a new Canadian or immigrant. I was not born in Canada, I feel sometimes there is an embarrassed for us”. P20 seemed to agree and said:

All employers I met weren’t friendly enough to accept immigrants. It’s highly prejudiced that locally-trained people are better… Like, am I a kid? I’m not a human? How’d you treat me like that? I feel really concealed or barriered (P20).

Echoing these thoughts, P15 reflected:

I think they might have systemic reasons here. When I send out resumes, I never get the interview. Some people say your name, this has discrimination right? Like if your name is not English name or something, you would be discriminated or something… They see your last name, they know where you are from. Then they
don’t look for your competence; just look at your last name or something. Before I come, I saw Canada was a fair place, fair country; now, I feel opposite (P15).

*Lack of Social Connections*

Facing prejudice and discrimination may be particularly difficult for immigrants who also have to adjust to being away from family and friends. Many immigrants do in fact find themselves socially cut off from others. A lack of social connections was another career barrier identified by some participants (P1, P2, P3, P8, P12, P14, P18 & P20). For instance, P14 said: “I think it’s very important to have a network, and when you come on your own, you don’t have that network”. In addition, P8 stated: “because you’re new in the country, you don’t have a network”. P18 explained: “Because honestly, outside the networks, you are nothing. You cannot get anywhere… you need to know somebody. It’s all about who referred you”. Similarly, P12 maintained: “it’s really hard but mainly if you don’t have what we call networking. If you don’t know people inside a company, it’s more difficult, it’s harder to get that job. It’s very, very hard not having social connections”. Discussing this difficulty, P1 shared: “What made it harder is that I didn’t know anybody, so I didn’t have any connections”. Unfortunately, it may be difficult for many immigrants to form social connections. Facing this difficulty P14 said: “Over here, people are happy to ‘know’ you, but, maybe because they are adults and their circle of friends is already set, it’s very hard to enter”.

*Competition*

Competition for available jobs was another career barrier mentioned by a couple of participants (P12, & P19). For instance, P19 suggested that competition amongst domestic doctors makes it difficult for foreign doctors to enter Canada’s healthcare system. Discussing this issue P19 recalled:
I met another doctor, Italian doctor, who was practicing in Mississauga, and he was quite friendly with me, and I asked him, I said, ‘What do you think about me getting into the system? He said ‘Do you think we will allow you to get into the system? We know you Indians are good doctors, and you’ll take away our practice’ (P19).

P12 also saw competition as a barrier to excelling in his new career as an interpreter. P12 explained:

A barrier for this job is that many people are coming to Canada, and many people are taking this training, so when these people are entering the market, then the agencies tell you ‘I can have more people for less than you’re charging me.’ The offer is higher than the demand (P12).

**Economic Recession**

Competition for jobs may be an even greater barrier during an economic recession. The slowing economy was in fact identified by some participants (P3, P4, P9, P10, P12, & P13) as a barrier that has interfered with successfully establishing a career in Canada. For instance, in attempting to understand the cause of her recent ongoing unemployment P3 expressed: “What I think is the most tough part … I think that because of the recession and maybe unemployment rate is higher than officially advertised on Service Canada; it’s my assumption. I don’t know”. In addition P4, who was also unemployed at the time of his interview, also saw the economy as a career barrier. P4 explained: “Unemployed because that company that I tell you downsize, almost disappear, so at this moment I’m unemployed”. P10 also pointed to the economy as contributing to his initial difficulty finding work when he arrived in Canada. Recalling his difficulty, P10 said: “It could have been, looking back, the time was wrong as well, because there was a recession, and Canadians themselves were not getting jobs”.

**Work-life Balance**

A final career barrier that was identified by a number of participants (P8, P9, P11,
P17, & P19) involves the difficulty inherent to balancing family and work-life. Sometimes strong family values and/or the need to take care of children and/or support a family can affect career development (especially for women) by making it more challenging to pursue a higher education or a more demanding job position. In support of this idea, P9 described how her future retraining plans depend on her ability to balance her family life. More specifically, when asked if she would pursue future retraining P9 responded: “Yes, if I can balance family life and working life, yeah, but I know when you have the kids, it’s very tough to back to the training”. Similarly, P8 indicated that she stopped pursuing further retraining due to family commitments when she said: “Because of my family conditions, I had to stop that, so I’m the only income in the house, so I have to support my family and I cannot go back to school now”. Family obligations also seemed to influence P8’s decision to not seek out a higher position at work. In particular P8 shared:

Right now, my family is priority, so my plans for the career are a little bit put in a stop right now… I was offered the manager position, but considering how much time you need to do that job, and you have to support your family at the same time, I didn’t accept that. Right now my family is more important (P8).

P17 also indicated that the fact that family is a priority for her means that she does not intend to pursue a more demanding work role. In particular, P17 said: “Well now since I have family, of course I can’t devote all my hours to work. I used to work long, long hours until seven or eight o’clock. But now I have family, so I have to put family first”.

Relational Influences on Career Resiliency of Professional Immigrants

The fact that family commitments and responsibilities can influence education and career choices highlights the important role that relational influences can have on people’s career development. In this study relational influences appeared to affect the
career development of professional immigrants in the following ways: 1) by limiting educational/job pursuits, 2) by facilitating the pursuit of educational/job pursuits, and 3) by facilitating adaptive coping and/or promoting career resiliency.

As mentioned above, strong family values and/or responsibilities can directly affect education and work decisions (especially amongst women) by deterring some individuals from pursuing a higher education and/or more demanding work role. As outlined in the above discussion on work-life balance, a number of participants (P8, P9, P14, P11, P17, & P19) suggested that their family influences their career-related decisions. For instance, P9 demonstrated how family responsibilities deterred her from pursuing a higher education. Discussing her desire to pursue a full license as a Chartered Accountant, P9 stated: “But I know it’s time consuming, and it is costly, and I have the kids, I’m not sure if I can handle… I do have that dream, but I don’t know one can make it”. Also talking about giving up on his dream to re-gain his medical license, P19 shared:

It’s a process of three years and 10,000 bucks down the drain. I don’t have that kinda money right now because my son’s a lawyer, and we’re trying to set up his career. The priorities change sometimes, after your children take priority over you (P19).

Although P14 doesn’t yet have children, she too demonstrated how family can influence one’s career path when she expressed:

In five years, maybe I’ll be married, maybe I’ll have a child. Maybe I’ll want to be a stay at home mom, maybe I’ll want to go back to work… So, there’s a sense of ‘it depends on whether I do get married’, but, for the foreseeable future, I probably will be working, I probably will progress to a senior manager role (P14).

A couple of participants (P11 & P17) specifically referred to the influence of family responsibility as a “conflict” or “dilemma”. In particular, P11 said:

I’m three years in my position. I feel the routine thing, I feel so bored now. I need to move on. On the other hand, if I move on, I will be neglecting my family again.
Will it be family first, or my work-life first? I’m at that dilemma right now (P11).

Echoing this same sentiment, P17 shared:

Well, I have some inner, internal trouble/conflict with myself: how much of myself should I devote to work, and how much should I devote to my family? Cause sometimes I’m torn. But it has nothing to do with the certificates or not; it’s just me, inside myself, I have to decide what I should put first, setting my priorities straight. Because many times I find myself guilty that I don’t give enough to employer and I don’t give enough to my family. But I think it’s the struggle that every parent is going through to some extent (P17).

Fortunately relational influences do not always hinder career development. In fact, participants also indicated that relational influences can have a positive impact on career development by facilitating educational pursuits and/or job opportunities. In particular, when it came to deciding to pursue a Canadian education, a number of participants reported that their decision was positively influenced by acquaintances (P9, P12, P15, & P20), friends/peers (P4, & P14), family members (P1, P6, & P13) or professionals (P19). For instance, discussing how an acquaintance influenced his decision to retrain as an interpreter, P12 recalled: “that person told me I could go to this agency and take a training, and I did it”. Similarly, discussing how an acquaintance influenced her decision to choose a particular college program, P9 said: “I know one of my sister’s friends, she had same experience as me, so that’s why I talk to her. I think that’s one of the major reasons that I choose that college”. In terms of family influence, P1 discussed how his wife directly influenced his decision to retrain as an insurance broker by introducing him to her boss, who was recruiting insurance brokers. In addition, P13’s decision to retrain as a nurse was directly influenced by her daughter who told her “it’s a good life for you”.

Aside from providing encouragement and/or referral information, relational support can also facilitate career development by making it easier for people to pursue an
education or new career path. For instance, P6 was able to focus on his education immediately after he arrived in Canada because his uncle supported him. In addition, P16 discussed how his wife was an important source of support by bringing in an income while he pursued school. P16 explained: “So she ended up taking a night job so she could bring funds into the house, and she can manage her time with the kids, and I had the day job and she had the night job”. Meanwhile, P13 even found her two adolescent children to be helpful in managing financial strain. P13 explained: The main thing was two of us held full-time jobs, and the third person worked part-time, so we could manage our lifestyle as well as studying. When my daughter went to school full-time, my son and I worked full-time so she could work part-time. We made each other a deal, and it worked”. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, family may either hinder or facilitate the pursuit of an education. For more information on how relational influences affect retraining decisions, refer to chapter eight: ‘the Pursuit of Canadian Educational Retraining’.

In addition to the potential to facilitate educational decisions, relational influences can also have an impact on job choices and opportunities. In particular, as previously discussed, a number of participants (P1, P2, P4, P7, P8, P9, P16, P17 & P18) suggested that social networking is an important strategy for finding work. Referring to the use of social networking as a career-enhancement strategy, P18 said: “It’s all about who referred you”. Describing his own use of networking, P4 said: “Talking with people… that’s how it [first job] came up, this person. It didn’t come from the help side; it came from a contact person”. In further support of the positive impact that relational influences can have on career development, P16 recalled: “So my networking and friends helped me get
that thing [job]”. Finally, P17 shared how her social contacts within her cultural community led to success in finding her first job in Canada as an accountant:

And also what helped is… it’s, again, where you’re coming from, what languages you speak, so history and the background. I’m Jewish; I speak Hebrew and Russian. That chartered accountant was Jewish; he was speaking Hebrew. From the company I came to, the owner was Russian, so I spoke Russian. So, somehow I find that when people have this similar background, they’re more prone to help (P17).

Receiving relational help or support may also indirectly facilitate career development by helping individuals to more effectively cope with the challenges they face, thereby strengthening career resiliency. Relational support was in fact the most commonly cited source of support or way of coping utilized by participants during their retraining. In fact, all of the participants in this study specifically mentioned that they found it helpful to have family members and/or friends available for emotional and/or financial support during their retraining experience (refer to above section on ‘support and resources’ in chapter eight). Recall that when talking about what helped him during his retraining, P16 said: “The very, very understanding nature of my family. They have been supportive all through”. In addition, highlighting how relational support can lead to enhanced coping, P12 said: “My kids have always been motivation to cope with anything”.

Parental support was also important to a number of participants (P3, P6, P7, & P14). For example, P3 stated: “in terms of morally supporting me, my mum … She always supported me in my studies”. Similarly, P7 said: “My family supported me. My family gave me strong support, my mom gave me… They believe in me here. They believe I did the right choice”. Finally, P4 shared: “What helped me more was the family. Family union, and they’re all in the same boat. I knew that Canada is a beautiful country to stay in, and I saw that my kids were developing, so I needed do more effort to stay”.
Friends and/or peers were also identified as an important source of support during retraining (P6, P8, P12, P13, & P15). For example, P12 said: “I had some friends, and some of those friends were with me at College. So that was motivation, too”. Specifically discussing how he coped with the stress of retraining, P15 said: “I called friends, talked to people”. Also highlighting the important role of friendships, P6 shared: “a lot of my friends were from different parts of India, were all international students, all new to the country. So, knowing them, socializing with them, that really helped me as well”.

**Role of Attitude and Personal Growth in the Development of Resiliency**

A tendency to adapt relatively well to stressful circumstances over time has been conceptualized as ‘resiliency’ (Luther, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). The concept of resiliency is highly relevant to studies on career development because those who are ‘resilient’ are more likely to persist in the face of challenges in order to attain success and/or satisfaction in their career (Grzeda, 1999). Aside from social support (discussed above), other factors, such as a positive attitude or optimism, are also thought to promote resiliency. While discussing adjustment experiences and difficulties, many participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P9, P10, P13, P14, P16, & P17) did in fact suggest that they relied on internal coping resources such as optimism to help them overcome encountered challenges while establishing their career in Canada (refer to above section on ‘Factors that Facilitate Canadian Career Development’). For example, drawing a link between having a positive attitude (e.g., optimism, patience etc.) and being resilient, P14 said:

One of the reasons why I avoid other immigrants is because there is a lot of resentment and anger. They want things done immediately. I don’t believe in that. If you want something, you have to work hard to get it. Maybe God’s going to bless you and everything will resolve for you in a month, that would be fantastic, but maybe it’ll take a little bit longer. But, I’ve found, if you’re super negative, because
I was there, I was negative at one point, it only makes things difficult, it only works against you (P14).

In addition, P16 stated: “I’ve learnt that there are four words which you can carry all your life, and those four words are: passion, commitment, perseverance, dedication. Take that, then if you have those, you kind of keep yourself going, going, going”.

Aside from the ability to remain relatively positive in the face of stress, resiliency is also thought to involve the capacity to actually grow and develop in response to encountered challenges (Felten, 2000). A number of comments made by some participants (P1, P9, P14, & P20) in the current study seemed to support the idea that resiliency develops and/or is strengthened by personal experiences with overcoming challenges. For example, P1 suggested that his transition to Canada was easier for him because he had already faced similar struggles during a previous move to the United States. Sharing his experience P1 said: “It was tough in the beginning, but I had been through that same process when I moved from Colombia to the U.S., so I had that experience already behind me: moving to a new country, finding a job, getting settled. So that helped”. Similarly suggesting that encountered challenges have helped her to more easily adapt, P9 shared: “I think I find myself, because before my life was very stable there, so now I found out myself, I can take more challenge. I can learn more, I can adapt to more difficulties”. Further supporting the idea that people can become increasingly resilient in response to facing challenges, P9 offered an analogy of her personal growth:

I think the first time is tough, but when you just overcome that, you can feel it’s kind of achievement. I say first it’s tough, and then you overcome it. It takes time. So you just feel achievement. I can recall the feeling… It’s like people on the train, I’m kind of people chasing the train, people on the train are faster because the language you learn is gradually, so I think I feel I’m chasing the train. But when you get on the train, I think it’s kind of an achievement (P9).
The story shared by P14 also offers support to the idea that resiliency involves the capacity to grow through challenges. In particular, P14 talked about struggling greatly during her retraining due to the competitive climate and how this taught her to advocate for herself. Discussing her retraining experience P14 said:

It affected my self-esteem, and I didn’t have the healthiest self-esteem because of the way my parents raised me… I wasn’t very good at standing up for myself; I’ve learned to stand up for myself in the recent past… The MBA teaches you to deal with difficult people. It teaches you to deal with dynamic, ever changing activities, and you realize you have to adapt (P14).

Interestingly, P14 also offered an analogy of her experience and said:

Over time, I’ve definitely evolved. You know, bad experiences break you, that was my experience, but then, you know what, like the Phoenix rising from the ashes, I know that sounds really melodramatic, but, you learn to stand up for yourself. That sense of self and of identity has evolved. It probably will continue evolving, but, at least now I feel better of who I am, and I don’t need approval from anyone because I like who I am (P14).

In a final demonstration of how her difficult adjustment and career experience led to personal growth and/or enhanced resiliency, P14 also expressed: “I’m not ashamed, and I’m not angry that I had to go through the immigrant experience of starting at the bottom, because I climbed up, and I elevated myself through my own bootstraps. So, it’s been very good”.

Role of Social Comparisons and Relative Deprivation on Adjustment Experiences

Although participants were not asked to specifically make comparisons between themselves and others, during discussions about adjustment and career development experiences, some participants inadvertently highlighted the important role that relative comparisons have on adjustment perceptions and experiences. In particular, some of the comments made by participants (P2, P10, P14, & P20) supported the idea that some professional immigrants judge their level of adjustment by comparing oneself with
similar others (e.g., other immigrants). If one determines that they are less fortunate than others (especially similar others) than relative deprivation, the sense that one is being deprived, is more likely to occur (Crosby, 1976). On the other hand, if one deems himself/herself to be adjusting comparatively well, then he/she is more likely to feel satisfied. Supporting this idea, P14 stated: “I am very fortunate, compared to other immigrants, I’m very fortunate. I’m very happy that I have this MBA”. In addition, P2 indicated that social comparisons have shifted her perception regarding her own struggles and difficulties. For example, while discussing her job as a trainer P2 shared:

Well it allowed me to see immigrants from different countries, and their struggles. And how it hasn’t been that difficult for me. But what I really, really have seen, and really, so close, that most people don’t get to see this, I see people from Pakistan, the Middle East, India, China, and I see really how much they struggle, and I’m like ‘whoa’. There’s so many that are amazingly trained, but they’re not working (P2).

Even comparisons with people who are less similar to us can shift our self-perceptions. For instance, P10 revealed that he frequently compares himself to domestic born individuals and suggested that his use of relative comparisons was helping him to cope with his employment difficulties. In particular, P10 described how he is not fully utilizing his skills in his current job as a customer representative at a bank. Talking about the job P10 expressed:

My confidence level was affected a bit in the sense that I can still see myself doing more than what I’m doing right now. I question why, but if you look at yourself individualistically, then you tend to get more frustrated rather than if you see yourself as a component of society. Of course you can do better, you’re supposed to when you retrain, but you also have to realize what’s happening in the times right now. Job availability is less, employability is less because of the recession (P10).

Demonstrating even further how social comparisons shifted his perceptions, P10 said:

I always gauge myself against a fellow Canadian, and I see them also struggling. I thought maybe colour would give them a better opportunity, but, no, some of them have completed university degrees, and they’re not getting jobs... So, that was a
great leveller. Understanding what’s going on in society itself... When you think they are having a cakewalk, not everyone is really having a cakewalk (P10).

Therefore, although P10 is working at a job much below his qualification level, comparing himself to society at large seems to help him more easily accept his situation. In fact, P10 said:

I’m happy to have a job, because I know many people don’t. Though I know I could do better, at the same time, my company right now is in financial turmoil. They’ve downsized terribly. Our particular unit has gone from thirty-five to twenty people, so I feel lucky. But I feel lucky to survive, I don’t feel lucky in the sense that I couldn’t do more, that’s the downside of it. But, like I said, I look at things in balance, so it doesn’t frustrate me so much (P10).

As further testament of the degree to which social comparisons can shape people’s self-perceptions and/or personal adjustment to difficult circumstances, consider the following discussion that took place with former medical doctor P20, who now works in a retail store:

P20: Because you see, like I said, my life is very happy. I know other peoples’ story. We’re very blessed. We don’t have … people die in Somalia every day. They don’t have basics: they don’t have food, they don’t have life. About a week ago I met a woman; she was from Africa. And she said how the fact that she now has enough water to drink makes her happy. The many that live here, they don’t know that.

I: So, you find that helps you- comparing what you have to what others don’t have?

P20: Yeah, not only comparing but knowing that what you have, it’s a very good standing already. Like, whatever you’re doing, it’s still good! You don’t have any reason to be depressed; you don’t have any reason to be angry. You live absolutely happily.

Therefore, using social comparisons as a frame of reference seems to help some people to appreciate what they have and can thereby improve one’s ability to cope more effectively with adverse life events.

Aside from utilizing social comparisons to shift one’s frame of reference, people also often make relative comparisons between one’s own current and past status, career or lifestyle. If one determines that that their current level falls below what they previously
had attained, relative deprivation and/or distress is more likely to occur (Crosby, 1976). Supporting the idea that professional immigrants often make comparisons between their pre and post-immigration lifestyles, several participants spontaneously made comments about how their standard of living changed since coming to Canada. For example, discussing how her family experienced a reduction in their standard of living, P11 expressed:

Not to brag about it, but we had all the comforts back home. We had three helpers; I had three girls with one nanny for each. We didn’t have to cook, all of those menial jobs you have to do when you get home. After work you’d just have to eat. Here, after work you have to cook, fix things, when you’re going to bed after three hours and you have to clean everything up (P11).

In addition, comparing his retail job in Canada to his previous job as a medical doctor P15 said: “in China, I was taking more responsibilities, and its good job, right? It’s like medical field and teachers, so that give you social status. But this job is kind of lower entry job”.

Although professional immigrants often make comparisons about their pre and post-immigration career and/or lifestyle attainments, predicting the development of relative deprivation amongst immigrants appears not to be straight forward. In particular, relative comparisons and their impact on experienced relative deprivation seem to be complicated by the fact that not all needs are created equally. For instance, although most participants reported that they experienced a relative decline in their career and/or lifestyle status, most participants (except P5, P15, & P19) did not express feeling significantly deprived and/or dissatisfied with their decision to immigrate to Canada. In fact, a number of participants (P4, P10, P12, P16 & P20) seemed to suggest that an
improvement in fundamental needs, such as safety, leads to greater acceptance of a relative decline in high-order needs such as career status. Touching on this idea, P16 said:

It [difficulty coping with unemployment] comes from the fact that the country of origin… you’re coming from a country which is in a period of growth, you’re used to seeing getting jobs, you’re used to seeing people getting up and doing something. But, rather, if you’re coming from a country, for example, where there is unrest, and you’re not working, maybe you’ll be able to accept it more calmly, you won’t be as stressed out (P16).

Supporting P16’s assertion that unemployment may be less stressful if accompanied by a concurrent improvement in other needs, P4 shared:

Are we talking about level? You remember that there, I was a professional chartered accountant, giving advices to any kind of company. Here, I was part of a company, participating, so it was different things. I didn’t mind. Like I said before, I came with one purpose: family purpose. And this is fine with me (P4).

Further supporting the idea that relative fulfillment of fundamental needs makes it easier to accept and/or adjust to relative deprivation of career needs, P12 reflected:

If I compare both, both have advantages and disadvantages. If I were working back home, I had health care, maybe good salary, certain stability, but I didn’t have safety, and that’s really important. Whereas in Canada, I don’t have a stable job or stable income, but we have safety. It’s very important for my kids especially (P12).

Echoing this sentiment, P10 concluded:

I would never return back to India. Like, I mean, though my income is less, I’d still try to make it over here because the benefits and the society outweigh the fears. There are certain standards here, human rights, etc, which you have which are positive… They make it worth the fight. You don’t realize what you have until you compare it to some other place (P10).

Suggestions: Laying a Clearer Path for Future Professional Immigrants

Part of the purpose of the current study was to uncover information that could be utilized to help inform public policy and/or assist immigrants with their adjustment and career transitions. Participants were therefore asked to discuss the main lessons they learned and/or comment on any suggestions that they had to assist immigrants in the future. Overall,
participants’ main comments and suggestions can be broken down into: 1) provide more honest information about Canada prior to immigration, 2) make information more centralized and accessible in Canada, and 3) make it easier for professional immigrants to bridge their career in Canada.

As was discussed in the above section ‘Pre-immigration Expectations of Canadian Career Development’, many professional immigrants arrive in Canada with the expectation that they will be able to continue working in their previous profession. Further supporting this idea, and highlighting the importance of immigrants receiving more realistic information prior to immigration, P12 said:

Many of us come to Canada… I don’t know if that is American dream, but with a mind that since at home I’m an engineer, in Canada I can be an engineer. Oh, my God; that’s a wall, and people crash. I’ve seen many doctors and engineers driving taxis, working in factories. That’s the system. That’s how it works (P12).

Not surprising then, a number of participants made suggestions related to the idea that immigrants ought to be given more realistic information from the Canadian government or elsewhere prior to finalizing their decision to immigrate. For example P7 said: “I have some suggestions for the newcomer, if people plan to come to Canada, they should do more work before they come to Canada. They should know more about Canada as much as possible”. In addition, P9 suggested: “establish more programs, special for the international professionals. Before people come here, they need advice, they need counselling, I think that’s important”. Echoing this idea, P4 stated:

Probably the best suggestion could be to have an on-site understanding, so in their own country understanding of the things – some kind of courses or whatever – that they can understand what they are going to go through. Learn a little more about what to expect and come prepared for that (P4).
At least one participant (P19) suggested that the lack of information is dishonest on the part of the Canadian government. Expressing his concerns P19 argued:

There’s a lot of lies floating around from the government. The Prime Minister himself went to India and said ‘we need doctors’. We are inviting doctors, and we have opened up immigration to doctors to work three years on menial jobs. Why you call them in India? Because our doctors are trained to do mental jobs, not physical jobs. So anything that doesn’t use mental capacities is a menial job. I’m not degrading any job, but that’s how it is. None of my qualifications or strengths are being used. I’m just being used as a labourer. I think that was perhaps at the back of the immigration guys’ mind, they just want labour. And they should say so very openly rather than call qualified people in, then make them work as labour (P19).

Aside from making realistic information more readily available to potential immigrants, some participants also suggested that there needs to be a more centralized method for disseminating information to newly arrived immigrants. Pointing out the issue with information flow, P1 said: “even though there are so many things out there to help immigrants, a lot of people don’t know about them, or they just don’t look for them”.

Talking at more length about the issue P10 expressed:

The flow of information needs to be made available across government agencies to new immigrants who are not that well versed in their new immigrant skills. There is a gap between the knowledge which is available, and those who need it. It needs to be abridged. Things which Canadians take for granted are sometimes unknown to immigrants. The paucity of knowledge, the lack of knowledge is awful at times. When you really go out on the street and you speak to some new immigrants, to some people who have come recently into this country, they don’t know what’s available over here, they don’t even know how to get about (P10).

Sharing how a lack of knowledge affected her after she first arrived in Canada, P18 said:

I’ll give you an example- food banks… sometimes we go without food because we didn’t know that you can go to a food bank as many times as you can and get food for free… I remember sleeping on the floor for a week, not knowing that you could go to a certain organization, they would give you mattresses or a bed or furniture. So, I think those are some of the gaps that are there. Yes, the resources are there, but it’s just that the way they are being made available to people… we are suffering when we shouldn’t be. It’s not that we don’t know; it’s just that we need to be directed properly. So, I think that’s what’s lacking (P18).
P12 attributed part of the problem with information sharing to a lack of coordination between services and organizations:

It’s complicated because here, the institutions work separately. Immigration looks like it works separately from the Ministry of Education, and other governmental entities. If they had a common goal, they would say ‘let’s try to help these people’. They should co-ordinate better (P12).

P11 and P16 seemed to agree about the need to coordinate information more effectively. For instance, talking about how a lack of information about financial supports can prevent some immigrants from seeking retraining, P11 said: “The government lacks the information to the people, to those who want to retrain, that there are financial supports that can be provided”. Similarly, P16 said: “There has to be something more to it, at the academic level too, of close coordination between these regulatory bodies and the academic institutions, so it would kind of help the whole process”.

Another important issue raised by some participants pertains to the difficulties inherent to starting over in one’s career after arriving in Canada. Several participants suggested that it is imperative that Canada make it easier for professional immigrants to bridge their career. For instance, upset by this issue P8 stated:

I had a degree, and I had fifteen years of experience. It’s ridiculous you come here and you go back to school for a credit in finance or accounting, to start from scratch. When they evaluate the credits, it should be more flexible... When you come here, there should be more opportunities like internship programs and co-op programs, to help you go and get that work experience instead of going back to school and starting over (P8).

Similarly P12 also raised the issue of bridging when he said:

The system must change, or the system must give the opportunity to newcomers to perform their professions. I know many doctors who are trained back home, in Colombia, in Iran, in Afghanistan. And they are better trained than doctors here. Maybe they don’t have the technology, but that’s easy to catch up. Why are they better trained? You know how many people are shot or stabbed on the streets of
Bogota? Many. Many medical students go to those hospitals to do their internship, and they learn many, many things. The system should allow them to perform, or it should facilitate the testing (P12).

Former medical doctor P19 experienced the problem first hand and also shared several comments on the issue. Criticizing Canada’s non-acceptance of foreign-trained doctors P19 said:

Medicine-wise, definitely some of the best medical brains are in Canada; there’s no doubt about it. But to say that the rest of the medical brains are zilch shows the inward-looking attitude of Canadians, which is sad. Training is important; But the attitude that ‘Well, we know best’… that attitude is what is failing Canada, and that is what is preventing Canada from reaching its full potential. This is a country with TREMENDOUS potential. I don’t think any country in the world will have this much potential. WASTED potential, if you please (P19).

To help facilitate the entry of foreign medical doctors into Canada’s healthcare system P19 suggested:

Once they have cleared their first exam, they should be employed in their field of specialty and allowed to work as junior doctors – or whatever term they want to give it – and asked to complete the exam in a period of about three years, which is the normal period any intelligent man would take. And if they don’t clear in three years, then it is for them to leave. But for heaven’s sake: let no doctor work as security guards or labour. I had a Russian doctor work as janitor in my building. So, this is blasphemous, to my way of thinking (P19).

Former medical P15 also seemed to share these sentiments and said: “my field, we have longer period of training than medical field here... So I think these policies are not good for the immigrants, not good for the Canadians, not good for the people here”.
CHAPTER 10
DISCUSSION

The overall findings of the current study will now be summarized briefly and then discussed within the context of the existing literature pertaining to the career development and adjustment of professional immigrants. The main areas of discussion are as follows: 1) Pre-immigration experiences and expectations, 2) Post-immigration work and adjustment experiences, 3) Canadian educational retraining pursuits & outcomes, and 4) Factors that facilitate/hinder the career development of professional immigrants. The implications of these findings in terms of career resiliency theory will then be discussed before moving on to the implications for policy and practice. Next, the limitations of the current study will be detailed and finally suggestions for future research will be made.

Summary of Main Findings

Pre-immigration Career Experiences and Expectations

In exploring professional immigrants’ pre-immigration career experiences and expectations, this study found that most professional immigrants (all except one participant in this study) tend to have fairly desirable and/or rewarding careers before immigrating to Canada. Not surprisingly then, only six participants chose to immigrate to Canada because of career-related reasons. Most participants based their decision to immigrate on a desire to have a higher standard of living and/or greater career/educational opportunities. Four participants specifically based their decision on wanting to provide better opportunities for their children. A few participants also wanted to immigrate to Canada because of a desire to live in either a safer or more just place or
to be closer to family members.

As Zuberi and Ptashnick (2011) pointed out, although macro-level influences (e.g., population growth) on immigration trends are often discussed in the literature, micro-level factors related to individual immigration decisions have received relatively little attention. The current study specifically examined micro-level influences on professional immigrants’ decision to immigrate by asking participants to discuss the personal reason(s) they chose to immigrate to Canada. Similar to findings from Zuberi and Ptashnick (2011), most participants in the current study immigrated for reasons related to the fact that they noticed an apparent inequality in the standard of living between their native country and Canada. In particular, most of the professional immigrants in the study chose to immigrate because they expected that Canada would provide a higher standard of living for themselves and/or their children. In addition, participants’ decisions were also based on factors related to their social relationships. For instance, several participants chose to immigrate to Canada in order to be closer to family members.

The pre-immigration career development expectations of participants were examined in this study because expectations have been shown to affect later adjustment outcomes (Yost & Lucas, 2002). In particular, a mismatch between one’s expectations for employment and actual employment outcomes may heighten experienced distress. In the current study it was found that before arriving in Canada, most professional immigrants are fairly confident that they will be able to continue in their professional field once in Canada. In fact, many professional immigrants expect that they will be able to continue working in a very similar role with little or no retraining needed. Very few professional immigrants expect that they will have to start over in their career and/or expect that they
will experience significant difficulty finding at least some employment related to their field. In support of this idea, most of the participants in this study did not expect that they would be required to complete full educational retraining in order to continue their previous career in Canada.

*Post-immigration Initial Work and Adjustment Experiences*

Unfortunately, despite initially feeling optimistic about their Canadian career development, most of the professional immigrants in the current study reported that they faced significant unforeseen career barriers and adjustment challenges since arriving in Canada. As discussed previously in the literature, immigrants often face unique and difficult challenges such as language barriers, employment difficulties, discrimination, social isolation and acculturation stress (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Fouad et al., 2008; Gomez et al., 2001; McWherter et al., 1998; Picot & Sweetman, 2005; Schellenberg & Slowey, 2007; Shinnar, 2007; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2005; Utsey et al., 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008). Indeed in the current study, professional immigrants were found to face challenges related to adjusting to a new climate, locating desirable housing, financial strain, a reduced standard of living, relational difficulties, prejudice/discrimination, culture shock, acculturation stress, language barriers, transportation problems and employment difficulties. For instance, although most professional immigrants come to Canada in order to have a better standard of living, some professional immigrants actually experienced a reduction in their standard of living upon arriving in Canada. This may not be surprising considering that nearly all of the participants in this study reported that they experienced significant difficulty, at least initially, finding and/or maintaining adequate employment. In particular, despite being
university educated professionals, more than a quarter of the participants were unable to locate any employment for at least six months after their arrival and nearly half the participants experienced multiple instances of being unemployed due to being laid off and/or fired. Many participants also shared personally humiliating accounts of how they felt compelled to work in survival type jobs and/or accept unfair treatment in order to provide for themselves and/or their family. This finding is consistent with past research which found that many immigrants identified employment problems as a main issue with immigrating to Canada (Schellenberg & Slowey, 2007). The employment issues confirmed in the current study are concerning because nearly all participants reported that finding work in Canada was very important due to financial concerns and/or the need to support a family. This may suggest that employment issues are particularly pronounced for professional immigrants despite their relatively higher level of education.

The qualitative design of the current study allowed the researcher not only to identify key challenges, but also to explore how professional immigrants are affected by those challenges and how they cope. Challenges such as unemployment, long work hours and acculturation stress can have a significantly negative impact on the well-being of immigrants (Catalano et al., 2000; Mascaro et al., 2007). Indeed within the current study encountered challenges were found to impact on professional immigrants’ well-being by reducing their self-esteem, lowering their mood, affecting their physical health and energy level, disrupting their social relationships and inducing a high level of stress. Encountered stress (particularly job-related stress) even led some participants to seriously question their decision to immigrate to Canada.

In exploring how professional immigrants cope with the negative consequences of
encountered challenges, participants suggested that they rely on social support as their primary way to cope with the difficulties they encounter. In particular, participants relied on family members for emotional and/or financial support, and on friends, peers (e.g., other immigrants) and professional resources for emotional support and/or advice. Some participants also mentioned that engaging in spiritual activities and/or having a positive attitude and/or being flexible helped them to cope. Only one or two participants mentioned utilizing professional counsellors or doctors as a coping resource. In addition, very few participants identified leisure activities as a coping strategy, perhaps because of a lack of time, money and/or knowledge of recreational opportunities.

*Canadian Educational Retraining Pursuits & Outcomes*

Aside from the individual coping strategies identified above, to help cope with employment difficulties many professional immigrants make a decision to pursue educational retraining (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Krau, 1981; Remennick & Shakhar, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2006). Retraining can be thought of as a task-oriented type of coping, where the individual copes with encountered career barriers by purposefully trying to solve the problem of foreign degree non-recognition by taking purposeful action to improve one’s credentials (Krok, 2008). To better understand the use of retraining as a coping and/or career enhancement strategy amongst professional immigrants, and since very limited research has specifically focused on this topic, the current study asked participants to discuss their retraining decisions, experiences, perceptions and outcomes.

In elucidating the reasons why professional immigrants choose to pursue retraining after they arrive in Canada, most participants reported that they completed retraining in order to establish a more desirable career in Canada. In particular, most participants
found themselves either working in survival jobs or facing unemployment due to non-recognition of their foreign degree and/or work experience and as a result many saw retraining as the only way to overcome career stagnation and/or financial hardship. Only two participants out of twenty pursued retraining solely because they simply desired new knowledge and skills.

In discussing their specific retraining decisions, most participants suggested that they choose retraining options that were somehow related to their previous profession and were reasonably affordable and/or accessible within a relatively short time frame. More specifically, only three participants chose to retrain in an entirely new field, while four other participants chose to retrain in an area that was only partially related to their previous field. All other participants chose retraining that was closely related to their previous field, even if they could not receive formal recognition for their past education and/or experience. The extent to which such decisions were influenced by personal desire versus practical considerations is unclear. However, the fact that most participants chose retraining that was somehow related to their previous field suggests that personal interests and/or personal familiarity tend to influence retraining decisions.

Aside from individual preferences, contextual barriers such as financial constraints, time limitations, age, gender and relational influences were also shown to affect retraining decisions. In particular, some participants mentioned pursuing retraining that familiar others had taken or suggested. In addition, participants appeared to choose retraining options that were relatively affordable and/or short in duration. Although all of the participants in the study obtained a university degree in their home country, no participants chose to complete a university degree as their first Canadian retraining
experience. Interestingly, a quarter of the participants only later chose to complete a university degree after finding out that their initial retraining would not advance their Canadian career as much as they had hoped. Overall, most professional immigrants appear to be somewhat discouraged or hesitant to pursue a university education because of issues such as financial constraints, older age, lengthy or complicated application procedures and life-work-family balance dilemmas. This means that without foreign degree recognition, many professional immigrants are unlikely to attain a career that is equivalent to their pre-Canadian career status.

In line with past research that investigated the employment outcomes of professional immigrants (e.g., Adamuti-Trache, 2011; Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Frenette & Morissette, 2003), even after several years in Canada and despite completing educational retraining, many of the professional immigrants in this study were not yet able to establish a career that is comparable to their pre-Canadian career status. In fact, four participants were currently unemployed, while approximately nine others indicated that they were under-employed due to either working part-time or working in a role that they felt over-qualified for. In contrast, seven participants suggested that they were working full-time in a role that utilized most of their skills and was more or less comparable to their pre-immigration career status. Not surprisingly, participants who felt that their skills were being more or less fully utilized tended to endorse a higher level of Canadian career satisfaction and career identity. Participants who were either unemployed or under-employed, and who viewed their Canadian career development as comparatively worse than their pre-immigration career status, reported less career identity and were more likely to report feeling distressed about their career.
Despite the fact that retraining did not lead to desirable outcomes for many participants, most participants expressed fairly positive and/or neutral sentiments about their retraining experience. In particular, most participants indicated that the retraining was either helpful or would be helpful for advancing their career, even if the retraining had not yet led to lasting or highly desirable employment. Many also enjoyed their retraining experience because they saw it as a learning opportunity, found it practical and/or enjoyed meeting new peers and teachers. Most of these same participants reported that they either planned to or were contemplating taking additional retraining in the future. Only three participants expressed wholly negative feelings about their retraining experience due to finding the training unhelpful, expensive and/or time-consuming.

Although most participants expressed relatively positive sentiments about their retraining experience, it is important to point out that a large number of participants were initially resentful about having to complete retraining due to feeling undervalued for not having their foreign education and experience recognized. Many of these same participants indicated that their feelings of resentment subsided post-retraining because they realized or accepted that the retraining was necessary to help them develop a desired career in Canada. However, most participants did not agree that the retraining was necessary in order to render them competent to continue in their field here in Canada. Despite such sentiments, overwhelmingly most participants suggested that their retraining experience was useful because it helped to increase their self-confidence, their sense of career identity and/or their motivation to pursue a career in Canada. Retraining also taught participants important skills and/or lessons such as increased self-efficacy, how to tolerate uncertainty, work/life balance and the importance of perseverance.
Factors that Facilitate/Hinder the Career Development of Professional Immigrants

As mentioned above, many participants perceived retraining to be helpful to them in terms of developing their career and/or increasing their chances of securing desirable employment. In fact, when participants were asked to identify the factors that were most helpful to them for enhancing their career in Canada, retraining was one of the most commonly offered responses. Not surprisingly, participants who completed a full diploma or degree at a college or university, rather than a professional institute and/or only a few courses seemed more likely to report that retraining led to desired employment. In discussing the factors that seemed to facilitate their career development, participants also identified factors such as having social support and connections, a positive attitude, transferable skills, English language skills, being flexible and optimistic and remaining persistent in actively seeking out work opportunities and retraining options as helpful for establishing a career in Canada.

On the other hand, factors such as language barriers, low self-confidence, a lack of familiarity with domestic norms, practices and knowledge and a lack of Canadian education and experience, financial constraints, older age, prejudice and/or discrimination, a lack of social connections, high competition, economic recessions and difficulty with work-life balance were reported to negatively affect participants’ career development. The fact that there are many different factors which serve to either facilitate or hinder professional immigrants’ career development has important implications for theory, policy and practice, which will now be discussed in greater detail below.
Implications for Theory

Although most of the professional immigrants in the current study struggled to some extent at least initially to adjust and re-establish a career in Canada, participants seemed to differ greatly in the extent to which they demonstrated career resiliency and/or the ability to cope with challenges and/or successfully establish a satisfying career in Canada. Contrast for example P14 who stated: “Which other country allows you to come in as a skilled worker, and gives you that sense of dignity that you can start all over again?” with P19 who concluded: “I would not come to Canada. Never. And I’ve discouraged quite a few people from coming to Canada, doctors especially. My colleagues, my friends. I told them- Go to anywhere. Go to hell, but don’t come here”.

The personal perceptions and shared experiences of participants help to demonstrate how career development and resiliency are uniquely shaped and manifested in each individual. Consistent with the findings in the current study, past research has suggested that there are many different factors that influence the career development outcomes of immigrants (Gomez et al., 2001; Koert, Borgen & Amundson, 2011). In particular, a range of both individual, relational, contextual and socio-political factors need to be taken into account in order to accurately understand how career resiliency is shaped and/or developed in professional immigrants. Past models such as the Career Life-Path Model (Gomez et al., 2001) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000) acknowledged the complexity of career development by including both internal and external components of career development. However, neither model accounted for the important influence of other factors such as relative context on career development, nor did they emphasize the interrelatedness of different components/dimensions. In addition,
a model specific to the career development and resiliency of professional immigrants was needed.

*A New Theoretical Model of Career Resiliency in Professional Immigrants*

Understanding the career development of professional immigrants is a complex process that requires consideration of many factors, situated both internally within each individual as well as externally. Through asking detailed questions and examining the answers and comments offered by participants, the current study was able to identify and better-understand some of the factors that appear to influence the ability of professional immigrants to cope with career related challenges. These factors led to the emergent model, the Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency (see Figure 1 on next page). This model suggests that certain variables located within various dimensions, both within the person and outside the person, make it either more or less likely that a professional immigrant will demonstrate career resiliency, or the ability to cope with challenges to one’s career after immigrating to Canada. The dimensions are inter-related and involve everything that encompasses an individual (including personal characteristics, social location and external contextual factors), and thus influences the person. At a glance these dimensions include: a) Individual/Personal, b) Immediate Context, c) Relational Context, d) Cultural Context, and e) Relative Context.

*Individual/Personal*

At the centre of the model, depicted as an inter-connected circle, lies the Individual/Personal dimension of career resiliency. This dimension includes factors such as individual characteristics and demographics (e.g., personal preferences/aspirations, expectations, motivations, identity, values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, age, gender,
FIGURE 1: The Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency

- **Immediate Context**: e.g., barriers, opportunities
- **Relational Context**: e.g., social support, family responsibilities
- **Individual/Personal**: e.g., coping responses, individual characteristics, social location, skills, choices, actions, health
- **Cultural Context**: e.g., values, norms, gender roles
- **Relative Context**: e.g., perceived relative improvement in needs, perceived relative decline in needs
health etc.) as well as individual coping responses, choices and actions (e.g., pursuing retraining). The lines in the model between the Individual/Personal dimension and the remaining contextual dimensions depict how the impact or meaning of individual factors (e.g., gender, age) are largely shaped by surrounding contextual factors such as culture, family values and discrimination. Thus although individual factors manifest within a person, many ‘individual’ factors are anchored to one’s social location and cannot be neatly dissociated from their surrounding context. For instance, individuals belonging to a marginalized social location are more likely to encounter increased barriers such as discrimination and this in turn may alter the relevancy of immediate contextual factors and vice versa (Tenorio & Lo, 2011).

Previously recognized as a core component to career development (e.g., Clausen, 1991; Gomez et al., 2001), the Individual/Personal dimension lies at the core of the Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency because individual variables are largely shaped by one’s surrounding context and ultimately mediate individual coping responses and actions. Together individual variables (e.g., gender, aspirations, values) and outer contextual variables (e.g., barriers, opportunities, relational influences etc.) interact to determine people’s subjective perceptions and chosen actions. Individual perceptions and actions are core components of career resiliency because perceptions and actions largely determine coping responses and career outcomes (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000).

Supporting the idea that individual variables represent a core component of career resiliency, in the current study most participants chose a career path in Canada that somehow corresponded to their previous knowledge, skills and interests. Therefore,
individual preferences and aspirations do appear to largely shape professional immigrants’ career decisions and actions, even in the face of contextual barriers. Individual motivations are also important to consider.

Although Gomez et al. (2001) found that many Latino immigrants are motivated by a goal to ‘survive’ rather than ‘excel’, the professional immigrants in the current study appeared to be influenced by competing pressures to both ‘survive’ and ‘excel’. In particular, nearly all participants described taking survival jobs while pursuing retraining that would ultimately help them to excel. In some cases participants followed their desire to excel, even if that meant it was more difficult to survive. For example, P16 took a lower-paying job related to architecture (compared to his survival job at a telemarketing firm) just so he could work on re-entering his desired profession. However, for some participants the motivation to survive overruled motivations to excel because many participants chose not to pursue a desired university education due to the need to earn money and/or support a family. This was especially the case for female participants who more often spoke about needing to prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations. This suggests that individual motivations are influenced not just by individual aspirations, but also by social location, contextual barriers, relationships and family values. This is an example of how individual, relational and other contextual variables are intertwined.

Aside from individual interests and motivations, specific career-related choices were also shaped by other individual factors such as whether a person felt confident enough to pursue their desired career and/or whether they expected to succeed or not. In line with past research (e.g., Arboni & Novi, 1991; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Fouad &
Byers-Winston, 2005; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995), this study found support for the idea that
immigrants often have a discrepancy between their career aspirations and their
expectations. Take for example former physician P19 who had very strong aspirations to
continue working as a medical doctor, yet who decided not to pursue his medical degree
in Canada because he expected that he was “too old” to successfully secure a residency.

Aside from highlighting the aspiration/expectation discrepancy, this example also
highlights how individual variables are influenced by other factors related to one’s
immediate context. For example, aside from personal aspirations, motivations and
expectations, retraining decisions were also often influenced by factors such as financial
constraints, age, gender, and family obligations. In particular, many participants chose
shorter or more cost effective retraining options rather than a university degree. In turn,
choosing such options may have negatively affected the chances of re-entering one’s
profession since a quarter of participants (P5, P7, P14, P18, & P20) later chose to
upgrade their Canadian education further after finding out that their initial Canadian
training did not enhance their career as much as expected.

Another finding was that individual factors such as age may have differing impacts
depending on personal perceptions or experiences. Several participants (P3, P4, P13 &
P19) over the age of fifty discussed how their age deterred them from pursuing additional
retraining, while at least one participant (P12) over age fifty did not seem discouraged to
pursue future retraining. This suggests that the impact of individual factors, such as age,
on career development cannot be considered in isolation, but must be placed within the
context of individual perceptions and/or experiences. Social Cognitive Career Theory
also recognized this distinction by stating that career development is shaped by an
interaction of cognitive (e.g., perceptions), person (e.g., age) and contextual (e.g., relationships & barriers) variables (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000).

In addition to affecting specific career-related decisions, individual characteristics also appear to influence career resiliency by impacting upon how individuals cope with career problems. For example, spirituality is an individual characteristic that is thought to shape coping responses. Spirituality, which can be thought of as both observable spiritually motivated behaviours (e.g., praying) and spiritually motivated thinking (e.g., searching for purpose or meaning), affects people’s ability to cope through means such as altering one’s perception of encountered stressors and/or by empowering the individual to persevere (Krok, 2008). In the current study several participants mentioned how their spirituality helped them to persevere during stressful job search and retraining experiences. This suggests that for some professional immigrants, individual beliefs play an important role in strengthening career resiliency.

Personal beliefs related to one-self and/or the world in general were also shown to influence career resiliency. In particular, many participants suggested that having a positive attitude is crucial to overcoming adjustment and/or career-related challenges. Some participants (e.g., P5, P13, P16 & P17) who believed in their own abilities to succeed suggested that their self-confidence or optimism helped to increase their determination to complete their retraining and find desirable work. In contrast, some participants (e.g., P3, P9 & P18) suggested that a lack of self-confidence may have made it more difficult to cope with stressful adjustment, employment and/or retraining experiences.
Immediate Context

The second dimension within the Relative Encompassment Model is Immediate Context. One’s immediate context is comprised of the barriers and opportunities that one encounters. This could include both micro-level factors such as individual discrimination, as well as macro-level factors such as economic recessions and/or increased labour competition. Past research has documented how one’s immediate context can have a strong influence on one’s career development by shaping career choices and altering available opportunities and encountered challenges (Heilbrunn, Kirshnirovich, & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010; Lent, Brown & Hacket, 2000; Swanson & Woitke, 1997). Although some studies (e.g., Bhaghat & London 1999; Blustein, 2000; Bohon, 2000; Gomez et al., 2001, Lopes, 2006; Shinnar, 2007) have identified the barriers that uniquely affect the career development of immigrants in general, few studies have specifically examined the unique challenges encountered by professional immigrants in Canada. Therefore, the current study sought to better understand the immediate context encountered by professional immigrants as they attempt to re-establish a career in Southern Ontario.

Participants revealed that in addition to the challenges faced by most immigrants, such as language barriers, prejudice/discrimination, acculturation stress, social isolation, and financial constraints, professional immigrants also face additional challenges such as non-recognition of foreign higher education and an experienced downgrade in their standard of living. These barriers affect career development by making it difficult for professional immigrants to locate Canadian work that is related to their desired profession. In fact, most professional immigrants in Ontario appear to experience unemployment and/or feel compelled to work in survival jobs that are below their level of
Challenges within one’s immediate context, such as financial constraints, unemployment difficulties and/or high costs for retraining, affect career resiliency by limiting opportunities and influencing career decisions. Variables within one’s immediate context also interact with individual and relational variables, such as age and family commitments, again suggesting that contextual and individual dimensions are interrelated. For example, encountered employment barriers, financial constraints, family commitments, age and expectations may interact and lead an individual to pursue retraining that is relatively affordable and short in duration rather than retraining that will lead to a career that is desired and/or similar to one’s foreign career attainment. This is in line with what Clausen (1991) predicted when he stated that the impact of individual determinants of career development (e.g., preferences, abilities) will diminish in the face of contextual barriers. Interestingly, the impact of contextual barriers may be lessened by having social support and this idea will now be discussed below.

**Relational Context**

The impact of Relational Context encompasses the third dimension of the Relative Encompassment Model. Since previous research (e.g., Bhagat & London, 1999; Blustein, 2001; Kiuru et al., 2008; Lent et al., 2000; Palladino-Schultheiss et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997; Whiston & Keller, 2004) has begun to uncover the significant impact that relational influences have on general career development, the current study sought to understand how relational influences shape the career resiliency of professional immigrants in particular. Overall, relationships helped to shape the career paths of participants by influencing immigration decisions, career expectations, and retraining
choices. Social connections were also often cited as a factor that influenced employment success by providing job opportunities, while a lack of social connections were identified as a significant barrier to career resiliency.

Relationships also played a role in facilitating coping responses during encountered adjustment, career and educational stress. Blustien (2001) postulated that relationships can influence career resiliency by providing individuals with both emotional and instrumental support. Indeed within the current study, participants suggested that family members (particularly partners) and peers had a significant impact on career resiliency by assisting individuals to cope with stress, make career-related decisions and in some cases by financially facilitating the pursuit of retraining.

Paradoxically, relationships were also noted to have a negative impact on career resiliency, particularly for several female participants. More specifically, some participants reported that they were reluctant to pursue desired retraining and/or job opportunities due to the pressure they faced in trying to balance their career and family life. One female participant reported turning down a managerial role due to her family obligations and several others indicated that they would like to pursue a higher education (e.g., Masters Degree) in Canada, however, they felt that doing so would not be feasible due to the time it would take away from their family and/or the difficulty of financially supporting a family. Similarly, a previous study by Shinnar (2007) found that many Latino immigrant women avoid supervisory roles because of the central commitment that they have towards taking care of their family. This study suggests that professional immigrants from a variety of cultural backgrounds (e.g., Filipino, Israeli, and Chinese) face similar challenges which impact upon their career development.
Cultural Context

The impact of family commitments on career development is closely related to cultural norms, gender-roles and values (Gomez et al., 2001; Shinnar, 2007). In particular, cultural practices and personal values such as “familialism”, or prioritizing family commitments over career aspirations, are shaped through relational ties within one’s family or community of origin, which are then internalized by individuals (Shinnar, 2007, p.361). This is another example of how relational, cultural and individual variables are closely intertwined. Values, gender-roles and/or cultural norms are thought to influence career development by exerting a direct impact on career choices and/or interests (DelCampo et al., 2011; Lopes, 2006; Sinnar, 2007; Stebleton, 2007). As a result, Cultural Context makes up the third dimension of the Relative Encompassment Model.

In the current study, the influence of gender-roles and/or values on the adjustment of professional immigrants was highlighted through the shared experiences of the three former medical doctors (one female P20, two males P15 & P19). In particular, although all three doctors were unable to re-enter their professional field, only the male doctors expressed significant distress and suggested that they regret their choice to immigrate to Canada. Although the sample size is too small to draw strong conclusions, the findings from this study are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Ponizovsky, et al., 1996; Remennick & Shakhar, 2003; Remennick 2005) which found that male immigrants tend to report greater adjustment difficulties than females when they are unable to re-enter their previous profession. Ponizovsky et al. (1996) postulated that this is because males
feel more responsible for financial supporting their family, while Remennick and Shakhar (2003) suggested that males experience a more negative impact on their self-esteem due to a stronger identification with their career. Remennick (2005) further postulated that in contrast to men, women are more likely to be flexible in quickly adjusting their career ambitions and are more likely to seek out social support to help cope with difficulties.

In the current study P19 appeared to support Remennick and Shakhar (2003)’s assertion that men tend to identify more strongly with their career with the comment: “If you want to destroy a man, destroy his livelihood. That’ll be the end of him”. However, overall the idea that men develop a stronger identification with their career than females was not supported because both the female and male participants talked similarly about having a strong pre-immigration career identity. At the same time, it seems likely that individuals who identify more strongly with their career will experience more distress when they are no longer able to continue their career and thus career identification is likely one factor that affects immigrants’ adjustment. In support of this, the two participants who appeared to identify most strongly with their career (P5 who said: “I was born a teacher” and P19 who said: “I was a five-year-old when I decided I have to be a doctor”) were amongst the professional immigrants who appeared to be the most distressed over their inability to re-enter their career in Canada.

Ponizovsky et al. (1996)’s assertion that men experience greater adjustment difficulties because they are more likely to feel responsible for financially providing for their family was supported by P19. In particular, while discussing his inability to continue working as a doctor, P19 made comments such as: “I give most of the credit to my wife because she had the family together, which was a devastating experience” and
“until today, she’s supporting me in this country, which is very, very bad for my ego”, and “the immediate concern is food on the table. How long can I have my wife’s slender shoulders bearing the brunt of it”. These comments suggest that when contextual barriers hinder the realization of personal values or sense of identity (e.g., supporting one’s family, being a doctor), individuals may experience greater adjustment difficulties, which may further threaten career resiliency.

Based on the current study it is difficult to say whether or not females were indeed more willing to adjust their career ambitions in the face of career barriers because both males and females in this study were observed to commit to a career change and/or remain unwilling to initiate a career change. Overall it does seem that professional immigrants who are unwilling to commit to a career change (e.g., P3, P4, P5, & P19) may be more likely to experience ongoing unemployment and career-related distress. Interestingly, female participants P11 and P13 both mentioned that their husband had greater difficulty adjusting to career-related challenges, while none of the male participants mentioned that their wife experienced greater difficulty than them.

Aside from the suggestions discussed above, in trying to understand the gender differences suggested in the current study it is also important to consider the possibility that men may be more willing to openly discuss their career adjustment difficulties. In contrast, women may be less likely to report career-related distress and thus only appear to be less distressed over being unable to re-enter their career. In other words, because of factors such as gender role socialization, women are more accustomed to sacrificing their career aspirations and may be more likely to be self-silenced as a result. Although both men and women are known to self-silence for different reasons, gender roles, including
the expectation that women prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations, often encourage the use of self-silencing in women to the extent that “their desired outer self masks their true inner self” (Swim, Eyssell, Murdoch & Ferguson, 2010).

Relative Context

The seemingly greater difficulty experienced by males who undergo a career downgrade after immigrating to a new country may also be partially explained by the possibility that males are likely to compare themselves to other males while females are more likely to compare themselves to other females. In fact, individuals tend to compare themselves to similar others and the act of comparing oneself to others shapes a person’s frame of reference (Stutzer, 2004). This can have critical implications for males who often have a higher career status than women, and are less likely to have previously put their career as secondary to family role obligations (Feber, Elke & Matiaske, 2006). In particular, males who compare themselves to other males may form higher expectations based on seeing other men attain a relatively high status. In addition, men may be less likely to have previously experienced a compromise to their career by stepping back from work to stay at home with children. As a result, an experienced downgrade in one’s career status may be especially salient to males.

In support of this idea, some of the males in the current study made comments involving a comparison between their pre-Canadian career status and their current career status which suggested that the comparison had a negative impact on them. In particular, former doctors P15 and P19 both discussed how they used to enjoy a high career status, while currently they feel undervalued as a result of either being unemployed or working in a survival job. More specifically, P19 said: “the only compromise that I made in
Canada is my status. That loss of status, that loss of stature that I had back home”. Also noticing a change in career status, P4 discussed how he used to feel admired for his work position and now feels “the opposite”.

A reduction in one’s career status is not just difficult for males. Career downgrades appear to be quite difficult for professional immigrants in general. Based on the findings from this study, most professional immigrants are very satisfied with their career prior to immigrating to Canada. In contrast, after arriving in Canada most professional immigrants experience significant employment difficulties such as finding themselves unemployed or working in survival jobs that leave them feeling devalued and distressed because of financial strain. The tendency to make comparisons and/or notice a drastic change in career status and/or lifestyle may lead to feelings of relative deprivation, or the perception that one is being unjustly deprived of something desired (Crosby, 1976). In the current study, several participants (e.g., P3, P4, P5, P11, P15, & P19) suggested that they had experienced feelings of relative deprivation, as indicated through comments related feeling distressed over noticing a drastic change in their career status and/or lifestyle.

The fact that professional immigrants may experience feelings of relative deprivation is concerning because such feelings may lead some individuals to give up on their career aspirations. In support of this idea, many of the participants (e.g., P3, P4, P15 & P19) who most described experiencing relative deprivation appeared to be more likely to report that they would not pursue future retraining of any kind. Therefore, the experience of relative deprivation appears to have important implications for career resiliency and/or the ability to persist in building one’s career. In light of this impact,
Relative Context makes up the outer dimension of the Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency. By including Relative Context as a final dimension in the model, the Relative Encompassment Model attempts to uniquely account for the experience of going through a downgrade to one’s career after immigration.

Although professional immigrants may be vulnerable to experiencing relative deprivation after immigrating to a new country and having to face a reduced career status, based on the results from this study, predicting the development of relative deprivation is not that straightforward. Even though feelings of relative deprivation appeared to be more likely amongst individuals who experienced a substantial loss of career status (e.g., the two male medical doctors, teacher and microbiologist), not all participants who experienced a drastic change described feeling deprived. In particular, the one female former medical doctor (P20) did not report having feelings of relative deprivation, despite experiencing a significant loss of career status. In fact, P20 appeared to be resilient because despite working in a survival job, she was continuing to pursue retraining (a university degree). She also reported relatively minimal distress over working in a retail job. What factors (e.g., age, gender, aspirations, self-silencing etc.) are responsible for P20 not experiencing relative deprivation?

One possibility relates to age or the fact that P20 was at least twelve years younger than P15 and P20. Perhaps a loss of career status at a younger age is easier to deal with because a) a person is not as likely to have attained as high of a career position yet and/or b) a person may be more likely to think that it’s still possible to re-establish one’s career or even change career paths.

Another possible explanation for P20’s relative lack of distress over her inability to
continue as a doctor involves the notion that when some individuals experience a discrepancy between their career aspirations and career attainments (a form of cognitive dissonance), in order to cope they may reduce their aspirations or expectations (Krau, 1981). Women especially have been shown to be more likely to adjust their expectations more quickly than men after immigrating and a higher willingness to be flexible seems to be adaptive and leads to more positive career-related attitudes for some immigrants (Remennick, 2005). P20 did in fact appear to reduce her career aspirations from being a medical doctor to working in the health and safety field, while P19 continued to strongly desire being a doctor. However, the other male doctor P15 reduced his aspirations when he decided to retrain in pharmaceutical analysis, which he found satisfying until he was laid off and unable to find any desirable work.

Perhaps another explanation for why not all individuals who experience a relative decline in their career status experience relative deprivation relates to how individuals often compare their new life in Canada to their previous life not just in terms of their career, but also in terms of the degree to which other non-career needs are met. In particular, several participants appeared to suggest that a relative improvement in more primary needs, such as safety and security and/or their children’s well-being, makes it easier to accept a relative decline in secondary needs related to career status. The idea that needs exist within a continuum and that secondary needs only become important once primary needs are satisfied has been termed “hierarchical system of choice” (Drakopoulos, 2007, p.304). Drakopoulos (2007) utilized the notion that there is a hierarchical structure of needs in order to explain why improvements in income tend to increase subjective levels of happiness amongst individuals in less developed countries,
while improvements in income do not lead to increased happiness amongst individuals in more developed countries. In other words, improvements to primary needs may lead to greater satisfaction than improvements to secondary needs.

This idea may be relevant to the theory of relative deprivation and to the career resiliency of professional immigrants because improvements to basic needs amongst professional immigrants may lead to an easier adjustment for individuals who also experience a downgrade to their career status. In contrast, if both primary and secondary needs are not perceived to be improved through immigration, relative deprivation and/or adjustment distress may be more likely. Several comments made by some participants indeed appear to support the notion that relative context plays an important role in adjustment and/or career resiliency. For instance, P2 suggested that her adjustment became easier when she saw other immigrants struggling and realized “it hasn’t been that difficult for me”. In addition, P10 suggested that he feels less frustrated about working in a role much below his previous qualification level when he considers his situation within the context of the recession. Reflecting on this P10 stated: “I feel lucky to survive”. P20 also highlighted the role of relative context and its affect on career adjustment when she shared how she actually feels very blessed in life because she compares herself to people who do not have basic food and shelter. Having these primary needs well met seems to make it easier for P20 to accept that her secondary needs for career development have not yet been met in Canada. Overall, participants who suggested that they tend to compare themselves to less fortunate others and/or see their primary needs as being improved after moving to Canada appear to have a greater sense of career resiliency regardless of whether or not they experience an objective decline in their career status after moving to
Although there are still many unanswered questions related to the impact of relative context on career resiliency, the Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency proposes that relative context shapes the impact of other contextual variables such as encountered barriers and relational influences. For example, the impact of encountered barriers on career resiliency may differ depending on an individual’s frame of reference, which is largely shaped through relative context. By acknowledging the role of relative context, the Relative Encompassment Model takes into account the full complexity of career development and resiliency in a way that previous theoretical models have not. This model explains how career resiliency amongst professional immigrants is influenced by a full range of factors, including internal/personal, immediate-contextual, relational, and cultural factors, as well as relative context. This model also acknowledges that these factors are often intertwined and difficult to clearly separate. The many factors identified within the model and the ways in which various factors interact are uniquely manifested in each individual, making the career development of professional immigrants a highly complex process. The more factors contained within the model that can be identified and/or understood for a particular individual, the easier it will be to predict the extent to which an individual is likely to be career resilient.

Implications for Policy

Several of the findings within the current study (e.g., the mismatch between professional immigrants’ expectations and actual career development outcomes) have important implications for both policy and practice. To start with, Canada’s skilled-labour policy, which utilizes a points system to evaluate immigration applicants, favours Canada.
immigrants with a high level of education and/or skills over immigrants who are less highly educated or skilled (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). Under this policy, candidates such as former medical doctors P15, P19 and P20 are evaluated highly and are readily accepted into Canada. As pointed out by P19 himself, this policy is problematic because it often leads immigrants to believe that their education and skills will be highly desired and/or easily recognized once they arrive in Canada. Unfortunately, such beliefs are largely unfounded. Consistent with recent findings by George and Chaze (2012), most of the professional immigrants in this study were not aware that they would be required to go through a credential review process and/or complete educational retraining in order to continue their previous career here in Canada. As discussed above, despite the expectation of being able to re-establish their career in Canada, most professional immigrants encounter significant career roadblocks, such as language barriers, discrimination and non-recognition of foreign degrees, which make it very difficult to continue a desirable career after immigration.

The inconsistencies inherent to Canada’s immigration policy and actual immigrant employment outcomes seems to be largely attributable to both a lack of information available to immigrants prior to immigration and to Canada’s complicated and lengthy credential evaluation system. In particular, many participants suggested that they were led to believe (by immigration representatives, lawyers, organizations and peers) that their credentials would be more readily recognized and transferred into Canada. For example, P19 stated that the prime minister had come to India and said that “Canada needs doctors” and he felt that the prime minister neglected to mention the lack of residency positions. Some professional immigrants may therefore lack accurate
knowledge regarding Canada’s labour market conditions and credential evaluation requirements and procedures. As a result, Canada’s immigration policy ought to more accurately reflect actual credential requirements and this information ought to be more clearly communicated to immigration candidates by immigration officials prior to final application submission.

In the current study, only four participants re-established their previous credentials by going through a credential review process and completing the necessary requirements. Unfortunately, at least three other participants initiated this process and then gave up due to feeling frustrated or confused by the requirements. In particular, participants reported difficulties with knowing where to go and how to get required documentation, as well as problems with not having their previous credits or experience recognized. Perhaps for such reasons, most participants did not even attempt to have their foreign credentials evaluated. This supports assertions made by past researchers that there needs to be a more uniform, straight-forward and easily accessible procedure for professional immigrants to have their foreign credentials evaluated, perhaps before even arriving in Canada (Adamuti-Trache, 2011; George & Chaze, 2012).

If Canada is going to continue to try and attract highly educated immigrants, there also ought to be more educational policies and programs in place that recognize the unique needs of professional immigrants by offering more opportunities for career bridging. In the current study, participants such as P8 and P17 lend support to the idea that career bridging programs can be highly effective. Dali and Dlievko (2007) recognized the need for more career bridging opportunities when they proposed a model for facilitating the careers of librarians from Eastern Europe who immigrate to Canada.
The model was based on a previous model developed by Austen and Dean (2006) called ‘the International Pharmacy Graduate Program’. Both models were designed to bring together employers, regulators and educational institutions to help facilitate a quicker re-entry of professional immigrants into Canada’s labour force. Similar models are still needed for many other professions and countries of origin so that future professional immigrants do not continue to suffer from unmet expectations, disappointment and/or career stagnation.

**Implications for Practice**

**Professional Help**

Since professional immigrants are known to face many significant challenges in their quest to start a new life and/or career in Canada, many professional immigrants could benefit from support and/or counselling from helping professionals. Cross-cultural counselling can be uniquely challenging and requires an adequate level of cross-cultural competence in order to be effective. In the course of providing cross-cultural counselling, helping professionals are more likely to run into issues such as difficulty establishing trust, language barriers, unfamiliarity with a client’s traditions, customs or norms, a client’s unfamiliarity with helping professionals, and a tendency to be viewed as an authority figure (Benezer, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008). Cross-cultural competence, and/or the ability to effectively maneuver around these barriers, can be facilitated and/or developed by engaging in readings and/or learning opportunities that are specific to the cultural or ethnic population that one will be working with.

Once prepared for general cross-cultural counselling, professional helpers could approach their work with professional immigrants by specifically having an
understanding of the factors (e.g., individual factors, immediate context, relational context, cultural context and relative context) that uniquely affect professional immigrants’ career development. For instance, understanding the contextual barriers that professional immigrants often face will assist counsellors to effectively recognize, validate and normalize clients’ experiences and feelings. Informed knowledge of encountered career barriers is also important because it likely leads to greater empathy and to more effective problem solving. Recognizing and understanding barriers, such as prejudice and discrimination, also highlights the importance of teaching clients how to promote and/or advocate for themselves. Professional helpers have an important role in empowering clients by identifying strengths, sharing knowledge, teaching skills and providing encouragement.

In supporting and effectively understanding professional immigrant clients it may also be important to have knowledge about the impact of relative context and/or relative deprivation because this can help counsellors to better understand how career downgrades affect professional immigrants’ adjustment, career satisfaction, and sense of identity and/or how feelings of relative deprivation may be affecting career motivation. Equipped with knowledge about the full range of factors that affect professional immigrants’ career development, counsellors will be better prepared to assist individuals with evaluating priorities, identifying barriers and/or opportunities and making informed career decisions, such as the type of retraining to pursue. For some specific recommendations on factors (e.g., status in home country, conditions leading to immigration, cultural values etc) to consider during a clinical interview and other suggestions for effectively working with immigrant clients see Yakushko et al. (2008).
In addition to helping to identify some of the factors that affect the career development of professional immigrants, the results of the current study suggest that there needs to be improved access to information and programs related to the credential re-evaluation process as well as greater access to information related to retraining programs and opportunities. Previous research identified a lack of awareness about where to obtain information on educational and apprenticeship programs as a common information-seeking problem amongst immigrant youth (Silvio, 2006). In this study, a lack of information about retraining options was also identified as a problem for some adult professional immigrants. In particular, some participants reported problems such as not knowing how to select the most suitable retraining option and/or not knowing whether they could trust certain educational organizations. Difficulty with accessing career information is an important issue because a lack of information regarding career options is known to be significant career barrier for immigrants and domestic born individuals alike (Yakushko et al., 2008). Career counsellors therefore represent an important potential resource because counsellors can help ensure that professional immigrants are able to access important career-related information by directly providing information where possible and/or by being knowledgeable about community and educational resources and services.

Even though professional counsellors represents a valuable potential source of support for professional immigrants, most participants did not mention utilizing counselling or career services while retraining. This may be attributable to both difficulty accessing services and/or unwillingness to seek out professional services as sources of support (Yost & Lucas, 2002). The results of this study suggest that access difficulties
(e.g., cost, knowledge on where to go etc.) are likely the main issue. This suggests that there needs to be improved access to professional helping services, especially at retraining sites since only one participant mentioned utilized an organized service to help them cope with retraining difficulties. Perhaps efforts to tailor these services more specifically to professional immigrants would help to increase their usage and effectiveness as a coping strategy.

*Self-help*

The under-use of professional counselling as a coping strategy amongst professional immigrants means that self-help is particularly important. Although professional services could help to alleviate distress and/or aid professional immigrants’ career development, individual decisions and actions are also crucial to adjustment and/or career outcomes. In the current study, many participants suggested that they relied on either social support or their own attitudes as two main resources for coping. In particular, some participants found it helpful to talk to other immigrants who had similar experiences because they then felt less at fault for their own struggles and/or they found it helpful to hear about suggestions that worked for others (e.g., volunteering). The fact that professional immigrants can find it helpful to hear about other professional immigrants’ experiences means that the shared accounts of participants in the current study could serve as a source of support and/or inspiration to others.

The fact that personal attitudes were highlighted by several participants as an important coping resource also has implications for self-help. In particular, participants suggested that attitudinal factors such as flexibility, the tendency to compare down, optimism and spirituality were valuable for assisting them to cope with adjustment and
career difficulties. As such, professional immigrants may benefit from seeking out preferred spiritual groups or practices (e.g., prayer groups, meditation) and striving to be as flexible and optimistic as possible. Professional immigrants are also encouraged to be mindful of the comparisons they make because a tendency to compare oneself to less fortunate others may lead to an easier adjustment than a tendency to compare oneself to those who are more fortunate.

Since personal actions are central to career development and/or resiliency, professional immigrants are also encouraged to remain persistent in their efforts and pursue educational retraining as soon as possible after they arrive in Canada. The results of the current study support the notion that retraining often helps to facilitate the career development of professional immigrants. Retraining is particularly likely to be helpful if a full diploma or degree is obtained at the college or university level. Other individual actions such as persistence in applying for jobs, networking and volunteering were also reported to be helpful for developing or re-establishing one’s career in Canada.

**Limitations of the Study**

In discussing the contributions that this study makes to our current understanding of theory, policy and practice concerning the career adjustment of professional immigrants, it is important to identify and discuss the limitations of the current study. To start with, the current study’s use of qualitative methodology poses some potential challenges or limitations. In particular, the data collection and analysis were completed primarily by one researcher. Since qualitative methodology relies heavily on the researcher’s interpretations, particularly during the analysis process, findings may be more prone to being influenced by the researcher’s own biases. To help address this issue, the
researcher clarified and stated her own personal biases before beginning the data collection process and memos and notes were made in an attempt to be aware of personal beliefs and reactions to the participant’s shared experiences. In addition, findings were discussed with the researcher’s supervisor and other members of the research team. Finally, participants’ direct quotes were used very extensively in order to convey participants’ experiences, thoughts and beliefs as precisely as possible.

Despite the efforts made to minimize potential problems related to the use of qualitative methodology, there are other issues that need to be identified. In particular, this study utilized a semi-structured interview, which means that the content and direction of participants’ shared experiences were largely shaped by the researchers who created the interview protocol. The researchers made an attempt to account for this issue by keeping the questions as open ended as possible and allowing for some follow-up questions when more information was desired. Still, the fact that participants’ narratives were likely shaped by the exact questions posed of them needs to be acknowledged. In addition, the detailed nature of the seventy-seven or so interview questions means that participants may have been somewhat limited in the extent to which they could describe the complexity of some of their experiences. Although the intent of the current study was to conduct a relatively general exploration of professional immigrants career and adjustment experiences, the issue regarding the potential limits to the depth of information gathered needs to be considered, particularly for future research.

Another potential limitation with using an interview format is that participants may have been influenced by presentation bias, or an internal pressure to appear positive. In considering this issue, the researcher was trained in administering structured and semi-
structured interviews and attempts were made to ensure that participants were not subtly reinforced for pro-social responses by the interviewer not nodding or actively agreeing with responses. Participants were also reassured early on of the importance of confidentiality. In some cases, if participants appeared hesitant to share negative feedback, they were encouraged to provide honest feedback. Participants were also made aware that part of the intent of the study was to identify potential issues or problems in order to make recommendations that could be helpful for future immigrants.

Issues regarding the generalizability of the current study also need to be addressed. For example, the generalizability of this study may be affected by the fact that convenience sampling was used as the sampling technique in this study. This means that the sample was self-selected and as a result, certain sub-groups within the target population may not be fully represented. In particular, the sample in this study overlooks professional immigrants who chose not to stay in Canada and/or professional immigrants who chose not to participate and share their story.

One reason that some professional immigrants may have chosen not to participate may be related to the fact that the study limited participation to those who could speak and understand English. Therefore, professional immigrants who do not possess English language skills are not represented in this study. Since English language skills are often used as an indicator of cross-cultural adjustment, it is possible that the sample over-represented professional immigrants who have attained a higher level of adjustment and/or career development (Mak et al., 1999). As a result, it cannot be assumed that the challenges encountered by the participants in this study are fully representative of the challenges faced by non-English speaking professional immigrants. The fact that the
participants in this study spoke English as a second language may have also impacted upon the manner in which participants were able to express themselves. It is possible that more in-depth information may have been gathered had the interviews taken place in participants’ first language.

The generalizability of the current study may also be affected by other inclusion/exclusion criteria, such as the requirement that all participants completed retraining, immigrated under the skilled-worker class, were over the age of twenty-five and arrived between 1999 and 2006. These selection criteria were chosen in order to maximize the amount of information collected from the population of interest (e.g., professional immigrants who arrived between 1999 and 2006 and took retraining). However, the findings of this study may not be applicable to other immigrants and/or professional immigrants who did not complete retraining and/or were younger and/or arrived within a different time period.

Another limitation relates to the fact that recruitment posters were posted on the city’s subway line and the interviews for this study were all conducted at the university’s counselling clinic. This means that only professional immigrants residing in or near Toronto were reasonably able to participate in the study. As a result, the study’s findings may not be representative of professional immigrants residing in rural areas or outside of Toronto.

Although the generalizability of the study’s findings may be limited to a certain target group (e.g., self-selected professional immigrants who met the inclusion/exclusion criteria and resided close to Toronto), maximum variation sampling was used to help increase the generalizability of the study’s findings within the selected population.
Maximum variation sampling involves maximizing the variability of a specific criterion by purposefully selecting a wide range of individuals (Sandlelowski, 1995). For the current study, this was achieved by purposefully contacting recruited participants from at least ten countries of origin and from multiple professional fields. Finally, the researcher ensured that an equal number of males and females were represented. It is hoped that these efforts served to minimize potential weaknesses within the study in order to make the findings as valid and replicable as possible for the selected population of interest. It is important to point out that this study was intended to be exploratory in nature, with the intention of not just increasing our knowledge and understanding of the factors that shape career development and resiliency in professional immigrants, but also to generate suggestions for practice, including suggesting for future research.

Future Directions

In order to further understand the extent to which the current study’s findings can be generalized to other professional immigrant groups (e.g., non-English speaking professional immigrants and/or professional immigrants living in rural areas), future research could endeavor to include groups or populations that were not included in the current study. For example, future research could examine whether professional immigrants who settle into rural areas experience the same challenges and/or opportunities as professional immigrants who settle into an urban area such as Toronto. In addition, future research could attempt to conduct interviews in professional immigrants’ native language to see whether different and/or more in depth information can be gathered and/or whether the newly self-selected group would differ in terms of having relatively unique experiences.
In order to better understand some of the results of the current study (e.g., the finding that most participants held positive attitudes about retraining), it may also be important for future research to endeavor to study professional immigrants at different stages of their adjustment and/or career development. In particular, it is important to point out that a large number of participants reported that they were initially resentful about having to complete retraining due to feeling undervalued for not having their foreign education and experience recognized and due to other issues such as the cost of retraining, the time and the commitment required. Interestingly, many of these same participants indicated that their feelings of resentment subsided post-retraining because they realized and/or perhaps accepted that the retraining was necessary to help them develop a desired career in Canada. This suggests that the attitudes and coping strategies of professional immigrants could vary depending on factors such as the length of time in Canada and stage of retraining. Perhaps future longitudinal research could help us to better understand the developmental progression of career related attitudes, decisions and actions in a way that a single time frame study cannot. Having a fuller understanding of the way in which perceptions, beliefs and attitudes change over time may shed light on additional ways of providing more effective support to professional immigrants who are still experiencing strong feelings of distress and/or resentment over having to retrain and/or re-establish their career in Canada.

Future research that examines aspects of the proposed Relative Encompassment Model of Career Resiliency and/or attempts to refine and/or expand on the model is also encouraged. For instance, future research could examine what factors contribute to the development of relative career deprivation, as well as the factors that seem to prevent
and/or help to resolve feelings of relative deprivation. In addition, since individual factors such as attitudes and actions appear to influence career resiliency, future research could examine how positive attitudes are shaped and maintained in the face of career barriers, as well as what factors predict career actions such as retraining. One way this might be achieved is by comparing professional immigrants who chose to pursue retraining with professional immigrants who do not pursue retraining. Results from future studies could then be utilized to compare and contrast the newly proposed model with pre-existing models. Perhaps these endeavors could lead to a unified theory of cross-cultural career development.

Overall, because the current study was largely exploratory in nature and the study of career development is relatively complex, there are many other areas of inquiry left for future research to examine. For example, the possible gender differences in the level of distress expressed by the doctors and the discussed variety of potential explanations suggests that the impact of gender needs to be more thoroughly explored. In particular, future research could examine whether women do indeed experience less distress over not being able to re-establish their career or are other factors such as self-silencing responsible for observed differences in expressed distress?

As another area of possible Inquiry, Shinnar (2007) previously pointed out that the role of career progression as a coping mechanism to manage perceptions of negative social identity remains to be examined. Perhaps future longitudinal research will uncover how professional immigrants’ sense of identity changes over time in response to encountered barriers and career related decisions.
Since attachment style has been shown to influence general career development (e.g., Hardy & Barkham, 1994) future research might also explore the role of attachment style in the career adjustment and/or resiliency of professional immigrants. This information would likely be relevant to the relational dimension of career development and may help us better understand not just the direct impact of relationships on career development, but also how relationships indirectly shape career development by altering individual factors such as attachment style, self-efficacy and expectations.

Regardless of the exact direction that future research takes, it is hoped that this study will help to lay a foundation that will spark future research on the very important topic of career development and/or resiliency amongst professional immigrants. As Yakushko et al. (2008) previously pointed out, work-life experiences have the potential to either facilitate or hinder the adjustment and well-being of immigrants. And, a positive career development in Canada has the potential to benefit not only individuals, but also society at large. Since professional immigrants are an invaluable resource to Canada and are expected to make up an increasing proposition of Canada’s population and labour force, future research that focuses on issues affecting professional immigrants will continue to be extremely important and valuable in the coming years.
References


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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, 2001 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 engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of retraining/program completion required)
- You have held employment in Canada, (full-time or part-time), for a minimum of 3 years after completing Canadian retraining
- 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 led by Dr. Charles Chen in Counselling Psychology at the Graduate 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

EMAIL SCRIPT OF INITIAL CONTACT
How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you so much for your interest in our research project! This research project is being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, and his research assistants. It’s a study that is looking to better understand the career training experiences and needs, barriers and opportunities that are present for immigrant professionals in their career transition in Canada. We are looking to conduct interviews with a total of 90 to 120 recent immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada. During the interview, we will be asking questions 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. It is our hope that you will benefit from the interview process by gaining an increased self-awareness on issues related to career retraining, career exploration, and planning, and find the exploring nature of the study interesting. We also hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers.

The interview will be audio-taped and it will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto and it will last for approximately 2 hours.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions and you may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

Your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. Your contact information and data will be labeled with a code and kept in separate locked cabinets, to which only Dr. Chen and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project, after which all the data will be destroyed. The results of this study may be used again in another study by Dr. Chen and his assistants. These research results may be presented in conferences or published in academic and/or professional journals. Your identity will still remain strictly confidential.

If you agree to participate and complete the interview process, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 for your time and effort.

All of our participants must meet the criteria of the term “new immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada” in order to participate in our study.

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.

If you don’t meet any one of the above criteria, you are unfortunately not eligible to participate in this study.

If you meet all the requirements and are interested in participating in this research study, please respond to this email providing the following information:
- your full name,
- your country of origin,
- your profession when you lived in your country of origin.

Also, please indicate the days of the week and times that you are available to come in for your research interview (e.g., Mondays and Thursdays from 2-4pm). We will contact you to schedule an appointment should you be eligible for our study and should our quota of participants from your country of origin not yet be fulfilled.

We thank you very much for your time and interest in our research project!
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Chen and his research team via telephone at 416 978 0725 or via email again at careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca

All the best,

CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto

If they reply and say that they don’t fulfill the requirements:

Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you again for your interest in our research project and for answering our questions. Unfortunately, as you don’t have...(repeat whatever criteria)…, we regret that you are not eligible to participate in the study. For research purposes, we must strictly adhere to our inclusion criteria. We greatly appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions and we thank you again for your interest in participating in the study.

Wishing you all the best,

CRC research team
If they are from a country that we have already maxed out our quota on, reply with the following:

Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you very much for your interest in participating in our study. In order to be comprehensive with our research, we have to interview individuals from a number of different countries. It turns out that we’ve already spoken with a number of people from your home country and for the time-being, we must limit that number of people to a particular quota. I will write your name and contact information down on our waiting list. If it’s ok with you, we may potentially contact you in the coming months as our research progresses. Thank you very much again for taking the time to answer our questions and for your interest in participating in our study.

Wishing you all the best,

Your name
CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto

If they are interested and give us their availabilities for the interview:

Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you again for your interest in our research project and for answering my questions. I have scheduled your appointment for (indicate date, day and time). Please respond to this email to confirm your availability to meet at that date/time.

I will be waiting for you at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto lobby, which is on the main level in the OISE building located at 252 Bloor Street West (at the corner of Bloor and Bedford) near the St. George Subway Station. Please remember to bring with you a record/proof of your re-training.

I look forward to meeting with you!

All the best,

CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto

If they reply and say that they are not interested:

Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you again for taking an interest in our research study. Please feel free to contact us again if you would like to participate at a later date.

All the best,

CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto
APPENDIX C

TELEPHONE SCRIPT OF INITIAL CONTACT
How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants’ vocational well-being

If we reach their voicemail:
Hello sir/madam,
This is (state name) from the immigrant retraining study returning your call.
Thank you so much for your interest in our study. I would like to speak with you about our study
for 5 to 10 minutes to evaluate whether you are eligible to participate in our study and to schedule
an appointment. Since our telephone system is automated, we will have to call you back once you
have left us another message, so if you could please call us back and leave a detailed message
with your name, the phone number we can reach you at, and the days and times when you will be
available to take our call.
Thank you again for your interest in our study and I look forward to speaking with you!
*Please call us back at 416-978-0725.

If they pick up:
Hello sir/madam,
This is (state name) from the immigrant retraining study returning your call.
Is this a good time to speak with you about the study?
Answer: No say the following…
Alright, would you like to speak with me at some other time about the study? The telephone
screening should take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time.
Arrange a time.
Answer: Yes (proceed…)
Great, thank you so much for your interest in our research project.
To start off with, could you please tell me your full name and country of origin? And what was
your profession when you lived there? (Record that information into the “Participants” excel
spreadsheet.)

If they are from a country that we have already maxed out our quota on, say the following:
Thanks so much for your interest. I’m going to write your name and contact information down on
our waiting list, because in order to be comprehensive with our research, we have to interview
individuals from a number of different countries. It turns out we’ve already spoken with a number
of people from your home country and for the time-being, we will have to limit our numbers to a
particular quota. If it’s ok with you, may we potentially contact you in the coming months as our
research progresses?
Great, thank you very much again for your interest in participating. All the best, goodbye.

If they are from a country that we need say the following:
Great, I’d like to tell you a bit about the study so you can consider whether you’d like to
participate. If you have questions, please feel free to ask me at any time.

This research project is 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. It’s a study that is looking to better understand the career training
experiences and needs, barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their
career transition in Canada. We are looking to conduct interviews with a total of 90 to 120 recent
immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada. During the interview, we will be asking questions 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. Does that sound of interest to you?

Answer: No, say the following…
I understand, thank you very much for your initial interest and for contacting us. All the best, goodbye.

Answer: Yes (proceed)
Great, well let me tell you a bit more about the interviews.

All of our participants must meet the criteria of the term “new immigrant professionals who have completed retraining in Canada” in order to participate in our study. I’d like to go through the requirements with you now if that’s alright? Thanks,

1) Are you are at least 25 years of age or older?
2) Did you come to Canada as an immigrant within January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006?
3) Do you have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada?
4) Did you work full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three-years before coming to Canada?
5) Did you engage in retraining in Canada and earn a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation? Do you have records/proof of retraining/educational program completion? (this is required for participation)
6) Have you 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) Are you fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English)?
8) Have you previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date?

*if needed, clarify whether they came as an International Student on a student visa. If yes, they are not eligible. They need to have come as immigrants.

If they do not meet criteria say:
Thank you again for answering my questions. Unfortunately, it seems that, as you don’t have...(repeat whatever criteria)..., I regret that you are not eligible to participate in the study. Sorry about that but thank you very much for your interest in participating, we really appreciate your taking the time.
All the best, goodbye.

If they are upset that they don’t meet criteria and want an explanation, say:
I’m sorry, let me explain, for research and ethical purposes, we must strictly adhere to our inclusion criteria. We greatly appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions though and wish you all the best. Thanks for understanding. Goodbye.

If they meet criteria say:
Great, you meet our criteria. (and proceed.) Let me tell you a bit more about the study.

The interview will be audio-taped and it will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto and it will last for about 2 hours.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview.
It is our hope that you will benefit from the interview process by gaining an increased self-awareness on issues related to career retraining, career exploration, and planning, and find the exploring nature of the study interesting.
We also hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions and you may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

Your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. Your contact information and data will be labeled with a code and kept in separate locked cabinets, which only Dr. Chen and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project, after which all the data will be destroyed. The results of this study may be used again in another study by Dr. Chen and his assistants. These research results may be presented in conferences or published in academic and/or professional journals. Your identity will still remain strictly confidential.

If you agree to participate and complete the interview process, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 for your time and effort.

Do you have any questions?
Would you like to participate?

Answer, Yes:
When will you be the best time for you to come in for your research interview?
(Record their availabilities on excel sheet)
Thank you, a research assistant who is available on one of those days will contact you to schedule an interview with you.

If booked:
*Remind them to bring a record/proof of retraining and that we will not be able to conduct the interview if they don’t bring it.
*Let them know that you will meet them at the lobby on the main level in the OISE building. Give the OISE address and closest subway station:
I will be waiting for you at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto lobby, which is on the main level in the OISE building located at 252 Bloor Street West (at the corner of Bloor and Bedford) near the St. George Subway Station. Please remember to bring with you a record/proof of your re-training.

Answer, No:
Well thank you again for taking the time to answer my questions. Please feel free to contact us again if you would like to participate at a later date. All the best, goodbye.
If they are not sure:
If you need more time to think about your options, please feel free to do so. You may contact me at a later time if you are interested in arranging an interview schedule with me.

Thank you very much for your time and interest in our research project!
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Chen or his research team at this phone number, 416 978 0725 or via email at: careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca
All the best, goodbye.
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT 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 will 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 you for 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 audio-taped interview that will last for approximately 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 Form 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 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 a code number to protect your identity. Any information that could lead to identifying 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 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 audio-taped 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 to 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 will 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

********************************************************************************
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.

(Please print: First and Last Names of Research Participant)

______________________________ Date______________________________
(Signature of Research Participant)
APPENDIX E

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.) ________________________________

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

   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 ________________________________

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 you are currently holding in Canada:
   ________________________________________________

9. Please specify how long you have been working in this employment: ________

   Date of interview: ________________________________
APPENDIX F
RE: How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

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?
   e) Did you find your job/career meaningful? Did you find you work fulfilling?

(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 work-life 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 work-life 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).

(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 re-accredit 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?
   c) Did you find the re-training process meaningful and/or fulfilling?

(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?
   Do you find your work meaningful and/or fulfilling?

(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?

(77) Any final comments and/or suggestions you want to make?
APPENDIX G: Overview of Presented Themes

Pre-immigration: Experiences and Expectations
Pre-immigration Career Development Experiences
Factors That Led to a Decision to Immigrate to Canada
Pre-immigration Expectations of Canadian Career Development

Post-immigration: Initial Adjustment Experiences
Initial Experiences and Difficulties
Impact of Difficulties on Well-being and Self-esteem
Coping with Initial Difficulties

Initial Canadian Work Experiences
Importance of Finding Work & Type of Work Intended
Strategies Used to Find Work
Difficulty Finding Work (Unemployment, Survival Jobs, Unfair Treatment)

The Pursuit of Canadian Educational Retraining
Type of Canadian Retraining Taken
Reasons for Retraining
Relational Influences on Decision to Retrain
Barriers to Canadian Retraining & School/Work/Life Balance
Support and Resources
Perceptions of Canadian Retraining

Canadian Educational Retraining Outcomes
Usefulness of Canadian Retraining
Impact of Retraining on Self-esteem & Career Motivation
Impact of Retraining on Canadian Career Identity
Self-Discovery and Main Lessons
Current Work Role and Skill Utilization
Canadian Career Identity/Satisfaction
Future Career Outlook
Anticipated Future Actions & Expectations for Future Retraining

The Career Resiliency of Professional Immigrants
Comparison of Pre-immigration and Post-immigration Career Attainment
Usefulness of Foreign Credentials and Foreign Work Experience
Factors that Facilitate Canadian Career Resiliency
Factors that Hinder Canadian Career Resiliency
Relational Influences on Career Resiliency of Professional Immigrants
Role of Attitude and Personal Growth in the Development of Resiliency
Role of Social Comparisons and Relative Deprivation on Adjustment Experiences
Suggestions: Laying a Clearer Path for Future Professional Immigrants
APPENDIX H: Overview of Participant Demographics

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<tr>
<th>P#</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Immigration Date</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Pre-Immigration Education</th>
<th>Pre-Immigration Job Title</th>
<th>Post Immigration Education</th>
<th>Current Job Title</th>
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<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Nov 2003</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Plant Manager</td>
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<td>Agent/owner insurance company</td>
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<td>May 2002</td>
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<td>OSCE prep instructor certificate</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Accounting certificate</td>
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<td>MA Teaching</td>
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<td>MA education equivalency/ Teacher’s college Unemployed</td>
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<td>Sep 2004</td>
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<td>marketing management Post Grad diploma Business analyst</td>
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<td>Accounting Diploma Senior financial analyst</td>
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<td>BA business administration</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>MBA Manager measurement &amp; metrics</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Country Origin</td>
<td>Immigration Date</td>
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All of the twenty participants in this study were professionals who immigrated to Canada between the year 2000 and 2006 and engaged in some type of educational retraining after arriving in Canada in order to try and advance their careers and/or obtain desired work. A participant overview was provided in APPENDIX H. A detailed profile summary of each participant’s career development and immigration experience will now follow.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a 44-year-old man from Columbia who emigrated from Columbia in November of 2003. He attended university in Columbia and completed a Masters degree in Business. Prior to immigrating to Canada P1 worked in the United States for four years as a manufacturing plant manager. He reported that he enjoyed his job in the U.S because of getting to work with people and having a high level of responsibility. His career was very central to his sense of sense and he had devoted long hours to his career.

Despite having an enjoyable career, P1 and his wife decided to move to Canada because his temporary US work visa was going to expire. He originally decided to emigrate from Columbia to the United States because he had been laid off from his job in Columbia (as a facility manager) and he wanted to pursue some international work experience.

Prior to emigrating to Canada P1 felt confident about finding desired full-time work in Canada. In fact, P1 reported that he had felt “very confident. Too confident”. P1 did not do any preparation to help secure employment prior to immigrating to Canada. He expected that me might have to complete some minor retraining, but did not anticipate having to take any formal educational retraining.
Upon arriving in Canada P1 was surprised to find things very similar to the U.S. in terms of culture, the landscape and daily living, however, he was surprised at the difficulty he faced in finding employment. He stated, “I thought that with my experience and my language skills I would get a job in no time. But it took nine months instead of three weeks”. P1 indicated that he was frustrated and discouraged by the difficulty he faced in finding desired employment. In response, P1 decided to start looking for entry-level business and manufacturing related jobs. When this still proved difficult, P1 started to search for any kind of job he could find.

P1 obtained his first job in Canada three months after his arrival. His first job was a part-time job conducting phone surveys for a telephone company. P1 was frustrated with the minimum wage pay and the fact that the job did not utilize most of his skills. P1 worked in the evening and searched for another job during the day. He joined several professional organizations and focused on networking. After approximately another six months P1 was able to secure a full-time job at a well-known electrical company as a distribution centre engineer. He remained with that company for two years before securing another full-time job at another large company as a business excellence manager. P1 remained with that company for two years before deciding to initiate a career change.

Three years ago P1 decided to start a career as an insurance agent. P1’s wife had influenced this decision because she had obtained administrative work at an insurance company and connected P1 with her manager who encouraged him to complete training to start his own insurance company. The opportunity to own his own business appealed to P1 because he liked the idea of: “not having to deal with the politics and bureaucracy of the corporate world. And the financial opportunity was a factor, too”.

In order to prepare for his new career P1 had to study for several government regulated exams over a six month period. To facilitate this process P1 also took a course through an insurance
company. He worked full-time during his retraining and found it very difficult to have sufficient
time left over for his family. He coped with this sacrifice by staying focused on his goals for the
future (e.g., to have more time with family, more career satisfaction and a higher salary).

Several months after completing the retraining P1 was selected by an insurance company to
start his own company branch. He reported that this led to him developing a new sense of career
identity as an entrepreneur and business owner and he has found this experience highly satisfying.
P1 also reported developing a new identity in terms of being able to assist others with their own
career and said: “I feel so much better being able to have my own business and being able to give a
work opportunity to other people; I help other people to have a career, so it has really raised my
level of satisfaction”.

As a result of starting his own business, work has taken on a more central role in P1’s life
and he has greater career satisfaction. In particular, P1 said:

I am very satisfied because Canada has given me the opportunity to do things I never would
have even imagined being able to do back home in Colombia or in the U.S. It’s given me the
opportunity to help people in my community, being in a community of Hispanics, trying to
help other people. So, that has been very rewarding, and it’s something that I’d never
imagined doing, not in the U.S. or in Colombia (P1).

Although quite satisfied, P1 stated that he is also having to deal with longer work hours and
some financial uncertainty. When P1 compared his current career to the career he had before
immigrating to Canada he said that despite current financial uncertainty, his current career is “better
than before” because he derives satisfaction from controlling his own business, helping others
and focusing on the potential for greater financial freedom in the future.

P1 is optimistic about the future and plans to pursue additional retraining in the insurance
field so that he can also be a certified financial planner and assist people with their retirement
planning. He plans to first focus on growing his business so that he can hire more people to assist
him, which would allow him more time to pursue additional training.
Overall P1 summarized his emigration and job search experiences by saying: “I wouldn’t say it was very, very hard; it was hard, it wasn’t easy”. He stated that he felt that his U.S. work experience, proficient English language abilities and persistence with networking were the factors that contributed to his success in finding work and starting a new career. He also commented on the importance of maintaining a sense of direction and positive attitude by highlighting the need for “having specific goals and being hopeful and having faith that if I do the right actions, I’ll get to where I need to be”. The largest barriers he faced included him not knowing anyone in Canada and having to start from scratch in terms of creating a social network, as well as having to accept a relative reduction in his standard of living and financial status.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is a 34-year-old female from the United States who immigrated to Canada in May of 2002. She completed a BA in Fine Arts in the U.S and worked as a dance and theatre instructor prior to immigration. She reported that she had enjoyed her career in the U.S. because her job was stable and she was well paid, although the hours and work demands were “intense”. P2 said that her career was very central to her sense of self because she felt like she “had a base”.

P2 decided to immigrate to Canada because she had felt that the U.S. was becoming increasingly unsafe and she was dismayed by the growing divide between the rich and poor. In particular P2 stated:

There were a lot of situations politically, and I hate to name names, but I think we know who… there was a really desperate situation developing between the rich and poor, and for people in the States, when I left, it was just starting to get bad, and I started seeing the writing on the wall… That things weren’t changing, and I think it was a lot of the violence that was created because of the lack of resources, and I just felt that I couldn’t have a place I could feel safe (P2).

P2 stated that she had witnessed a lot of crime living in areas such as Los Angeles, New Jersey and Seattle and she wanted to live somewhere where she could feel safe. She also wanted to have access
to affordable healthcare and did not see herself as having roots within the U.S. because of a lack of strong family ties.

Before emigrating to Canada P2 had visited Vancouver several times to gain a sense of what Canada would be like to live in. Prior to immigration, she had expected that she would easily find employment because of her education, work experience and native English language skills. She did not expect to have to complete any educational retraining.

As a result of her optimism, P2 was surprised to find that she could not locate any employment immediately after her arrival. She described having a very difficult transition, starting with being criticized by U.S. officials about her decision to “desert her country”, and then having to cross back over the boarder continuously for six months in order to keep working. She also felt isolated and lonely and stated: “I felt a little lost because I didn’t have friends around, I didn’t have family, I was really alone”. P2 described feeling cut off from others and became increasingly stressed. She soon became ill with a thyroid condition and became increasingly thin. She started to feel discouraged and experienced feelings of regret. P2 recalled: “a lot of times I didn’t feel like I made the right decision. I felt like I was really stupid, putting all the effort in those first two years, it was like nothing is happening, I’m worse off”!

P2 continued to have difficulty finding work in Vancouver Canada. Although she initially focused on trying to locate employment as an instructor, she quickly found herself having to adjust her expectations and began looking for survival jobs. P2 took several survival jobs, such as cleaning, and reported that she had very negative experiences involving not getting paid by some employers and feeling very degraded. In discussing her survival jobs P2 stated: “you’re just basically a slave. And I think that when they found out that I was an immigrant, it was like I was easy pickings because they felt like, well she doesn’t have anything else, so she’ll take this”. After working several survival jobs and having difficulty paying her rent, P2 decided to move to Toronto.
In Toronto P2 first worked for a telemarketing company and then managed to find preferred employment as an usher for two different theatre companies. She described experiencing sexual harassment by a manager within the first theatre company and said that she was fired after getting into an argument with a co-worker. She said that having continued health problems led to her being dismissed from the second company a short time later.

After applying to an advertisement, P2 secured full-time employment as a trainer with a company that assisted immigrant medical doctors with preparing for their Canadian medical exams. The employer provided a rigorous training course where P2 had to learn medical terminology and how to facilitate role-plays. P2 said that she pursued this training option rather than a more formal education because the cost of the training was covered by the new employer. P2 stated that she enjoyed the training because she was learning new information and the material was very practical and hands on. P2 would learn information in a classroom setting and then was able to immediately utilize the information in her work setting. Her retraining experience increased her confidence and gave her a renewed sense of purpose and a new career identity. At the same time, she felt slightly resentful that her former education and skills were not being validated and/or utilized. P2 stated that in some ways she felt like she was “starting from scratch”.

Despite mixed feelings about her retraining experience, P2 described enjoying her new career-path until she experienced some difficulties with getting paid on time and became critical of the owner’s management practices. She was fortunately able to go and work for another training company doing the same job. She enjoyed this job until the company underwent some cutbacks approximately one year ago and her role was reduced to “barely part-time”. P2 explained: “because of the cutbacks from the government it couldn’t continue, which just hit me like an anvil, knowing that all this work I’d done, retraining and all that stuff, it felt like I was there making the money and happy, but then I lost it”. 
In response to her work hours being cut, P2 decided that she wanted to try and develop a new career path. P2 is currently working on trying to build her own business, which she described by saying: “it’s more artistic, using more of the theatre training, and the fine arts, bringing people together to create work, and talk about social issues”. She indicated that her business has not yet started to generate a viable income; however, she is working on networking and securing corporate sponsors. She is finding her new venture rewarding because she is utilizing more of her skills and artistic interests and is working on social issues. P2 also enjoys the flexibility of her job, however, she does not like the long hours required and the lack of financial remuneration. She expects that her new career path will be financially rewarding in the future.

Overall, P2 feels only somewhat satisfied with her Canadian work experiences. P2 summarized by saying:

My work in the States, I was happy with. My work in Canada, not so happy in the beginning. A nice bright spot with the doctors and the retraining, but it didn’t last, I wish it did. And then having to start up again, that is rough, but I found a place to be happy (P2).

P2 attributes her experienced with establishing a career in Canada to workplace prejudice against non-Canadians and also due to not knowing early on where to go for support and resources. P2 said she thought employers acted as if to say: “you’re not Canadian, so why should we give you the job? Especially a job that’s going to pay”. Despite this barrier, P2 thinks that her willingness to persist and to try new things has facilitated her career development. Comparing herself to less fortunate immigrants has also helped her to cope with her experienced difficulties. In particular, P2 has compared herself to foreign trained doctors that she met while working as a training instructor, stating that:

It allowed me to see immigrants from different countries, and their struggles… How it hasn’t been that difficult for me. But what I really, really have seen, in a way that most people don’t get to see, is that people from Pakistan, the Middle East, India, China, they
really struggle, and I’m like ‘whoa’. There’s so many that are amazingly trained, but they’re not even working (P2).

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is a 48-year-old female from Russia who immigrated to Canada in July of 2006. While in Russia P3 completed a BA in engineering, but worked as a human resources project coordinator for a Swiss University that was based in Russia. Her role involved providing employment placements for unemployed Swiss professionals in Eastern Europe. In terms of career satisfaction, P3 stated: “I felt very accomplished. It was the peak of my career where I really felt myself as a valued asset. I was developing the business and was involved in different projects, and I was really happy”. P3 suggested that her career was very central to her overall life and said:

I identified myself with my job. And I was the head of representative office in St. Petersburg, so I worked weekends, Sundays, statutory holidays. When I wanted to work, I just came to work. The job was the main part of my life (P3).

Despite having a fulfilling career in Russia, P3 decided to immigrate to Canada because her son chose to immigrate to the United States and Canada’s willingness to accept skilled workers made it easier for her to move to Canada compared to the United States. P3 also wanted to seek out opportunities to enhance her career within the international labour market.

Before immigrating to Canada, P3 had felt “100% confident” that she would find desired employment in Canada. She explained that her job in Russia required her to speak English and this gave her the confidence to think that she would be able to secure employment in Canada. P3 explained:

The working language when I worked for the University was English. So I thought, “Okay. My English is good enough to start working in a new country which uses English as the working language because all the recommendations, all the telephone calls with my clients and with head office was in English for five years.” I thought it was good enough (P3).

Despite feeling confident about finding Canadian employment, P3 expected that she might take some retraining in Canada, mainly to form some social connections and learn about Canadian
workplace norms. In discussing her expectations to retrain P3 said: “I wanted to find some standards, some genuine ideas how to proceed because in a new country, in a new culture, you don’t know what works, what doesn’t work; you don’t understand rules… cultural rules and ethical rules”.

Despite previously expecting some challenges, upon arriving in Canada P3 experienced culture shock. She recalled: “I was never exposed to the North American culture. I traveled all over Europe and I felt that North America is the same, and I was just shocked. Totally shocked!” In particular, P3 described feeling as if individuals in North America are very “self-contained” and narrow in their perspective and treatment of others. She felt isolated and experienced great difficulty understanding others and fitting in. This difficulty was particularly salient within P3’s first workplace in a call centre. She recalled:

I had to work with a social group which is different from the social group before. I worked at a call centre, and I totally misunderstood people. I totally misunderstood the type of behaviour which was accepted on the floor, the type of interactions between supervisors and the customers and representatives. I didn’t understand this teamwork; I didn’t understand how some things, which really seemed to be very rude, are acceptable here. And I felt destroyed. Every time I had to work I felt destroyed because I didn’t understand people (P3).

P3 explained that she was used to a very formal work place and found the workplace culture in Canada to be very informal. She had great difficulty adjusting to new work norms and often found herself crying in the washroom at work. She also had difficulty adjusting to the perceived competitive nature of Canadian workers. P3 stated: “even when you are INSIDE the company, everyone is competing for what? The job shouldn’t be your god. It’s okay to have a job, but it’s not a god”!

Aside from experiencing difficulty adjusting to a new culture, P3 also experienced difficulty locating desired employment in Canada. Although she had initially intended to find employment related to her human resources background, upon arriving in Canada P3 found herself applying for all types of jobs because financial pressures made it imperative that she locate work. Within a few
weeks of immigrating to Canada P3 was able to secure employment as a hostess for an event company and she also later worked as a waitress in a restaurant and then as a landscaper. Unfortunately she was unable to keep these jobs. P3 explained:

I worked as a waitress in a restaurant for five days. I was terminated. I’m not a waitress, unfortunately! I worked as a landscaping worker. It was okay; I loved it. I think they needed just more skilled people. That’s why they discontinued working with me (P3).

After realizing that it was going to be difficult to secure desired employment, within a couple months of arriving in Canada P3 enrolled in a business management course and a language course designed to assist people to reduce their accent. While enrolled in these courses P3 obtained a job in a call centre, where she encountered the adjustment difficulties described above. After six months she was able to obtain a position at another company as an administrative clerk. When that company ran out of business, P3 decided to complete a human resources certificate through a local college.

P3 reported that she enjoyed her retraining experience. The retraining led her to feel more confident in her abilities and encouraged her to pursue her desired career in human resources. She also found that the retraining was helpful in teaching her about workplace norms. Talking about the retraining, P3 explained:

It helped me to understand values. While studying, I met different people from different social groups, and I understood well the values of this society, and I started to appreciate them. When I came in and had to start from minus, I didn’t understand their values. I did have values from my home country, my culture, and now I appreciate these values and I prefer them. If I had to choose again, I would do it again (P3).

Aside from enjoying the retraining experience, P3 said that the retraining helped her to find work in her desired field. After completing the retraining she worked for several months as a learning coordinator for a gaming company before getting married and moving with her husband to Sarnia Ontario. Although she was worried about her job prospects in Sarnia, to her surprise, P3 was able to secure employment as an administrative assistant. When her husband’s work assignment ended a
year later they moved back to Toronto and P3 has since been unemployed for approximately one year.

Dealing with unemployment has been difficult for P3. In talking about her unemployment P3 said, “I’ve never lived unemployed before. Never. Even in the very tough economical situations in Russia, I worked”! Unemployment has led P3 to feel very discouraged about her career prospects in Canada. She said that it is worse than starting from scratch. In fact, she feels like she has started “not from zero but from minus”. When she compared her career attainments in Canada to her career back in Russia she said, “when I worked in my previous career in Russia, I grew with every company I worked for. I never had any doubts in myself. And here, my self esteem and personality changed drastically”.

Overall P3 has experienced a difficult career transition in Canada. Although she managed to overcome many difficulties along her journey by adjusting to a new culture, taking retraining and finding some desirable work, she is currently unemployed and feels very worried about her future career development prospects in Canada. P3 is currently volunteering and applying for jobs daily, however, she reported that she has had very few interviews. She believes that prejudice against foreign born workers, her age and economic conditions are responsible for her experienced difficulty with securing desired work. She thinks factors such as her Canadian retraining and her personality have contributed to experienced successes. In particular, P3 credits her devotion to high work standards and her sense of humour.

Despite these attributes, her experience with unemployment has led P3 to feel worried about the future. Although she offered some explanations (e.g., her age, the economy), she is having difficulty fully understanding why she has not been able to secure employment over the last year. P3 explained:

I used to have problems in my home country, when we had hard economic times and I had my son at home and we didn’t have something to eat for supper or breakfast... The temperature in
the apartment was zero and it’s winter outside, like serious problems but they were natural. This problem doesn’t seem natural because I’m following and seeking a job based on the rules which this country offers, and I follow these rules and still nothing—It’s not making sense (P3).

In order to try and locate employment, P3 plans to continue applying and volunteering. She has also contemplated moving to South America. She does not plan to complete any future retraining due to her age and due to not feeling convinced that additional retraining would help solve her problem with unemployment.

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 (P4) is a 54-year-old male from Argentina who immigrated to Canada in June 2004. In Argentina P4 completed five years of University to become a chartered accountant and was registered at both the provincial and federal level. P4 reported that prior to immigrating to Canada he held two jobs. One job involved working as an accountant at a bank and he also ran his own business as an accountant. He recalled that he found his career in Argentina to be very satisfying and his career was very central to his life. P4 said: “I really loved it, and I was feeling comfortable there”.

P4 and his wife decided to immigrate to Canada in order to provide better opportunities for their adolescent children. He had heard from friends that Canada was an enjoyable place to live. Work was not involved in his decision to leave Argentina.

Prior to immigrating to Canada P4 expected that he might have to take some training courses to work as an accountant in Canada. He recognized that Canada had different taxation procedures and knew he would have to learn new sets of rules. However, he expected that the training would be relatively brief compared to his prior training. P4 said: “I was not initially planning to do the whole career again”.
In terms of work expectations, P4 recognized that he would likely not work as a formal accountant in Canada right away; however, he expected that he would be able to obtain entry-level employment in the accounting field. P4 explained:

I knew that initially I could start some steps down, so I don’t need to start as an accountant but I can start as an assistant, see how things are done here. For sure, this country has different rules, different ways of doing things. But the main part, I knew about it, so I was not expecting to get accountant here, but yes, assistant or clerk. Something that can introduce me to how things are done here so I can learn because I feel I’m capable to learn things very quickly (P4).

Despite his expectations, P4 reported that finding work was the greatest difficulty he encountered when he first arrived in Canada. Suggesting that he felt alienated from others and disrespected because of being an immigrant, P4 said:

I don’t know if the right word could be ‘respect’, but what I was when I came here, it was a huge difference. People admire me there [Argentina], and when I came here, things were all the opposite. Because you are an immigrant, you are nobody. Really bad, really really bad. Once I got in one of my survival jobs that I had initially, I remember somebody make a math equation and I resolve it right away. And the guy said, ‘Ah, don’t listen to him. He’s an immigrant; he doesn’t know anything’. And then nobody talked to me. I felt really bad (P4).

These types of experiences took a toll on P4’s well-being and confidence. P4 stated:

I became very old myself. Like before, I was energetic with a lot of willingness to do things, then suddenly these hits or punches or whatever puts you in a state where you slow down and you start not feeling very confident with yourself (P4).

P4 coped with these difficulties by turning to his family for support and remembering his motivation for moving. He said: “I knew that Canada is a beautiful country to stay in, and I saw that my kids were developing, so I needed to do more effort to stay”.

P4 managed to sustain his efforts and continued to pursue work in his field. After working some survival jobs for several months as a mover, then a security guard and a carpet installer, P4 decided to take some college courses in accounting. In explaining his decision to pursue retraining P4 said: “I was going to be stuck forever doing survival jobs if I didn’t do something because no one was going to believe in my profession if I can’t prove I have some Canadian qualifications.” P4
reported that although he enjoyed some of his learning experiences, he also felt frustrated at times because he realized that he was covering material he had already learnt many years ago. In talking about how he felt during the retraining P4 said:

You start feeling frustrated or mad for the fact that everybody tries to sell you education and what you need is probably not the whole education. What you need is somebody who shows you how to match the one thing with the other (P4).

As a result of having to review previously learnt material, P4 suggested that the retraining discouraged him in pursuing his career. He said: “when you start realizing that things are not much different than what you already know, you start saying: “Oh, my God. Why am spending so much effort and money on this?” Another difficulty with the retraining involved P4 having to work an extra overnight job (in security) in order to pay for the retraining, while maintaining his family home. P4 recalled: “I was not used to working at night, I was not used to being awake all night. I had problems to re-accommodate myself. It was a tough moment”.

Despite experiencing some difficulties related to retraining, P4 agreed that the retraining was helpful in building his confidence and increasing some of his knowledge and skills. Ultimately he ended up viewing the retraining as helpful and necessary, saying: “It was completely necessary; otherwise you don’t get in. You don’t have choices”. The retraining did indeed seem to help P4 find more meaningful work. After taking a few courses related to accounting and software P4 managed to obtain a job as an administrative assistant that involved him using some of his accounting skills.

He attributed his success in landing this job to “luck”, saying:

I don’t know if I was lucky or if it was my time, but one way or the other I was lucky. I got in touch with the right person who needed a cheap accountant and me as an immigrant, he had it. When he tried me, he was not sure what I was; but he was really happy. So he was paying me three or four times less, but that gave me opportunity. I worked for more than five years with him, and okay, the company didn’t do as well. But at least he had what he wanted and it helped me (P4).

Despite not getting to fully use his skills and abilities, P4 responded positively to this new work role. He compared this job to his previous career in Argentina by saying:
There [Argentina], I was a professional chartered accountant, giving advices to any kind of company. Here, I was part of a company, participating, so it was different. I didn’t mind. Like I said before, I came with one purpose: family purpose. And this is fine with me. So it was kind of relaxing, not having so much responsibilities, and putting all my effort in one nest: working for the company and doing all my best to keep this company working (P4).

Because P4 found the job sufficiently satisfying, he decided not to complete a Canadian accounting certificate. Being in his fifties, P4 had planned to stay with the company until retirement.

Unfortunately, the company ended up downsizing and laid P4 off in the spring of 2011. P4 has been unemployed ever since then. Discussing how being unemployment has led him to be concerned about his future, P4 said:

Now I am getting very concerned because I have another item working against me, I think, is my age. I’m that much older than when I came, and things like my age, it looks like employers don’t like to consider that… because I’ve been called for several interviews already, and I feel the interview goes perfect, goes fine. But somehow I’m not elected. So I start thinking, ‘What’s going on?’ My job developer said, ‘Sorry, but your age is not…’ And the economic crisis this moment, another factor (P4).

Overall P4 thinks that his age, the economy and prejudice have been the main factors that have challenged his ability to succeed with his career in Canada. In discussing the barriers that many immigrants in Canada seem to face P4 said: “we didn’t come here to have more privilege than any Canadian starting professional. But yes, at least to have some opportunities”. In dealing with such barriers, P4 thinks that his common sense, work experience and work ethic have been his most significant career assets. Commenting on other factors that facilitate career success P4 also said:

Luck. Luck, luck, luck. If you have luck, like the luck I had with this employer, if this employer, instead of having the bad luck to close, he would have been successful, and I would be the happiest guy in Canada, working long and having a good position here. I believe the most important thing is luck (P4).

For the future P4 intends to keep applying for jobs and networking. He is reluctant to pursue further training due to his age. However, P4 indicated that if he remains unemployed for much longer he may need to reevaluate his options. In regards to his intentions for retraining P4 said: “I’m
confused in this moment, but for sure if this situation with me becomes firm unemployment, for sure I need to”.

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) is a 45-year-old male from Uganda who immigrated to Canada in December of 2004. In Uganda P5 completed a Masters Degree in education and was registered as a teacher. Prior to immigrating to Canada P5 worked as a vice principal and a teacher in a private boarding school for adolescent boys. He reported being quite satisfied with his role and related responsibilities, saying, “I felt satisfied because I was teaching, I was looking after children, I was looking after teachers and workers at the school”. At the same time P5 was dissatisfied with his wages and long work hours.

When asked what led him to immigrate to Canada, P5 said that a parent at his former school (a regional councilor) encouraged him to move to Canada because there would be better opportunities for him to advance in his career. P5 recalled that he also wanted the opportunity to pursue a Canadian PhD.

Prior to immigrating, P5 intended to continue working as a teacher in Canada. When asked about his expectations for employment in Canada he said: “I was expecting to get a job, the way I had a job in Uganda. To have a permanent job, teaching as a teacher. I teach, teach, teach”. When asked what factors contributed to his confidence in finding work as a teacher P5 said: “because, I’ve seen white people coming to our country, and they could fit within us”. In terms of educational retraining, P5 said that he expected to do some retraining (he wanted to pursue a PhD) but he did not anticipate having difficulty with getting his previous credentials recognized and continuing to work as a teacher.

Upon arriving in Canada P5 first encountered difficulty adjusting to the weather. He recalled: “I came in December and weather was a very big problem. I had to put on a thief mask, I was
hiding myself. That was the first hardship I endured”. P5 also quickly discovered that finding desirable work was difficult. To secure work as a teacher P5 needed to have his former credentials re-evaluated, which involved contacting his previous university and writing formal exams for the Ontario College of Teachers.

P5 worked on regaining his teaching designation for two years. In the meantime he worked a survival job in a factory. Referring to the factory job P5 said: “I was tired of going to the factory. Because when you stand up, I felt very embarrassed and very dehumanized”. In order to get away from factory work more quickly, P5 decided to take a personal support worker (PSW) course so that he could find more satisfying work, while still working on his teacher certification. Although he was frustrated by having to take new educational retraining in order to find more meaningful work, P5 said that the retraining helped to increase his confidence. Discussing the retraining P5 stated: “it was okay because I knew I was going to get knowledge. Knowledge is power; I wanted to get more power”. Unfortunately confidence was the only thing that P5 felt that he gained from the retraining. When asked whether he thought the retraining was necessary P5 replied:

No. It was not necessary at all. I tell you there is nothing that I gained when I went for the teaching. In fact, I expected a lot, but I didn’t get it. Instead, I was giving them more of what I learned from the developing world. So, I didn’t gain much, but only to give me the confidence that I trained (P5).

Later on P5 also admitted to learning about the importance of student-centered teaching and how to use new technologies. And, despite feeling somewhat resentful and disappointed about taking his educational retraining, P5 also reported that the retraining led to new work opportunities. First, the PSW certificate allowed P5 to obtain work in a nursing home. Unfortunately P5 did not enjoy this work as much as he had hoped because he felt like the doctors and nurses looked down on him and he felt degraded. Fortunately, once he completed the certification P5 soon secured employment at a Catholic high school. Not long into the job however, P5 began experiencing some difficulties with the staffing team. In particular, P5 said that he was accused of sleeping in class by
the principal of the school. P5 contested this accusation and he became very upset with his supervisors. He perceived his supervisors to be racist against him because he could not understand why they were making allegations against him. P5 coped with this situation by resigning and looking for another job. He felt very discouraged. In remembering this time period P5 recalled: “that’s when I thought I should go back home… I thought this is not the place for me”.

Fortunately, after persisting a while longer, P5 ended up securing another teaching job at a private school. He enjoyed this job and remained there for a couple of years and was promoted to vice principal. A short time later the school was closed due to funding difficulties and P5 has been looking for another teacher job ever since. As a result of the school closing P5 has not taught in approximately six months. He has returned to working as a PSW and does occasional factory work to help pay his bills. Despite some setbacks, P5 remains determined that he will secure a new teaching job. Revealing his determination P5 stated: “my mother was a teacher, my father was a teacher. If you look at my blood, there is teaching in my blood. Give me another thing, I will not take it. I will retire as a teacher”. At another point in the interview P5 also said: “I was born a teacher, and I will die a teacher”!

Looking ahead P5 intends to keep looking for work as a teacher. In the meantime he volunteers within his church by assisting with education initiatives. P5 would also like to still pursue a PhD in education, although he is worried about whether or not pursuing a higher education will be a possibility for him. Despite his hardships, P5 expressed no regrets. When he was asked if he would have done anything differently he said:

I think I wouldn’t do anything different, because I love teaching, and there’s no way I would go out of it. I will suffer with it, and I will suffer with it until the end. I even told my wife, because my wife was telling me ‘please, why don’t you find something else?’ I said, ‘Look, honey, this is where I belong’ (P5).

Overall P5 boils down the difficulty he has faced in establishing his career in Canada to language barriers and prejudice and/or racism. When asked what factors he thinks made his career
transition difficult P5 said: “my colour. Being black, made it difficult. And my accent, being that I don’t speak the way people who were born here speak, made it difficult”. Racism as a career barrier emerged several times during P5’s interview. Discussing racism as a barrier, P5 stated: “Here, it is biased. You may not believe it, but I’ve seen it. Biasness in employers… Because of religion, race, colour. You may not like it, but it is there. I’ve faced it”. In trying to identify the factors that have assisted him in his job search P5 said:

What made it a little bit easier is that I’m professional. I’m enthusiastic, whenever going to an interview; I will make sure I show them that I am a teacher. So my experience and professionalism probably have been the only saviour on my path. But the undoing is my colour and my accent (P5).

Despite his vocational difficulties, P5 still retains his identity as a teacher and he remains hopeful about his future career prospects. In anticipating his future direction he said, “I’m not ashamed to say I’m a teacher, wherever I am. I’m not ashamed, because that’s what I am. And I know that at one time I’m going to get a job again in the teaching profession”.

**Participant 6**

Participant 6 (P6) is a 28-year-old male from India who immigrated to Canada in September of 2004. In India P6 completed a Bachelor’s Degree in commerce, with a major in accounting. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P6 worked as a financial analyst for a large company for approximately a year and a half. P6 reported that he enjoyed his career in India:

I was quite satisfied. I was still looking for some growth at the same time, but I was young… I didn’t know what I wanted to do in the future. It was my first full-time job after graduating, so it was quite challenging, a lot to learn, so I didn’t get the chance to hate the job (P6).

His career was very important, but not necessarily central to his life.

Despite enjoying a new career in India, P6 decided to immigrate to Canada because he wanted to pursue further education outside of India and his uncle already resided in Canada. P6 explained:

I had a fairly good financial background from my parents, and my uncle was here at that time, and I was debating to go either between U.S., U.K., Canada, or Australia. I picked Canada because my uncle was here and he had a well developed business. So my future was like
okay, I’ll go to Canada, I’ll study something, and I may join my uncle’s business after that (P6).

Prior to immigrating to Canada P6 was not worried about finding work in Canada because he planned to pursue further education and knew that it would be possible to work for his uncle’s company if he wanted to. P6 prepared for his arrival by taking an international language test and applying to college. He had researched online and went to an educational consultant in India before deciding to apply to a college in Toronto to complete a diploma in Marketing Management Financial Services.

When P6 arrived in Canada he was excited to start his new life, saying, “I enjoyed that moment of the new environment”. At the same time, he also recalled feeling somewhat homesick because he missed his family. Luckily P6 was able to live with his uncle, which was helpful from both a financial and an emotional standpoint. P6 reported having a fairly smooth transition. In discussing encountered challenges after he first arrived P6 said: “other than missing my parents and my friends at home, there were no other big challenges”.

Immediately after arriving in Canada P6 enrolled at a local college and found his educational retraining assisted him with his transition. P6 recalled:

80% of the students were international students, and 80% or 90% were from India, and different parts of India... So that really helped because you feel that you are not the only one here. You talk to people and you help each other out in any situation. ‘How did you get your SIN card”? ‘How did you get your Health Card”? Whatever it is, you kind of fight together with it. That really helped, having some friends around in the same boat (P6).

Social support therefore seemed to assist P6 with making an easier adjustment. He reported that he did not find his immigration experience to be stressful. In fact, the experience seemed to have a positive impact on him. P6 stated, “I think it was positive, because, a lot of things which you have to do here is by yourself. It’s a lot of exposure, you get independent, and it really boosts your self-confidence”.
P6 enjoyed his year-long college program. In fact, P6 described his course as “a perfect match because it suited his interests by blending financial analysis with marketing management”. The program also assisted P6 to obtain his first job in Canada. As he explained:

They [the college] had a big list of twenty or thirty of the companies that wanted to hire at that time, and there is postings, you apply for a job, and if you qualify, they will interview you. It was clearly not a big, big challenge. I did see a few of my peer students didn’t get a job, or a co-op, but I didn’t find that challenging. It was the first interview I got, and I got the job (P6).

Because of the ease at which P6 found his first job, he described his Canadian career development as “falling into place nicely” without much planning. Not only did the college program assist P6 to locate employment in the form of a co-op placement, he also reported that the educational retraining helped to increase his knowledge and skills, which helped to establish himself in Canada. Talking about his retraining P6 said, “for sure, it sharpened my skills” and “retraining overall helped me 100% to stay in Canada. I probably wouldn’t have stayed in Canada otherwise”.

The educational retraining also helped P6 to define his career path. In discussing the impact of the retraining P6 explained:

It helped me a lot because I was never focused on my career path anyways. I didn’t know how to find my career before that point. But after retraining and having the co-op, I knew, not knowing what else I could do, I really liked it, and I was more convinced that this is the path that I probably want to take (P6).

In further discussing how the retraining helped to guide his career path, P6 said: “retraining on the financial side, because that’s where I wanted to go, helped me to concrete that path”.

During the retraining P6 had a chance to explore his career path by working for his uncle and then at his co-op placement at a bank. Although the co-op placement only lasted four months, P6 was able to secure a full-time job with the same company after he graduated from the retraining program. He has worked there ever since and enjoys his career. Reflecting on his current job P6 said:

I feel pretty good. It’s quite challenging. It’s a bit different from what I was doing before. It’s challenging, at the same time I see a lot of opportunity to grow in this job. I can fairly say that
I’m doing what I want to do at this stage (P6).

P6 also said that he has found a new career identity in Canada and is fairly satisfied with his Canadian work experience so far.

Looking ahead to the future P6 is thinking about pursuing further education. At the current time he is still debating whether he will pursue an MBA or more certificate courses. He stated that finances are the biggest barrier to pursuing an MBA. When asked to predict his vocational direction five years from now P6 said:

Where do I see myself 5 years from now? That’s scary. I don’t want to talk about that. Career-wise, I’m not sure if I want to change my career, I’m not at that point already. I’m still learning what I’m doing right now, and I see good potential in this side of the business. I don’t know, in 5 years, hopefully there will be something surprising (P6).

Overall P6 credits his retraining as the factor that most contributed to his career development in Canada. He stated:

It was a very good approach for me to get retrained in Canada, and that’s what helped me for getting a job, what I’m doing right now. So I think that was the most important factor, about where my career is going (P6).

P6 did not identify barriers to his Canadian career development except that the cost of higher education deters him from readily pursuing an MBA. He has some concerns about staying in his current position long-term and not advancing to another role, however, P6 is generally positive about his choices and did not express any regrets. In summarizing his experiences P6 said:

Looking back, I don’t know if I would have done anything differently, I don’t know what the outcome would be. But I think I needed a change, a different approach. I could have done a lot different, a lot better, but I’m not really unsatisfied with what I did (P6).

Participant 7

Participant 7 (P7) is a 38-year-old male from China who immigrated to Canada in November of 2003. In China P7 completed a Master’s degree in electrical engineering and immediately before he immigrated to Canada, P7 worked as a maintenance engineer in a factory. P7 reported that he was not very satisfied with his career in China. In particular, he thought that the company he worked
for was having difficulties with running a business. Despite not being satisfied with his job, P7’s career was central to his life because he needed the income to support himself.

P7 made a decision to immigrate to Canada because he wanted to pursue a better life and a new career. In reflecting on his decision to come to Canada P7 said: “It’s freedom, it’s peaceful. I wanted to have a career change in Canada. There is still some restriction of freedom in my home country, so I choose to leave my home country and come to Canada”. P7 had heard about Canada from books and television and was eager to pursue this new “opportunity”. As part of his preparation he began taking English language training. P7 was optimistic that he could find work in Canada. In recalling his expectations he said, “Yeah, I thought it would be easy to find a job in Canada when I was in China”.

When P7 first arrived in Canada he felt happy to find things as he had expected in terms of the landscape and the culture. P7 had prepared himself by reading books about Canada, however, he wasn’t prepared for the difficulties he encountered. First, despite taking language training, P7 found it difficult to communicate in a new language. In discussing the greatest difficulties he faced when he first arrived P7 said, “The most difficult thing is about the employment opportunity. It’s tough for the English as a Second Language people. It is tough for the people who want to go back to school, because of the language barrier”. To assist him with his difficulties, P7 sought out opportunities to learn English and he also went to a resource centre for immigrants.

Despite using a program called ‘LINK’ for assistance with improving his language skills, the stress of adjusting to a new culture had an impact on P7. He recalled, “I think it really influenced our [he and his wife’s] psychological or mental state… We feel frustration. Sometimes we argued about the life, the opportunity”. In addition to experiencing difficulty with communicating in a new language, P7 also encountered difficulties locating a desirable job. He was unemployed for the first
six months after his arrival. Then, P7 ended up working in a restaurant for nearly two years before he decided to pursue educational retraining.

Due to difficulty finding desired employment, P7 chose to complete a college diploma in hospitality and tourism. During his program P7 completed a co-op placement where he worked as a retail salesperson at a winery. P7 said that “luck” was responsible for securing the co-op placement because he had entered a contest put on by the winery and winning the competition gave him a connection that later helped him to get an interview. Aside from facilitating him getting a co-op job, returning to school also proved to be an enjoyable experience for P7. In talking about how he enjoyed his retraining experience P7 said: “The new learning experience, for me, was very exciting, because I’m back to school. I’m student again. I loved that program, I loved the new career, and I felt good”. Retraining in the hospitality field was a new experience for P7. When he compared his new education with his previous engineering background he stated that the main difference is: “Communication with people… It’s very different. In the engineering program, we dealt with the facility, the machine, the equipment, so that’s different. Now I love to talk with people, to communicate with people”.

The only thing that P7 did not like about his retraining program was the cost of his tuition. To help afford the cost, P7 took out a government education loan. Unfortunately, the educational retraining has not yet led to desired employment. In discussing this issue P7 said: “something unexpected about the retraining is… my job. Because, even though I took a new program, when I started to work, it’s still an entry level job. Entry level job is below my expectation, but I have to accept that”. P7 is currently working in a retail position that is part-time September until April and full-time for the summer. P7 is unsatisfied with the job’s low level of pay and said: “The thing I don’t like is the rate, because it’s still minimum wage. It’s not a highly paid job. This is just for a student. This is what I don’t like”. Despite this issue, P7 said that there are aspects of the job that he
enjoys. Explaining what he enjoys P7 said: “This current job is a program related job. I really like this job because it’s related to my program, it makes me feel connected with the industry, and through this job, I get to know a lot of people”. When he compared his current job to the job he had in China P7 stated, “I think it’s totally different, but I like the employment here better than from China… Because this is a new career, I have a passion in this new career. I communicate with people, I feel very good”.

Aside from continuing to work at his part-time retail job, P7 is also currently completing further education. He had originally completed a college diploma in hospitality and tourism and after continuing to experience difficulty finding desired employment he decided to upgrade his education by pursuing a university degree in the same subject. P7 is currently halfway through a four year program. He looks forward to finishing his degree in 2013. P7 is optimistic that the degree will help him to start a new career. In predicting his future career development P7 said: “I will have a professional job, I will get involved in a new industry, a new career. I will do better. I will make more money than my current job. That’s my expectation”. About the future P7 optimistically said: “I think with the economy growing, there will more opportunity, a better opportunity for me to work in this industry. I feel positive with my new career”.

Overall P7 pointed to difficulties with not having his credentials recognized and language barriers as the main factors that have hindered his career development in Canada. Talking about language as a barrier P7 said: “language is a barrier because language is everywhere, when you talk to people, when you do paperwork”. For this reason P7 suggested that: “if people plan to come to Canada, they should do more work before they come... They should know more about Canada and get their English ready, because this English is very important. Bilingual abilities [are] very important”! P7 also suggested that prejudice and discrimination are barriers for new immigrants. P7 said: “I think there is still a virus for a new Canadian or immigrant. I was not born in Canada; I feel
sometimes there is embarrassment for us”. Perhaps as a result of this barrier, P7 turned to the Chinese community when he was having difficulty finding work and he found that his cultural background then became helpful. As P7 explained:

I think another important factor was my background, because I have Chinese background, so when I was searching for a job, my background really helped me. My goal was [to work] for a Chinese company. So, when I was working in a restaurant, it was a Chinese background. I can speak Mandarin, and they needed people who could speak Mandarin, so this was really helpful (P7).

Participant 8

Participant 8 (P8) is a 44-year-old woman who emigrated from Albania in February of 2004. In Albania P8 completed a Bachelor’s Degree in Finance. Prior to immigrating to Canada P8 worked as a financial controller in a private company. She reported that she had been very satisfied with her career in Albania and work was quite central to her overall life. Discussing her career in Albania P8 said:

It was an important role, because, like I said, I started when I finished university. I started as a junior financial analyst and then kept going and I became a senior financial analyst, and finally a controller. So it was a very important part of my life, my career (P8).

Despite an enjoyable career, P8 decided to immigrate to Canada to seek out a better life. When asked how she made the decision to immigrate to Canada P8 said:

Simply for a better life. Coming from an ex-communist country with a lot of… not being allowed to do… not a free life… even though after 1990, after the wall of Berlin, it’s changed, but it was a transition. A very long transition which made me and my husband, forced us to do that. We couldn’t stay anymore. We wanted a better life (P8).

P8’s decision was also influenced by her brother who had immigrated to Canada and was encouraging her and her husband to immigrate as well.

Having a family connection in Canada may have influenced P8’s expectations. She said that before immigrating to Canada she was aware that finding work in her field would not be easy. In talking about her expectations P8 said: “I knew that when I come here, I have to start from zero.
From scratch. I was very well aware of this thing. So it’s a good thing to be prepared for what you expect”. Although she knew she would likely have to pursue retraining, P8 was not sure exactly what type of training she would take. She explained, “I didn’t know exactly what to expect. I knew I had to come here and do training because I knew that my experience from Albania wasn’t that great to go and look for work here in the profession”.

When P8 first arrived she had to adjust to a new language and a new culture. She described feeling lost initially. She recalled: “To be honest, the first day or two, you feel lost. You’re lost. You come into a new country, a new culture, a new climate. Everything new”. P8 explained how she relied on social support to help her cope:

Because I was with my family, and my brother was here, and I had friends, the first month or two wasn’t that bad for me. I had people around me, and showing me where to go, and all the papers and everything I needed (P8).

Revealing how she benefited from having a positive attitude and realistic expectations P8 said:

I’d been always an optimistic person, so I took it, and I said if you come prepared here, you are prepared, you are aware that you have to start from scratch, then it’s easier. If your expectations are high and you come here, you are disappointed (P8).

Despite having social support and a positive attitude, P8 said that she encountered some difficulties when she first arrived in Canada. In particular, P8 had difficulty adjusting to communicating in a new language. P8 recounted:

When I came here, I was looking at people’s mouths, what they’re saying, understanding nothing, almost nothing. And I had to stay home because my younger son was two years old, so I had to stay with him. So I didn’t have contact in the first months with a lot of people, but I went to the bank, and that was the first thing that I had to think of… how to understand, even though I studied English, it’s different if you don’t talk (P8).

Explaining how she encountered difficulties with having her credentials recognized, P8 said:

My background, my work experience was in all fields of accounting, so I was looking for jobs, but without going to any training… Then when I went to CGA, I was so disappointed because only one or two of my credits was recognized, and I had to start from scratch (P8).
Realizing that she needed to take educational retraining, P8 decided to start taking courses in accounting and finance. P8 wanted to take courses through the Certified General Accountants Association, however, because the courses were expensive P8 decided to pursue courses at a local college. P8 recalled:

So based on the evaluation from the CGA, I started taking courses, because there are four levels of courses in the CGA, so I had to start from the beginning and I took courses from the first level. So I was able to complete the 1st level and the 2nd level. Then, after that you have to take courses through the CGA. I took only one because it’s very expensive (P8).

Adjusting to being back in school was challenging for P8, however, she described meeting this challenge head on:

Going back to school after twenty years since you’ve finished university… It’s something that even in your language, it’s difficult to go back, right? But, you know, the first course maybe was a little bit hard for me, but you get that routine, and then it wasn’t that hard. All the courses that I took there, I had like A, A+, no problem (P8).

The main difficulty remained the cost of tuition because P8’s family was receiving social assistance at the time in order to help pay the bills.

Fortunately P8 was able to receive assistance from a program called ‘Career Bridge’. The non-profit organization had just started a program that offered some new immigrants a chance to complete an internship to help establish their career in Canada. P8 was one of the first interns in the program. She ended up completing a four month co-op placement and was subsequently hired on full-time by the company. P8 was later promoted to a senior financial analyst and has now been with the company for four years.

Overall P8 credits the internship program with helping her to succeed in her career development. She reported that the courses she took were helpful with improving her English communication skills; however, she does not think that the courses were necessary for her to be competent in her job as an accountant. In talking about her retraining P8 explained, “it helped me with the communication, but professionally it wasn’t that different. I knew what I knew, I had the
experience. It didn’t change anything”. As a result, P8 felt that the educational retraining was just a formality to allow her to access Canadian work opportunities. Discussing this issue P8 said:

I would say you have to do that [educational training], because you’re new in the country. You don’t have a network. If you know someone and they can refer you somewhere, without going to training, you can get a job. But you have to go through that to often be… To have the opportunity to apply, because employers here, they want to see something Canadian, either training, or work experience, or a reference. It’s different if you decide to change careers and go for something different, yeah, you have to go. But to continue in your profession, I don’t think that the training is… You need some kind of training, but not to go back to school and do the whole thing. It’s like you’re wasting time (P8).

Therefore the retraining seemed necessary to P8 only because it allowed her to access opportunities such as the co-op placement, not because she actually required new skills to work in her profession. Fortunately the retraining allowed P8 to more easily access the internship program, which led to permanent full-time work in her chosen occupation.

Today P8 is very satisfied with her job as a senior financial analyst. In discussing her current job P8 said: “I feel very good. I am appreciated. The work that I do, I feel very good. I got promoted every year in my performance. I have the maximum, so I’m very, very satisfied with the job that I have”. When P8 compared her current career to her career back in Albania she said: “I think I’m at the same level now that I was there. Being a controller there, and a senior financial analyst here, I think they’re comparable, the same, so I’m very satisfied with what I have now”. Looking ahead to the future P8 feels optimistic. In fact, contemplating her future career prospects P8 said: “I don’t have any concerns”.

Participant 9

Participant 9 (P9) is a 35-year-old female from China who immigrated to Canada in April of 2003. In China P9 completed a Bachelor’s Degree in Commerce and a Post-Graduate Degree in Information Systems Management. Before immigrating to Canada P9 worked in an office environment and was responsible for: “the bookkeeping, the reconciliation, the financial statements preparation and analysis, and helping the management to make decisions based on the financial
P9 reported being “somewhat satisfied” with her job. She enjoyed the stability of the job, however she disliked commuting long distances (three hours a day) and felt that it would take a long time to advance in her career. As a result of some dissatisfaction, P9’s career in China was not very central to her sense of self.

P9 made a decision to immigrate to Canada because she had friends and family who decided to immigrate to Canada. P9 explained:

Basically, in that time it was a kind of a trend, and some of our families, they immigrated here, and relatives suggested- ‘as long you’re young, you can maybe look into the decision… maybe you stay there or come back’. So I’d say at that time, it was kind of a trend (P9).

Before arriving in Canada, P9 did not know what to expect in terms of her future career prospects and that she tried not to form expectations. P9 explained: “Because I always judge myself, because you know, you need proof of language skill, a lot of stuff, and maybe the lifestyle here, so, for myself, I didn’t put too much expectation on that”. P9 did however expect that she would likely have to take some type of educational retraining. In order to help herself prepare for Canadian retraining, while still in China P9 took an English course and wrote a TOEFL (English language) exam.

When P9 first arrived in Canada she recalled facing difficulty adjusting to a new culture and a new language. In discussing her initial experiences P9 said:

I think it’s kind of strange because it’s… I did travel outside before, in other countries, but I think Canada is kind of not as comfortable a feeling as home, I think because the lifestyle here. The weather for me is fine, but the language, I think the communication, it’s fairly tough (P9).

In particular, P9 reported having difficulty having conversations in English and this proved to be challenging because she experienced difficulty finding things such as desirable places to eat and employment assistance programs. P9 discussed the toll this had on her by saying:

I think the communication is not smooth, is not good, so definitely I think it had a little bit effect on the family relationship, because people are not relaxed at home. Here, you cannot
say what you want to say, because it’s a different language, and then also the culture is different, so I think you need to adapt to that (P9).

To help her cope with these challenges P9 decided to follow someone’s suggestion to volunteer somewhere. She ended up volunteering at an IT company and found that the experience helped to improve her English communication skills. P9 described the experience by saying: “I took a workshop and one of the counsellors reminded me to do the volunteer job in a big IT company. Then for three months… the volunteer job really helped me a lot to improve my language”. Despite facing challenges with language barriers, P9 said she persisted and found it rewarding to overcome the challenges. She offered an analogy of her experience:

I say first it’s tough, and then you overcome it. It takes time. So you just feel achievement. I can recall the feeling. It’s like people on the train… people chasing the train, people on the train are faster because the language you learn is gradual, so I think I feel I’m chasing the train. But when you get on the train, I think it’s kind of an achievement (P9).

Aside from her volunteer job, P9 continued to have difficult finding a job and was unemployed for the first six months after her arrival. In order to help pay her bills P9 continued to look for survival jobs and she managed to find part-time work as a waitress in a restaurant. P9 also decided to enroll at a local college to work on an accounting diploma. During her educational retraining P9 continued to face difficulties with adapting to a new language. P9 recalled her difficulties:

I think the thing is, I need to translate the language every time. I try reading the books, I need to translate from English to Chinese. That is time consuming. Even when I take the exam. Maybe it’s take more time to reading the question than the local people.

P9 also found the more independent learning style challenging. She said that when she had studied in China, she was used to having the professor provide summaries for her, while in Canada she found that she had to do relatively more reading on her own. Despite some challenges, P9 said that she enjoyed the flexibility that the Canadian training offered in terms of class times and subjects. P9 also stated that the retraining was fairly important and helpful in assisting her with her career
development. In discussing the importance of the retraining P9 said: “If I give a rating, I would say the rating is a 7/10 or an 8/10. It’s important, yeah”. P9 also agreed that the retraining was necessary for her to be competent to work as an accountant in Canada:

You need to understand how the company works, how they operate. Like the country, they have different types of rules. Here they have different accounting rules. You need to understand this first, and you need to learn people how to do the right bookkeeping or financial statements. So that’s why I think that it is important to learn before you can take the job here (P9).

Overall, although P9 faced some challenges in pursuing educational retraining, she viewed the end result in a fairly positive light. She stated that the retraining increased her knowledge and gave her an understanding of how to work in Canada. This led to an increase in her confidence to pursue her desired career in accounting.

After completing her college diploma and completing a co-op placement, P9 was able to find full-time work as an accountant. Although at the time of her interview P9 was on maternity leave, she described having a Canadian job that is similar to her previous job in China:

It’s like an accountant role, and it’s a smaller-medium sized company. So daily job is… you’re doing the bank statements, reconciliation, daily transactions, and also the bookkeeping stuff, and using accounting software. And also monthly… closing, and doing the taxation reporting, and also helping prepare financial statements for a manager to make decisions (P9).

Even though P9 described having a similar role to her previous career in China, she discussed some important differences related to challenges she has faced in Canada:

As I said, here is more challenge, because in China, when I held a job, it’s like… the company is really stable, as long as you’re alive, you can stay, maybe even stay forever. But here, you need… as I said, the company is more private-owned, so you never know (P9).

Aside from a relative lack of stability, P9 also mentioned how she faces an “invisible pressure” working in Canada because of language barriers:

Seems like you feel a little bit intense because when I enter into the office, you will say ‘oh, I have to speak English’. You have the pressure that you need to speak different language, not like before you’re just kind of easy, here, it’s kind of invisible pressure (P9).
Despite facing new challenges in her current career in Canada, P9 summarized her career satisfaction by saying: “For me, it’s kind of neutral. I don’t like it that much, but I don’t dislike it much, so it’s more peace of mind for me”.

P9 also feels somewhat neutral about her future career prospects. In talking about the future she said: “The future… That is tough. I [feel] sort of optimistic and sort of concerned”. P9 said that she worries about not advancing in her career because she finds her recent work to be “boring”. P9 would like to pursue additional retraining to attain her formal CA certification; however, she is unsure of whether she can effectively balance her family life while pursuing more education. In expressing her concerns P9 said: “Yes, if I can balance family life and working life, yeah, but I know when you have the kids, it’s very tough”.

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) is a 38-year-old male from India who immigrated to Canada in July 2001. In India P10 completed Masters Degree in Business and Finance. Prior to arriving in Canada, P10 worked as an accounting manager for an international airline company. P10 was very satisfied with his career and said: “I was doing pretty well, I was earning very well, and I reached a good position. It was commensurate with my education, so it helped that”. P10 also liked that his job offered the opportunity for growth and said: “people appreciated intelligence and your initiative, and you were given a chance… a chance to grow”. However, P10 also talked about how he faced career-growth barriers:

There are barriers as well over there. For example, in India, there are cultural barriers at times. Not spoken of, but unspoken. For example, if you’re Christian, maybe you’d rise a little less faster than a normal Indian. Or you won’t get a government job, for example, very few of us work in that sector. So those are the barriers (P10).
P10’s career in India was important, however, work was not central because he was very focused on his family-life.

With his family in mind, P10 contemplated migrating to a country that offered more opportunities. Explaining why he decided to immigrate to Canada P10 said:

The quality of life, definitely. The Christians in the East, try to get out, if you can. Maybe this is not spoken of, but it is so, because, not that we are under any immediate threat in certain areas, but there are always undertones… But, we want to walk around those hurdles, and one of the ways to do that is by migrating, either to Australia, or to the UK, or to the United States, or to Canada (P10).

P10 chose Canada in particular because: “the immigration process was a lot quicker, and I had heard positive things about it”.

Based on what he had heard from other people, P10 expected that he would face some initial difficulties in re-establishing his career after immigration. In discussing his expectations he said: “Well, I knew it would be difficult because they always talk back home about Canadian experience”. However, P10 also expected that he would at least be able to secure an entry-level position related to his field. P10 explained:

You see, what happens over there, many people refer you to websites like Workopolis, Monster, etc, etc. When you look at the jobs on those sites, and you look at your resume, you say ‘hey, I can do that, this fits with what I was doing, so I have a fighting chance’. In saying so, I won’t say we were misled, but at least we hoped, reading a job profile online…you’d say ‘at least I could go for an interview’. It didn’t happen, unfortunately (P10).

In fact, P10 faced more challenges than he anticipated. Immediately after arriving in Canada P10 started applying for all types of jobs and ended up remaining unemployed for a couple of months. When asked about the impact that unemployment had on him, P10 said: “negatively. Very negatively. A feeling of ‘what can I really do here’… of closed doors. You feel shut out. It was really bad”. P10 continued to apply for jobs and was able to secure a few part-time survival jobs. He recalled: “I was working at McDonald’s, Subway, and Tim Horton’s… all three jobs at one time. I used to work from 5am to 1pm at McDonald’s, and then from 3pm to 11pm at Subway, and on the
weekends at Tim Horton’s as well”. P10 recalled feeling disappointed by the difficulty he faced in having his credentials recognized and securing employment within his field:

The sad part of it is, you could qualify to come to Canada, based on your education. We came in as economic migrants, we paid, not as refugees, so we came by the points system, the education system. That same education is not recognized here. So that was a kind of fallacy. I knew it would be difficult, but even for the basic of jobs requiring skills, much less than we had, we never thought that would be a problem (P10).

In addition to difficulty with finding desirable work, P10 also recalled having difficulty locating needed services and accessing transportation to get to and from work. P10 said: “not having a car and being in that area [Brampton], that was a really negative point, because, to get around, employers don’t want you”. P10 also encountered prejudice and discrimination. He recounted:

The shock came that certain Canadians, not all of them at least, thought that you were coming down from the boonies when you came over here, and they spoke to you as such, even on menial jobs... Some of them had the attitude ‘okay, you don’t know anything’, like you say you’re an accountant, you apply for a job, and they turn around and ask you ‘do you know debit and credit?’ And it’s like you’re shell shocked because, not only were the questions quite offensive, it’s the level of ignorance that really hit you in the head. What do these people really think we are? (P10).

Despite facing many challenges, P10 persisted in looking for work in his desired field and was able to secure a temporary position at a medium-sized bank. However, without fully utilizing his skills and abilities, P10 felt unsatisfied and decided to pursue Canadian educational retraining in order to advance his career. Describing his decision to pursue retraining P10 said:

I felt that it would put me on the same level as a Canadian applicant for job searches. Sometimes I find myself working alongside high school dropouts. How did they get that job? Heaven knows. And here I am with a Masters doing the same job as them (P10).

P10 enrolled in a financial securities course at a local college and started to work on earning a financial planner’s certificate. Recalling the difficulties he faced, P10 said:

I knew it would be difficult. Not in terms of the fact that I didn’t cover the syllabus before, but in finding time. In finding time for running your house, your family, as well as studying because back where we come from, we have a family support system, so if you’re studying, you’re left alone, and you don’t have to take care of those other areas. But over here, you have to do everything, plus work full-time. So that was a little bit jolting, though studying the material was easy, finding the time to study became difficult (P10).
Aside from time constraints, P10 also felt initially resentful of having to retrain. In recalling how he felt P10 said:

There was resistance… in the sense, ‘what the hell do you want me to do this course for? I completed this in the first year of university, and you’re asking me to do this stupid thing again, it doesn’t make any sense to me’. I can go forward, I don’t want to go back. But then when you realize that it’s important for finding a job (P10).

Therefore, P10’s resentment diminished over time as he realized that the retraining would be helpful to him for finding work in his field. In fact, P10 reflected positively on the flexibility of the training schedule and practical nature of his course work:

One thing I have to give credit for, the courses offered in Canada are very current in terms of what’s happening in the market. They’re revised frequently and they’re very up to date…With practical experiences, real time case examples and case studies, it was definitely a positive experience (P10).

P10 also felt that the training enhanced his confidence and assisted him in securing desirable employment in the finance sector. P10 explained:

It [retraining] gave me a stepping stone to apply, but didn’t necessarily mean it’d give me a job. It gave me the right to be called for an interview, but not be selected… but I would not be there if I had not done this. So, of the twenty places I applied, I got called for four places, and got selected for one (P10).

P10 obtained work at an international bank as a customer service representative. Although his current work is related to finance, P10 feels that many of his skills are not being utilized. When P10 was asked to compare his current job to his job in India he said:

It can’t be really compared because what I was doing over there was intellectually challenging, much more than what I’m doing over here. It was more growth-oriented and my skills were more appreciated. This [current job] only uses a quarter of my skills, my training. It’s a different ballgame totally (P10).

Despite feeling that his skills are not being fully realized, P10 expressed gratitude about having a job and stated: “I’m happy to have a job, because I know many people don’t… Though I know I could do better, but at the same time, my company right now is in financial turmoil”.


Looking ahead to the future, P10 would like to pursue additional retraining in order to qualify as a Certified Management Accountant. When asked to predict his future vocational direction he said: “Hopefully as a manager of an accounting division in a company or working for the government in a good position and contributing, not just earning a living but contributing to Canadians and immigrants alike”. P10 described feeling frustrated and discouraged about his career development prospects, however, he is trying to remain hopeful. When asked whether he felt worried, he said:

Not to the point of losing hope. It is challenging yes, it’s an uphill task, no doubt, but not to the point of being totally frustrated and losing hope and saying… Like I said, it correlates to your retraining, that assurance that if you do retrain, you do have a better chance. That’s the positive side (P10).

Participant 11

Participant 11 (P11) is a 47-year-old female from the Philippines who immigrated to Canada in December of 2003. While in the Philippines, P11 completed a Masters Degree in Business Administration and she worked as a bank manager. P11 reported that she was very satisfied with both her career and her standard of living in the Philippines and her career was very central to her sense of self. She had experienced rapid growth in her career and was focused on branching into corporate finance.

Although P11 was satisfied with her life in the Philippines, her family made the decision to immigrate to Canada in order to pursue better opportunities for the children. P11 explained the decision: “It was more about the future of the kids. Canada being first world compared to Philippines which is third world, there are more opportunities for them to grow and for their future”. P11 also wanted to leave the Philippines because she had been dealing with a court case against her corporate employer. P11 explained, “There was a court case against me as a bank manager, not me as a person, but because of my position, it was bugging me, so it’s a blessing in disguise”.

Before immigrating to Canada, P11 expected to have to start over in her career. Recalling her expectations P11 said:

I really expected I would not be working in the same field because I had these preconceived notions from friends and relatives that if you’re a manager back home you cannot right away be a manager there... I was already briefed, so I had a paradigm shift already that I would be starting all over (P11).

As a result, P11 expected that she would have to pursue educational retraining in Canada. She anticipated taking some form of continuing education, rather than returning to university. In order to prepare, P11 went to her former university and collected her course outlines.

Despite adjusting her expectations and doing some pre-planning, when P11 first arrived in Canada she encountered several difficulties. In particular, she found it difficult to adjust to the cold weather and to being away from her extended family. Recalling her initial difficulties, P11 said:

I felt so depressed because we arrived on Christmas and winter is depressing. Christmas and New Years is family time back home, most of the friends and relatives are getting together. We moved here and we’re just down to a small group, we didn’t have many friends and relatives here, and we were so, so, so sad. Even the kids wanted to go home within the first weeks (P11).

P11 also had to adjust to not having a car and to watching her children struggle. P11 recalled:

“There was one time when my eldest asked me- mom, why are we here? We are living like rats here!” On top of these challenges, both P11 and her husband also had difficulty finding work. In fact, they were both unemployed for approximately six months.

P11 coped with the difficulties by turning to her spirituality and by moving to an accessible location. She also did her best to persist in her efforts and maintain a positive attitude. P11 explained:

I’m a person who is goal-oriented. Whenever I want something, I always look in my mind that if my husband is not that strong, I should be stronger. Since we decided to come over and we don’t want to go back, we should really work hard on finding a job and do everything that we can. I was that go-go person. I made it a point that one of us should show that we’re determined, that one of us should be strong. If the kids can see that both of us are depressed and stressed out, they too will feel the same way. Who is the person who will be stronger? (P11).
P11 remained persistent and continued to send out countless resumes to apply for jobs related to accounting. She also decided to enroll in the ‘Skills for Change’ program that assisted immigrants with bridging their career. P11 ended up getting her first job within the accounting department at a hospital, where she worked part-time while continuing to further her education. P11 said that she applied for a scholarship and utilized her workplace’s educational assistance to work on pursuing her Certified Management Accountant designation. P11’s previous Master’s Degree allowed her to enroll in the accelerated program.

P11 reported that she had to re-adjust to being back in school. She discussed her age as a factor that made retraining more challenging:

You can’t deny the fact that when you’re older, in your forty’s or fifty’s, if you’re reading a topic that you used to absorb and comprehend in an hour, now you double it because you’re aging, so you absorb it in two hours instead of one hour (P11).

P11 also found group work challenging because she was not used to working within a group at school and she became frustrated when others did not pull their own weight. P11 recalled how she resented having to take educational retraining:

During the immigration process I was asked a lot of points about having an MBA, and work experience... Since you pass the immigration process, and this is what they are needing... my first reaction was ‘why should I study if I have all those credentials and qualifications?’ At this point, having all those work experiences and related education, I really resented it initially, but after six months of having no job, that was a wake-up call that we really have to retrain (P11).

Fortunately the retraining led to P11 feeling more confident and she secured desired work related to accounting. P11 has now worked as an accountant within the hospital system for seven years. In talking about her current position P11 said: “It’s the end goal. I was thinking of finding a job that is financially rewarding and related to my training, so my competence can be utilized. This position is fulfilling all of those objectives”. However, P11 also said that she is starting to find her
job “routine” and “boring”. Although P11 was able to re-establish her career identity, in talking about the overall meaning of work in her life P11 said: “Work-life is for survival”.

Looking ahead P11 would like to advance in her career by moving into a higher management position. Discussing her goals for the future P11 expressed feeling conflicted:

As far as my initial goals are concerned, I’m satisfied. But now that I have reached… ‘what’s next?’ I’m three years in my position. I feel the routine thing, I feel so bored now. I need to move on. On the other hand, if I move on, I will be neglecting my family again. Will it be family first, or my work-life first? I’m at that dilemma right now (P11).

In particular, P11 is contemplating pursuing a Canadian Masters Degree in Business. P11 is also contemplating switching back into the banking sector, although she feels locked in by her Canadian hospital setting work experience.

Overall P11 identified the difficulty with having her previous credentials and work experience recognized as the main barriers that she faced in her Canadian career development. P11 credits her educational retraining as the main factor that facilitated her career development; however, she noted that even with Canadian retraining, her relative lack of Canadian work experience remains a barrier. Commenting on this issue P11 said:

Training-wise, education-wise, it’s not being recognized. What will offset that is Canadian experience, but it’s like the chicken and the egg. That’s what Canada is lacking, I should say. How can you get Canadian experience when you’re not recognized having experience in that field, and then before you can be hired, they need Canadian experience (P11).

Participant 12

Participant 12 (P12) is a 55-year-old male who emigrated from Columbia in March of 2005. Before immigrating to Canada, P12 completed a Masters Degree in Economics and worked as a professor at a University in Columbia. P12 reported really enjoying his previous job and said: “I loved it! I love teaching, and I love people and my students. I taught economics, micro-economics, macro-economics, history of economics, and I loved my job”. P12 said that he had a good salary and enjoyed working with students, even though he sometimes found marking papers to be time-
consuming. P12 said that his job in Columbia was very important to him and gave him a sense of professional identity.

P12 decided to immigrate to Canada because the slowing economy had led to some downsizing within the education sector in Columbia and P12 was worried about job security. Discussing his main reason for immigrating to Canada P12 said, “Initially I thought about going to Switzerland, because I love that country, but I heard that Canada is closer to Colombia, where my mother lives now. Also, at that time, it was easier to come to Canada, and I applied as a skilled worker”. Before arriving in Canada P12 felt confident that he would be able to find work as a professor and continue in his desired career. He did not anticipate having to complete educational retraining. Talking about his pre-immigration expectations P12 said: “I had heard that in Canada, you could get a good job. Then I was very confident. But when I came here, well, that’s different”.

When P12 arrived in Canada he felt very excited about starting a new life. He recalled having some difficulty adjusting to the cold weather and said: “We came in wintertime, in March, so it was still very cold. Oh, my God. I couldn’t believe it”. Despite having to adjust to the cold, P12 reported that he thought he adjusted to Canada fairly easily because of his well-developed English language skills. He said that financial difficulties and locating housing were the greatest initial challenges he faced. P12’s family used the services of a homeless shelter, food bank and social assistance in order to cope. To help him find work, P12 also used the services of an immigrant organization to assist him with preparing his resume and practicing his interview skills.

Despite these supports, P12 ran into difficulty during his job search because of a lack of Canadian credentials and experience. Talking about this difficulty P12 said: “I didn’t expect that once I got into the market, its not that easy… most of the companies or agencies asked for Canadian experience”. P12 also found that a lack of a social network was another barrier to his career development. Mentioning this barrier P12 said: “It’s really hard but if you don’t have what we call
‘networking’. If you don’t know people inside a company, it’s more difficult, it’s harder to get that job”. Faced with barriers such as foreign credentials and lack of social contacts, P12 was not able to locate work related to teaching or economics. As a result, P12 became discouraged and started to look for work in other fields, such as retail. P12 managed to secure work as a cleaner and then as a retail worker. P12 continued to work retail for a year and during that time he decided to complete educational retraining in order to advance his career.

A chance event seemed to prompt P12 to initiate a career change. P12 described how a conversation with a resource person led him in a new direction:

When I came to Canada, I didn’t expect to volunteer as an interpreter, but then I went to this organization and the manager told me, ‘You have a good level of English, why don’t you go and volunteer and help us volunteer with this?’ I didn’t expect that, and that led me to continue doing this (P12).

Based on his volunteer experience, P12 decided to enroll in a local college to earn a certificate in Spanish Language Interpretation. He worked on the certificate part-time for two years and continued to volunteer as an interpreter. P12 reported that he really enjoyed his retraining experience. Reflecting on his retraining P12 said: “It was a really nice experience. Four out of six of the instructors I had were excellent, academically and humanly speaking. I liked them, and I liked the resources they had”. Comparing his new learning experience to his Columbian education P12 said:

Back home it was at university level. Here it was college level. Being in a college here is very easy. Back home, it was really hard. You had to eat the books to pass a test. Here, you read it, take a glimpse, and you go to the test. I think it is easier here. I would say I didn’t have to change my learning style, it was just an improvement. It’s a better way of learning things. In Colombia it was harder because of resources. Even though I was at a public university studying economics, it depends more on you. You have to go to the library and work and spend more time on researching, whereas here, you have all the resources on hand, and you have just to sit down and read and search (P12).

Aside from enjoying his retraining experience, P12 said that the retraining helped to increase his confidence and his desire to pursue a new career as an interpreter. Reflecting on his retraining P12
said: “My skills have improved. Language skills. I have learned many customer service skills. I feel more confident”. P12 also noted that the retraining led to new work opportunities. Commenting on the results of the retaining P12 said: “I needed it. It had a great impact. Otherwise I wouldn’t have gotten the job I’m doing”.

Currently P12 works as a Spanish interpreter. He reported that he enjoys the work, but that there are drawbacks:

I like that I help people. That’s the most important. Secondly, it’s $27, $30, $35 per hour. I don’t like the fact that it’s not stable. It’s not full-time, it’s not part-time. You don’t have insurance coverage or benefits. If you get sick, you don’t get paid (P12).

When P12 was asked to compare his current career as an interpreter to his career as a professor in Columbia he said:

If I compare both, both have advantages and disadvantages. If I were working back home, I had health care, maybe good salary, certain stability, but I didn’t have safety, and that’s really important. Whereas in Canada, I don’t have a stable job or stable income, but we have safety. It’s very important for my kids especially (P12).

Because of feeling safe in Canada P12 is pleased with his decision to immigrate to Canada. However, the lack of stability in his job continues to be an issue and he is contemplating another career change. P12 explained: “because I have realized that no, no, no, I can’t continue doing this. I can do this part-time, or as a hobby, even as a volunteer, but I feel like I have more potential to work in a different field”. P12 would like to now pursue a teaching career. He plans to return to school in order to complete a diploma or degree in economics. Looking ahead P12 is optimistic. When he was asked how he felt about the future P12 said: “Very optimistic, very positive. Even though I don’t have the Canadian experience in the field that I would like to work, or the Canadian education I would like to have, I still feel very optimistic”. He predicted his future vocational development over the next five years by saying:

I will be teaching at Seneca College, or George Brown College. Five years, eventually I would like to teach at York University, or Ryerson University. I will take training for two or three years at most, and two years after that, I will be teaching in those (P12).
Participant 13

Participant 13 (P13) is a 55-year-old female from India who immigrated to Canada in December of 2000. While living in India P13 completed a Maters Degree in Science with a specialization in Zoology. Prior to immigration P13 owed a business with her husband, who was a veterinarian. P13 assisted her husband with providing care to animals and she conducted research for pharmaceutical companies in order to run and monitor medication trials. P13 also taught chemistry and biology to high school students. When asked how much she enjoyed her career in India P13 replied: “Extremely. Very much so”. P13 said that she enjoyed the academic side of her research work, although at times she found her work environment to be loud due to the animals.

Despite having an enjoyable career, P13 wanted to pursue further educational and/or career opportunities outside of India. She also wanted to provide the opportunity for her children to receive an international education. P13 explained: “I thought coming to the West, we could continue the practice, as well as learning more, and getting my children educated”. P13 said that she also had several friends and family members who had immigrated to the Unites States and Canada and that her husband’s uncle had prompted their decision to immigrate to Canada by encouraging and assisting them with their application paperwork.

Prior to immigrating to Canada P13 expected that she and her husband could continue their business in veterinary medicine by opening up a practice in Canada. In discussing her pre-immigration expectations P13 said:

We led a good life in India… so we thought that we would continue to have that or better, because we had heard that veterinarians do have a good practice here… Since I had a similar education, in the sciences, I thought I would specialize in that line…In my profession I probably would have started somewhat at the bottom, like a veterinarian’s assistant, or even a kennel person. I didn’t mind it as long as I could be in a similar field…The other part was I was versatile so I could teach, I could sell, I could do customer service, so many other things. I was confident that way, and I knew English very well (P13).
Despite her confidence, P13 said that she expected that she might face some challenges in establishing her career in Canada:

I was quite prepared to face difficulty in terms of what I had heard of some people getting jobs in their field. A lot of them had told me that you have to retrain and to re-educate yourself, so I was quite prepared for it (P13).

When P13 first arrived in Canada, she said she was surprised by the well-developed infrastructure. Talking about her initial experiences P13 said:

Where I come from, which is Bangalore, India, a lot of it was pro-American, and not much was known about Canada except for bits and pieces. It's a quiet and safe country, that’s all we knew. When I came here, the most surprising aspect was I saw so much development here. It was busy, and the buildings and technology, I thought- why is Canada not known to the rest of the world? (P13).

P13 and her two teenage children were enthusiastic about starting their new life in Canada.

Discussing her family’s initial adjustment P13 said:

There was no problem with my children and myself. We just jumped into it, we were so enthusiastic, we wanted to learn a lot of stuff and we were so surprised that this was as good as, or better than America… It was my husband who had the coping difficulty. For one thing, he was 55 years of age when he came, I was 45, and the kids were about 17 and 18, so we three could do well, but my husband didn’t, so he became sort of a force that pulled us back. That had a lot of impact on the family (P13).

P13 said that because her husband was unable to have his credentials recognized he was unable to continue working as a Veterinarian. As a result he became increasingly depressed and decided to move back to India on his own. P13 chose to remain in Canada with her son and daughter. In discussing this difficult period of adjustment P13 said: “it was extremely bad in terms of emotional health and mental health, for all of us. In one way or the other we coped”. P13 said she coped by continuing to be “a die-hard optimist” and by turning to meditation and utilizing a women’s support group.

Of the challenges P13 faced, finding work was not one of them. In fact, P13 managed to locate work selling newspapers within a week of arriving in Canada and then as a veterinary assistant several weeks later. She also worked at a call centre, which allowed her to gain knowledge
about credit and served as a stepping stone to a subsequent job working in a bank. P13 credited her success in finding work to her enthusiasm and perseverance and well-developed language skills. Although she was never faced with unemployment, P13 found it difficult to secure a job that utilized all of her skills. In order to help advance her career, she decided to pursue further education.

Although P13 originally wanted to pursue further education related to veterinary medicine, she decided instead to complete a nursing diploma because the degree in veterinary medicine would have taken longer. Her daughter had also recently completed a diploma in nursing and encouraged P13 to do the same thing. P13 said that starting her diploma was challenging due to the cost and having to work full-time. Despite these challenges, P13 persevered and completed her nursing diploma over a three year period. Discussing how she really enjoyed her retraining experience, P13 said:

> There’s nothing that I didn’t enjoy except maybe a boring teacher or two. Otherwise I enjoyed everything, I loved to take part in the group activities…Then of course the practicum was very interesting because we worked at the hospital, we worked at the nursing home. So there was a lot of learning to do, and I enjoyed it! (P13).

Aside from enjoying the practical hands-on learning, P13 said that she also appreciated the flexibility offered by the program. P13 had become ill during her studies and required a surgery. She said that her teachers were supportive and accommodating.

> Overall, the retraining led P13 to be more confident in pursuing a new career as a nurse led to a new career in Canada. Reflecting on the impact of her retraining P13 said: “It was very positive… I knew that I was one of the… I made a difference, I could see that I liked my patients, and my patients liked me, so it was a good bolster to my self esteem”. P13 currently works full-time as a mental-health nurse. She said she was inspired to go into the mental-health side of nursing after her husband and son experienced mental health issues as a result of their adjustment difficulties. P13 finds her career very rewarding because she gets to witness the “rehabilitation of sick persons”. Referring to her current job P13 said: “I like everything about it. It’s my dream job, really”.
Looking to the future, P13 plans to continue in her current job until retirement. She said that she would like to continue learning and plans to take workshops offered through her work, however, due to her age she does not plan to take any further formal education (P13).

Instead, P13 plans to continue in her current job until she retires. Even after retiring in five years or so, P13 plans to keep busy by having her own part-time practice in foot care, volunteering and pursuing her hobbies (reading and writing).

*Participant 14*

Participant 14 (P14) is a 37-year-old female from El Salvador who immigrated to Canada in November of 2001. In El Salvador P14 completed a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration and worked as a consultant for a multinational audit firm. This job was P14’s first job out of university and she had worked there for two years. P14 said that she derived a lot of satisfaction from her job, although she was required to work six days a week. She was very satisfied with her career in El Salvador until she was laid off by the company. P14 said that she had difficulty finding another job because: “in El Salvador, once you reach a certain age, such as twenty-five, you’re considered old”. Facing difficulty in securing employment, P14 started to explore opportunities abroad. Discussing her decision to immigrate to Canada P14 said:

At the age of twenty-five, possibly twenty-six, I was already too old, I was already an ‘old maid’, so I had no job prospects, no social prospects. My girlfriends were already seeing people steadily and my parents were very, very strict. They pretty much told me what to do and when to do it. So I felt that I had no way out. So, I started to look for opportunities to get out. So, I found out about Canada (P14).

P14 said that she did not know much about Canada until she went to the International Organization of Immigration. After attending a seminar she decided to immigrate to Canada in order to increase her independence and advance her career. P14 explained:

I was looking for more dignity. Not being judged by who I was and what I have. In El Salvador, it’s very, very, very classist, and elitist. I did go to a bilingual school, so I’m not a refugee; I’m not someone who was persecuted... My days were spent going to work at a multi-national company, and on the weekends, lounging at the pool at the country club. We went to the beach... I had a very happy, easy life doing nothing. But it wasn’t enough. It was not very fulfilling. I like the opportunity to travel, the opportunity to go wherever I want (P14).
And so P14 immigrated to Vancouver Canada to start a new life. She also decided that she wanted to focus on the marketing side of her career instead of going back into human resources. Before arriving in Canada P14 did not expect that she would need to pursue educational retraining.

Shortly after her arrival in Canada, P14 found herself facing several challenges that led to her having to re-adjust some of her expectations. First, P14 had to adjust to the weather. She recalled: “Vancouver is very rainy. Very, very, very, very rainy. In El Salvador, there is a rainy season, but when it rains, it’s this thunderous shower, and then it stops. In Vancouver, it’s constant”. Then P14 found it challenging to locate housing. She had to utilize the services of a hostel. Reflecting on this P14 said: “I think I discovered early on that it’s quite the shock… that I have to figure out my own apartment. I can’t live in a hostel forever”. P14 also encountered difficulty finding affordable furnishings for her first bachelor apartment and shared that she had slept on the floor with a sleeping bag for five months before getting a bed. P14 attempted to find work right away, however, she found it difficult due to a lack of Canadian experience. She ended up seeking the services of a newcomer’s organization and then volunteered in order to gain some Canadian experience. In recalling her initial strategy P14 said she vowed to: “Volunteer my bum off, and take any job that came my way”.

P14 ended up working several survival jobs while continuing to look for a job as a marketing consultant. Her first job was with a telemarketing company conducting phone surveys. P14 described this job as “hellish”:

It’s prison. You have to follow a script, you have to take in all the abuse you get from people, and you cannot stand up for yourself. For someone with no self esteem, it was easy to do that job, but it was hellish, it made me feel worthless and insignificant (P14).

Despite feeling degraded, P14 persisted with working at the call centre while she continued to look for other jobs. After a job resource counsellor suggested she complete some courses, P14 decided to work on earning a Marketing Consultant Certificate while she continued to look for more desirable
work. P14 subsequently worked in a retail store and then as an administrative assistant before she managed to secure a more desirable job working for the as a consultant for the British Consulate. P14 remained in that job for one and a half years before she decided to pursue more education.

P14 decided to enroll in a Masters of Business program because she was unhappy with her salary and wanted to advance her career. Although she was initially excited to pursue retraining, P14 reported that she did not enjoy her retraining experience because she found her classmates to be very competitive and unfriendly. Discussing this issue P14 said: “my classmates were ruthless, they sized me up, they realized that I was no competition, and they chewed me up and spit me out”. According to P14, the socially isolating and competitive environment took its toll on her:

It was the most hurtful thing. I cried, and I cried, and I cried. And my last term in the MBA was the most difficult, isolating experience, and I felt very stressed, I felt that I was going to snap in two, I had no backbone, I had no self confidence, I had no self esteem. When you come in with a very weak sense of self, and you come into a country and there’s really no one and you have to figure out things on your own, and you don’t know how to trust people. That really broke me down completely (P14).

As a result, P14 really had to push herself to finish the program. She said she coped by using the services of a counsellor, reading books on assertiveness and turning to Chinese medicine. P14 also said that maintaining a positive attitude and a strong work ethic was crucial. Explaining how she persevered P14 said: “because I have a strong character, I swallowed unnecessary pride, and I worked”. Commenting on the importance of a positive attitude P14 said:

I’ve met a lot of immigrants who feel so insulted, and there’s all this negative and toxic energy emanating from them out of that anger and resentment, and I stay away from that because that’s not healthy. I came to Canada, and half of it was an experience, and you have to go through it, you have to roll through the punches and adapt to survive (P14).

Today P14 is glad that she persevered in completing her MBA because her degree ultimately increased her self-confidence. P14 explained:

While my personal experience with the MBA was disastrous, and you can say that I fell flat on my face, the MBA also gave me a lot of confidence in knowing that I could do things. I now feel very good about myself. So, all aside, yes, personally, it was horrible, but, professionally, it gave me what I needed to be where I am (P14).
In reflecting on her transformation, P14 said: “I lost myself, and I found myself”. In addition to personal growth, the MBA also led to P14 finding more desirable work. After she completed her MBA, P14 decided to move to Toronto for a fresh start. After an aggressive job search, P14 was hired by a large bank in an entry-level position. After a year she was promoted to an international division and she focused on networking within the company in order to obtain a more preferable position as a manager. Today P14 is quite satisfied with her career and feels that most of her skills are being effectively utilized. When she compared her current career to her career in El Salvador P14 said:

They’re very similar in the stress, the prestige, the dealing with clients, the dealing with multiple priorities and stressful deadlines. The difference is that in El Salvador, they treat you like a slave. They have no respect for people, there’s no such thing as a life-work balance. If you ever bring that up, you get fired. But, in Canada…there is a respect for the life-work balance (P14).

Looking ahead, P14 is focused on maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Although she is currently completing a certificate in project management so that she can continue to advance in her career, she is also devoting time to pursuing dance lessons and dating. Although she is uncertain of her exact future career path, P14 remains optimistic and positive about the future. In reflecting on her overall experiences P14 said: “I feel very satisfied. I’m not ashamed, and I’m not angry that I had to go through the immigrant experience of starting at the bottom, because I climbed up, and I elevated myself through my own bootstraps”.

Participant 15

Participant 15 (P15) is a 48-year-old male from China who immigrated to Canada in October 2004. In China P15 spent eight years in University and completed a Master Degree in Medicine. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P15 worked as both a physician and teacher. P15 was very satisfied with his career and enjoyed helping people in rural mountain areas.
P15 decided to immigrate to Canada because he had heard positive things about Canada from friends. When P15 found out about Canada’s point system and that he actually exceeded the minimum points required, he decided to start a new life in Canada. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P15 expected that he would be able to continue working in his field of medicine. Discussing his expectations P15 said:

Well, before I came here, I was reading some information from internet, from other places. I find out that Canada is a fair or something. So, based on that, I feel like maybe I get a chance. And I believe I have enough education and training to make me qualified to find work (P15).

P15 thought that he might have to do some educational retraining, however, he expected that any required retraining would be very minimal. He reported that there are lawyers in China who actively promote immigrating to Canada and as a result, P15 had very positive expectations.

When P15 first arrived in Canada, he was impressed by the wide open spaces and relative lack of people. However, as P15 started to apply for jobs in his field he quickly discovered that a lack of Canadian credentials and experience was a barrier for him. Describing this barrier P15 said:

At first I don’t understand what the requirement for the Canadian experience because I thought, ‘Why is it that much difference?’ Because here, basically they have similar knowledge, experience to us. For example, we get five years’ training in the medical school; here it’s only four years…and the first two years are mostly basic medical things, like science courses here. So actually, here, the training is not as long as the medical training in China. This is one. Another thing is if you don’t work here, how can you get the Canadian experience? (P15).

After discussing this issue at an immigrant career centre, P15 received feedback that it would be very difficult for him to find work in his desired field without completing Canadian educational retraining. Within a few months of his arrival, P15 decided to work on completing a certificate in pharmaceutical analysis.

In the meantime, P15 needed money to survive and he ended up obtaining work through a temp agency as a labourer in a plastics factory and then in a print shop. Recalling how the lack of stability and type of work impacted his well-being P15 said:
It impacted me greatly. Impacted my confidence, my decision move to Canada, and then my self worth. And my everything: confidence, self-esteem, self-respect. And my relation with other people… how other people view you, right? It’s all affected, and how you live in Canada, you feel worthless because you don’t have a job (P15).

Facing these difficulties, P15 hoped that pursuing a certificate in pharmaceutical analysis would lead to more desirable work. Unfortunately, completing the certificate did not lead to any lasting desired employment over the last six years.

Because the retraining was not very helpful, P15 reported that he felt somewhat neutral about the retraining. He enjoyed some of his learning experiences and felt that the retraining may have helped to improve his English language abilities, however, P15 wonders if the professional school he attended was only interested in collecting tuition fees because he has not found the retraining helpful for advancing his career. Comparing his Canadian retraining to his education in China P15 said: “Back in China, the Chinese [training is] more formal. It’s very rigorous, more difficult, it’s strict. And then you have to pass each step, very, very… Here, it’s like a business; they just wanna get some tuition”.

Currently P15 works in a grocery store making minimum wage. Although he continues to apply for professional jobs related to pharmaceuticals, P15 reported that he has not received any calls for an interview. At one point a few years ago he did manage to secure a job working in a hospital testing pharmaceutical equipment, however, he was laid off after six months. P15 has not worked within his desired field ever since. When P15 was asked whether he attempted to have his previous credentials recognized, he said that he went to the World Transcription Service a few years ago, however, they requested additional documentation and he was unsure of how to proceed. P15 is contemplating returning to the transcription service because he is unsatisfied in his current job.

P15 discussed the impact of his job dissatisfaction by saying:

It affects me greatly, because I wanted to move here, I wanted to immigrate here, I wanted to find a decent job here. Now I feel like I’m a loser, right? I don’t have a decent job; I don’t have a family; and I lose my previous professional field. So I feel my parents, my
family members often say, ‘Why you still there? Just come back’. But I don’t know because I’m not sure if I can find some job there, like good job (P15).

P15 therefore feels torn about whether to stay in Canada or return back to China. He said that because he is in his mid forties, he is worried that he would also face difficulty regaining employment in China.

Looking ahead P15 said that he feels “very pessimistic”. He anticipates that he will continue to experience difficulty finding desired employment and attributes his difficulties to systemic prejudice. Talking about this barrier P15 said:

I think they might have systemic reasons here. Here, when I send out resumes, I never get the interview. Some people say your name- this has discrimination, right? Like if your name is not an English name or something, you would be discriminated against (P15).

P15 also said that language barriers represent another difficulty. As a result, P15 intends to continue focusing on improving his English language skills by being involved in conversation groups. He does not intend to pursue any future retraining because he is skeptical that further retraining would be helpful to him. In summarizing how his perceptions have been negatively affected by his difficult experiences P15 said: “Before I come, I thought Canada was a fair place, a fair country; now, I feel opposite”.

**Participant 16**

Participant 16 (P16) is a 39-year-old male from India who immigrated to Canada in June 2005. In India P16 completed a Bachelor’s Degree in Architecture. Prior to immigrating to Canada P16 worked as an architect and owed his own firm for seven years. He reported that he was very satisfied with his career in India and he devoted very long hours to establishing and growing his business.

P16 decided to apply to immigrate to Canada because at that time he wanted to pursue a higher education and wanted to provide a good life for his family. P16 said that an immigration consultant had come around promoting the idea of immigrating to Canada, the United States or
Australia. P16 said he choose Canada because one of his relatives had visited Canada and really liked it here.

Before immigrating in 2005, P16 expected that he might have to start from a lower point in his career. He was even prepared for the fact that he might not be able to continue working as an architect. Talking about his prior expectations P16 said: “I knew I had to re-root myself. I’m kind of uprooting myself from one place and go and re-rooting myself somewhere else. So I had to prepare myself for whatever obstacles might come down the line before migrating”. To help prepare, P16 took truck driving lessons and also had his credentials reviewed by a Canadian University while waiting for his immigration application to go through. P16 wanted to have his credentials accredited by the Canadian Architectural Certification Board, however, he could not afford the $500 fee at that time. Prior to immigrating to Canada P16 did not anticipate that he would have to complete retraining, although he wanted to pursue further studies related to architecture.

When P16 arrived in Canada he felt excited to start a new life. He described his initial experience by saying: “I was excited… mostly to see the infrastructure part of it. Especially I do recall the expressways, the roads; I was excited to see all those”. P16 also said that he was ready for a change and did not find his transition very difficult.

Immediately after arriving in Canada P16 started to look for work and encountered some difficulty obtaining a job. To earn some money P16 decided to go to the airport and he assisted travelers with their luggage. Recalling this experience P16 said: “How did I earn my first cent in Canada? That’s surprising. One fine day I just got up, I went to the airport, and I did the trolley thing for 25 cents. I worked for four hours, I got $45-$46”. Next P16 worked as a labourer in a packaging plant for a few days and then obtained a job working in a call centre. P16 worked at the call centre for several months before taking a second job at a call centre, thus working from early in
the morning to late at night each day. During that time P16 also continued to apply to architecture firms to try and secure desired work.

P16 got his first break four months later when he was hired as an intern architect. P16 had to take a pay cut, but was excited to get his foot in the door. Around this time P16 also applied to have his credentials accredited by the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) and became an official architect intern within the company that hired him. The OAA required P16 to pass seven exams and complete 5000 internship hours. Although not required, P16 decided to take two courses at a local college in order to increase his knowledge of North American design and construction. P16 said that he really enjoyed the courses he completed and the courses helped to increase his confidence due to gaining up-to-date knowledge in his field.

P16 remained with the first architect company for a year before he decided to look for a job with medical benefits. P16 managed to find a higher paying job at another firm. P16 recalled: “They gave me a rational pay which any intern over here would earn – not looking into my immigrant factor – and they paid me well”.

Unfortunately, after working for that company for a year and a half, P16 was laid off. Recalling this difficult period, P16 said:

When I got my first layoff, it was a shock… ‘What am I doing here? I am a professional. I have the skills required. How can someone just make the decision that you’re not going through the door tomorrow?’ So, I was being laid off because the project was coming to an end. But I was not used to the fact that people get laid off in the first place. Absolutely not. So, that was a big thing for me, taking that first shot at layoff. It was big. I literally had to get my emotions out, kind of get used to the fact that there is something called ‘layoff’ in this country. It took time… It made me feel angry, and it made me feel a little bit dejected… I couldn’t take it (P16).

Despite this hardship, P16 continued to study for his exams and looked for another job in order to complete his internship hours. P16 remained unemployed for six months, before he found a job with another architect firm. At the time of the interview, P16 had just left that job and was about to move
to Alberta to pursue a job that was more in line with his interest in institutional design. P16 was still working on completing his final examinations to re-gain his architectural seal.

P16 identified the re-certification requirements as one of the main barriers to establishing a career in Canada because the exams are expensive and time consuming. P16 had to re-take some of the exams due to failing and he took longer than expected to complete his intern hours because of being laid off. Commenting on the importance of passion for overcoming these difficulties, P16 said: “Getting into architecture today is not very easy. My first job was based on my decision, because I was just so passionate about my field, I was willing to do anything to get my job”. Also crediting his ability to be flexible, P16 said: “I would say my flexibility in terms of being ready to accept a completely new culture, a new way of understanding structures, and pushing myself to really understand how it is done”.

Overall P16 said that he is happy and satisfied with his decision to immigrate to Canada. Although P16 is still working on firmly establishing his career in Canada, he is hopeful that his passion and perseverance will allow him to succeed. At the same time, he has concerns about job stability. P16 plans to overcome future career barriers by continuing to upgrade as needed and staying focused on his goals. In discussing his will to succeed P16 said: “I’ve learnt that there are four words which you can carry all your life, and those four words are: passion, commitment, perseverance, dedication. If you have those, you kind of keep yourself going, going, going”.

Participant 17

Participant 17 (P17) is a 34-year-old female from Israel who immigrated to Canada in Jan of 2003. In Israel P17 completed a Bachelor’s Degree in Economics, with a major in accounting. P17 also completed a Chattered Accountant Designation in the United States by taking and passing three additional exams. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P17 worked for an accounting firm in an auditing department. She reported that she was very satisfied with her career and liked the company that she
worked for because she met her husband there and found her co-workers to be very supportive and friendly.

Despite having a rewarding career in Israel, P17 decided to immigrate to Canada with her husband sometime in 2001 after taking a trip to United States. She liked the climate in North America and found it to be quiet and relatively peaceful. Recalling how her experience in the United States influenced her decision, P17 said:

There is not such intensity in political way. There are no breaking news every hour, no buses exploding, no terrorist attacks. The first time we came to U.S, it was two months after September 11. So, of course, every one was still under the effect of that disaster. But still, it’s just one-time event. In Israel, people live with this fear every single day. So just very different environment. And when I came back, I said: ‘I don’t want to live in Israel anymore. I don’t want to raise my family in this country’. And since then, I always wanted to live… I didn’t see myself as part of Israel anymore (P17).

To live a relatively safer life, P17 decided to move to Canada. P17 did not know a lot about Canada, but was optimistic about starting a new life. Recounting her expectations P17 said: “I knew it’s hard, but I also knew there are many opportunities because it’s a bigger country, and it’s beautiful and people are friendly and the nature is nice. I knew nothing about Canada. I had never been to Canada”. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P17 expected that she would need to have her credentials re-evaluated, however, she did not anticipate that she would have to complete educational retaining.

Upon her arrival in January of 2003, P17 encountered some difficulty adjusting to the cold weather, the vast distances and the people. Recalling the difficulties, P17 said: “So the distances are first thing, and the weather was extremely cold; it was a very cold winter. But also what I found, the people were cold, too. Nobody was willing to help you, really”. P17 also faced difficulty finding accounting work and recalled:

It was difficult because when I tried to look for a job, the first answer that I got, ‘Well, you are not qualified’. I told ‘Well, just give me chance’. They told ‘But then you don’t have the Canadian experience’. And then I told ‘Okay, well, how will I get the Canadian experience if you don’t give me a job?’ So it went back and forth. It didn’t go anywhere for several months... And I thought it would go faster (P17).
P17 ended up being unemployed for approximately four to five months. Recalling the toll this had on her P17 stated:

There are moments when you are sad when you see it’s not going anywhere… Why should I even try? I felt useless, though. Like, I would wake up in the morning, and this is the time people would go out to their job, and I had nothing. I’d wake up in the morning and look through the windows and say… ‘I’m useless. I’m no good for anything.’ So yeah, your confidence takes a hit, but you have to guide yourself and think of this as a temporary situation because somebody will give you a chance (P17).

After encountering difficulty finding work, P17 decided to focus on applying for as many accounting jobs as she could and building her social network. P17 was determined to find work in her desired field. She recalled:

I definitely intended to find the job in accounting only. I didn’t want serve food in a restaurant; I didn’t want to sell coffee at Tim Horton’s. I was determined to find the job in accounting. I didn’t care if it was an entry level job… but I didn’t want to throw all my education down the drain for the sake of finding a job. I wanted an accounting job, so this was what I looked for, and I wasn’t ready to settle (P17).

To assist her with finding work, P17 decided to seek support from an immigration job skills organization to work on her resume. She also went to the Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICA) to have her credentials evaluated. The ICA instructed P17 write an Accountant Reciprocity Exam to determine her readiness to be accredited in Canada as an accountant. P17 was then instructed to pass another exam and work for an accounting firm in an internship role for two years.

P17 started to prepare for her exam by studying (she had to take her exam twice due to failing the first time). She took a couple of courses to help her prepare. Referring to the course P17 said:

Well, I didn’t like any of them. It’s just another test that I have to accomplish; it’s another obstacle to overcome. And, well, the university was really stressful for me with all these exams… What if I don’t pass and have to write it again? But, you just do it. Do what you have to do, and that’s it (p17).

Therefore, although P17 initially felt somewhat resentful about having to retrain, she persisted because she saw it as an opportunity to help establish her career in Canada.
While retraining P17 was able to secure an accounting-related job through a family friend. She enjoyed this entry-level job because she got along very well with the owner and she found it difficult to leave a year and a half later when she was required to start her official internship hours. After taking three months maternity leave, P17 started her internship hours with an accounting firm, where she worked for two and a half years. Upon completion of her internship, P17 received her accreditation and landed a job working as a manager of financial planning and analysis. P17 really enjoyed the responsibility of managing large accounts for an international company and she remained in that role for five years. However, P17 desired a change. When a headhunter approached her in the summer of 2011, P17 jumped on the opportunity to work for another company. Referring to the job change P17 said:

I decided after five years that I wanted to try something else, a Canadian company for a change. And this is my third week at my new job. It’s cool, also. I’m still a manager. It’s, again, very large company, only Canadian owned, so I don’t have to talk to crazy people from New York because they never stop working’! (P17).

Referring to her current job P17 said: “I love it. The people are great, and the company is awesome, and the building is absolutely beautiful, and the view of the lake is amazing; it’s right on the lake. And oh, I just… I love it”!

Overall P17 is very satisfied with her Canadian career development. Although she struggled initially to find work and attain her certification as an accountant, she now sees her retraining as necessary to advancing her career. When P17 was asked if the retraining improved her sense of identity as an accountant she said: “Well, I’m still the same accountant, just a designated one”. However, P17 also said that her designation has increased her confidence and opened up many opportunities for her and she now feels very optimistic about the future. P17’s only struggle now is finding balance between her devotion to both family and her career. Discussing this conflict P17 said: “many times I find myself guilty that I don’t give enough to employer and I don’t give enough to my family. But I think it’s the struggle that every parent is going through to some
extent”. P17 plans to handle this conflict by trusting that her children will “grow up to be good people” and staying focused on advancing her career. Describing her plan, P17 said:

If everything goes well, then just progress with my current career and see where it goes and hopefully the succession plan will work out and I find myself in a job with more responsibilities and be able to work at higher level of management. And I will take it from there (P17).

**Participant 18**

Participant 18 (P18) is a 42-year-old female from Zimbabwe who immigrated to Canada in January 2006. In Zimbabwe P18 completed a Bachelor of Technology Degree in Applied Biology and Biochemistry. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P18 worked as a food microbiologist for an international food company. In discussing her previous career satisfaction, P18 said: “it was very important because I rose through the ranks, and I was almost at the managerial level. So I would say I was very satisfied with my career. It made me feel comfortable”.

Despite enjoying her career, P18 felt dissatisfied with the economic challenges facing Zimbabwe. She had heard from peers that Canada is “the land of opportunity”. P18 found herself wanting to “take advantage of those opportunities”. Discussing her decision to immigrate to Canada P18 said:

Because of the economic challenges in my former country, and hearing that other people were moving to UK, some to Canada. And also people would say, ‘Oh, it’s easy. You know, you go to Canada with your qualifications, it’s easy to find work’. And also, the advantage of Canada is that, with time, you can become a citizen. So I thought, ‘Oh, here is an opportunity. Let me go to Canada’ (P18).

Before arriving in Canada in January of 2006, P18 anticipated that she could continue working as a microbiologist in Canada. She did not expect that she would have to complete any retraining. Discussing her expectations P18 said:

When you are in Africa, you see a lot of white people coming from Canada, UK, U.S., whereever. They are the ones who teach you, who are usually at the universities. So I thought, ‘Oh, it’s easy for us to go there’. My thinking was, ‘Oh, they are the ones who were our lecturers, so if you go back to their countries since they are the people teaching us, it won’t be a big deal’. So, I thought it would be easy (P18).
Upon arriving in Canada P18 quickly discovered that adjusting to a new country was going to be more difficult than she anticipated. First P18 had to adjust to a much colder climate and to different food. She also found it difficult to navigate and learn a new transport system. Adjusting to a new social environment also proved difficult. P18 recalled:

Even interaction with people… where I come from, you would not work for a few minutes without stopping to chat and say, ‘Hi’. You chat with everybody, and it’s happy/happy. And everyone notices: ‘Oh, I didn’t see you on Monday. Where were you? But here, you are with people and you are alone. I think it was the first time I realized the meaning of the word ‘lonely’. Where I come from, it's different. Yes, you live with strangers, but they are not completely strangers. Somehow, you know what’s going on. Here, you live in an apartment, but you have no clue who lives where (P18).

Having to adjust to such challenges made P18 question whether she had made the right choice to immigrate to Canada. P18 expressed: “It was very disappointing. If I had a way of going back, I would of taken the next flight back”!

To help her cope with the challenges, P18 turned to newcomer organizations and sought out other new immigrants for emotional support. Managing her stress level was very important to P18 because she lives with HIV. She reported that navigating a new health care system was also a challenge. Furthermore, in addition to the many challenges P18 faced in Canada, she also was experiencing pressure from family members back home to send money to help support them. Discussing this additional pressure P18 said: “If I didn’t have pressure back home, maybe I would have focused more… Like you have to explain that ‘I’m trying, I’m trying’, but nobody understood that. So it was really heartbreaking”.

In addition to pressures from back home and having to adjust to a new place and new culture, P18 also had to focus on finding work in order to support herself. Recalling the difficulty she faced, P18 said:

I was considering working in a similar field. I was running a food microbiology lab, so I thought when I come here, maybe I won’t start that high but maybe I can be hired as a lab
technician and then work my way up. But I couldn’t... not even as a cleaner in a lab environment, I didn’t even get that opportunity because lack of Canadian experience (P18).

P18 decided to try volunteering at a women’s health organization in order to gain some Canadian experience. P18 utilized her knowledge of HIV and her volunteer experience from Zimbabwe to help her secure a volunteer position. P18 also participated in as many research studies as she could in order to earn money. When P18 continued to face difficulty re-entering the food industry, she decided to focus on the HIV community. Fortunately volunteering helped P18 to secure a job as a women’s community education coordinator. She continued to work year-long contracts in that field for a couple of years before she decided to complete educational retraining in order to help advance her career.

P18 enrolled at a professional institute in order to complete a certificate to be a certified clinical research associate. She had wanted to enroll in a college or university, but encountered difficulty obtaining the required documentation from her previous university in Zimbabwe. P18 recalled feeling unsure about the certificate program because she had thought: “how come at the university or college they are refusing me but you took me? Is it just to enroll me and make money, or is it really something?” Fortunately the retraining assisted P18 in obtaining work as a research assistant at a hospital. P18 reported that although she was initially disappointed that she had to retrain, the retraining opened up job opportunities, gave her knowledge and increased her confidence. Talking about the results of the retraining P18 said: “It helped me get a different job, and it helped me to navigate the system. It helped me to question certain things without fear of losing my job”.

Today P18 is somewhat satisfied with her Canadian career development but she would like to continue advancing in her career. Comparing her career back home to her new career P18 said:

My standard of living back home was higher, like I had almost everything I dreamt of: you have your job, you have your family, right? You decide what you want to do. But here, it’s
still… I’m not there yet. I’m like a graduate who’s just fresh from university. That’s the way I’m finding myself right now (P18).

Despite being only somewhat satisfied, P18 is fairly optimistic about the future. P18 explained: “It’s not where I would love it to be, but I think maybe in time, it’ll improve, depending on how successful I will be with building up networks”. Aside from building her social network, P18 also plans to complete further education. She recently enrolled in a Master’s Degree program and is optimistic that the degree will open up more opportunities for her within her field in the coming years.

*Participant 19*

Participant 19 (P19) is a 60-year-old male from India who immigrated to Canada in April 2002. In India P19 completed a doctoral degree in anesthesia and a post-graduate degree in health and hospital management. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P19 worked as a medical doctor and was the head of a hospital in Paloma India. P19 also worked as an associate professor at a medical college and had also worked as a commander physician in the army. P19 reported that he was extremely satisfied with his career in India. Discussing how important his career had been to him, P19 said: “That was my life. Without a career, man is nobody. So, very important”.

Despite having a very solid career in India, P19 decided to immigrate to Canada because he wanted to provide more opportunities for his children. When he applied to immigrate to Canada P19 anticipated that he would be able to continue working as a doctor in Canada. Discussing how the immigration points system increased his confidence, P19 said: “When I went in, it was pretty easy for me because of my background and the interviews that they had, and I thought I would succeed here; there was no reason for me to suspect otherwise”. Based on his high level of education and many years of experience P19 did not expect that he would have to complete educational retraining. Summarizing his expectations P19 said: “I thought I would get into the system here. I didn’t know that it was so – pardon the expression – backward looking”. 
When P19 arrived in Canada he was disappointed by the length of time it took him and his family to get set up. Identifying his greatest difficulty, P19 said: “getting set up. It was just an awful experience. The most awful experience of my life”. In particular, P19 said he encountered difficulty getting a driver’s license and found some Canadians to be impolite and/or unhelpful. P19 was also disappointed by the city landscape, which he described as a “grey flatland”. P19 also encountered difficult re-establishing his career in Canada. First, P19 found out that it was going to take him at least three to four years to obtain his medical degree equivalency. He also discovered that he needed a Canadian medical degree to go into hospital administration or medicine. P19 found this news extremely discouraging because, as he said: “I came here at fifty-two; I didn’t have that kind of time”. When asked about the impact this had on him, P19 said: “Totally shattered. Like, my family almost broke up. I still haven’t recovered fully… If you want to destroy a man, destroy his livelihood. That’ll be the end of him. Let him do no work”.

Feeling very discouraged about re-establishing a career in medicine, P19 decided to look for a survival job. He ended up taking a job as a security guard. Then later in the year he decided to write a medical exam to start his long re-certification process. In the meantime, to help find more immediate work, P19 also decided to complete a course to be a first aid instructor. Completing the certificate course allowed him to obtain some part-time contract work as an instructor, however, the contracts were often short-lived and P19 found himself without stable full-time work. Facing frequent unemployment over the years, P19 returned to India at times in order to earn money.

Discussing the impact of unemployment on his well-being and self-esteem, P19 stated:

It’s killed me. Killed all my love for this country, love for life. I was a very full-of-life person, and being an army man, a soldier, you can imagine we are very full of life: we do all kinds of duties, fun activities, job-related activities. I was head of a hospital; I want to use my skills. I feel very, VERY frustrated. It is the worst period of my life (P19).

To try and overcome his difficulties, P19 also completed a certificate course in business management and mortgages. Unfortunately, these other courses have not assisted P19 to obtain
work in that field because they require marketing on his part. P19 shared: “it’s not easy getting in because it requires knowing marketing. I’m not a marketing guy. I’m a guy who had thirty-three years of medicine in India. I had had people coming to me; I had never had to go to people”. Therefore, despite taking the retraining, P19 is currently unemployed. He was however recently hired to teach a first-aid and is waiting for the course to start. In the meantime, P19 was trying to go through the credential review process, however, he experienced difficulty getting all of the required documents from India and passing his exams. Recently P19 gave up on re-establishing his medical degree because he said that even if he passes all of his exams and obtains all the required documentation, he believes that he will never be able to get a required residency placement because of his age and immigrant status. Discussing this issue P19 said:

I cannot pursue a career in medicine because I am sixty years old already. When I passed my first exam, I was fifty-six and I went to look for a fellowship position… That man said: ‘Let me be honest with you’. If there’s a twenty-six-year-old MD and you, and you were in my chair, who would you choose?’ So that made me decide I’m not going to get into the system… There is NO chance of my getting a residency because of my age. Whether we like it or not, that’s the truth. And why should I be doing two years of studies, spending 10,000 bucks and having nothing to look forward to at the end of it? (P19).

Having given up on his career as a medical doctor, P19 feels very dissatisfied with his Canadian career development and regrets his decision to immigrate to Canada. P19 shared his sentiments by saying:

My career identity is shattered as it is because, being a doctor and being a CEO of a hospital, doing security jobs and all that actually makes me feel very disgusted and disgruntled. And I feel no love for anything over here… My sense of identity is shattered here, and I feel very, very bad that I took this step. But unfortunately, there’s no retracing (P19).

Therefore, even though P19 was going to be starting to teach a new medical administrative course, he is not feeling as if most of his skills or abilities are being recognized or utilized. Talking about not getting to work as a medical doctor P19 said, “the whole system over here… it is very inward looking. They do not have the ability to appreciate somebody else’s skills or
knowledge”. Not only has this made it difficult for P19 to establish a Canadian career identity, a lack of recognition has also prevented P19 from identifying as a Canadian. P19 explained:

I don’t feel like a Canadian, honestly, because if you don’t respect me, I don’t respect you. Period. That’s how it is I feel about it. It is very sad. I hate to say that, but that’s the actual feeling that I have (P19).

Remarkably, despite significant setbacks, P19 still tries to remain positive. Commenting on the future P19 said: “I think I’m shattered, coming here. But, later on maybe, perhaps. It has to change. Things will always, I presume… things always change for the better”. Despite some sense of optimism, overall P19 maintains that Canada is not open to outside knowledge, skills and talent and he is very regretful that he chose to immigrate to Canada. He worries about other professionals, especially doctors, making the same ‘mistake’. In light of this concern P19 admitted: “I’ve discouraged quite a few people from coming to Canada, doctors especially. My colleagues, my friends, I told them- Go to anywhere. Go to hell, but don’t come here”.

Participant 20

Participant 20 (P20) is a 36-year-old female from the Ukraine who immigrated to Canada in October 2003. In the Ukraine P20 completed a medical degree in general medicine. Prior to immigrating to Canada, P20 worked as a physician in a cardiovascular lab where she performed cardio-stress and pulmonary-function testing for children who were in training at a specialized athletic school. P20 also worked at a fitness club as a consultant and program evaluator and appeared on local television to promote healthy lifestyle training. P20 reported that she was very satisfied with her career because she really enjoys helping people and she found sports medicine to be positive. P20 said that her career was very central to her sense of self because she spent so many years studying and she devoted a lot of time to work.

P20 decided to immigrate to Canada because she fell in love with a man who had decided to immigrate to Canada. P20 also said that she was attracted to Canada’s social policies. Prior to
immigrating, P20 expected that it may take her three to five years to establish a Canadian career in medicine. She anticipated that she would have to have her credentials reviewed and take exams. To prepare, P20 had her academic documents translated.

When P20 first arrived in Canada she felt happy and she said it was not a priority to find work immediately. She first focused on getting settled in to start a new life. After being surprised that in Canada seniors often live in nursing homes, P20 decided to volunteer at a nursing home to “find out how the system works”. P20 enjoyed her experience with providing support to seniors, however, after some time she needed to start earning a living and she began to look for paid work related to her field. Even though she was applying to entry-level administrative positions, P20 soon discovered that finding work was going to be difficult. P20 said that employers seemed suspicious of her and gave her strange looks during interviews and questioned her credentials and implied that she was “overqualified”. P20 attributed the treatment she received to a “double standard”.

Discussing this barrier P20 said: “I met several people. When I told them my experience with interviews, they couldn’t relate to it because they never had it. I think it’s due to double standard in hiring processes of immigrants versus people who graduated here”.

Despite facing difficulty finding work, P20 managed to not take things personally. Discussing prejudice as a barrier, P20 said: “I found it’s not just my experience. Many other people with similar backgrounds, they had the same troubles. So, it’s not my own fault… It’s just common practice which relates to this population [immigrants]. Just unfairness of life, right?” Aside from not taking things to heart, P20 also credited her faith in god and her values with helping her through her difficulties. P20 mentioned that it is easier to stay optimistic when you think about the extreme challenges that some people in life face. For P20, she thought about the hardships her relatives had faced in the war in Russia. This frame of reference helped her to persevere.
P20 continued to look for work and obtained a job working in a fast food restaurant. She also enrolled in an English course at a local university to improve her language skills and then in a Health Information Management Certification course. P20 decided not to work on regaining her medical degree because of the cost, the length of time and the difficulty she thought she would face in getting a residency. Instead, P20 enrolled to complete an occupational health and safety degree and she has been working on that degree over the last few years. While working on her schooling over the years, P20 worked in a variety of jobs ranging from cooking in a restaurant to administrative work and then working in a call centre. Despite having to work survival jobs, P20 seemed to remain positive. Recalling her call centre job P20 said:

I like it because it was call centre. I had ability to talk to people, direct speech, and it was very, very precise script we had to conduct reports. And it was medical reports for insurer. I was trained for accent reduction. I heard myself on my own voice report, and I heard how people from other provinces reacted to me: ‘Are you… can you speak?’ It was very funny (P20).

After working in the call centre for a year, P20 decided to seek work in a retail store. She recalled succeeding in this position because her sales were consistently high. After a year P20 sought work as a movie extra, which she liked because she could do school work while she was on call. Then several months later she obtained work as a salesperson for a real estate magazine and worked there until the owner closed the business. P20 was then unemployed for six months until she obtained work in a retail store, where she currently still works. P20 just recently finished her Occupational Health and Safety Degree and is hopeful that she will find related work. In the meantime she is continuing to work in the retail job while she applies for other jobs.

Although P20’s certificate in information management did not lead to lasting work, she enjoyed her learning experience and feels hopeful that the recently completed degree will be more useful than the certificate. Once she lands a more desirable job, she plans to still pursue further education in order to work in the medical profession.
Overall, all of P20’s jobs resulted from her directly contacting people in person and being persistent, rather than resulting from her retraining. In her attempt to find work over the years, P20 attributes most of her difficulties to prejudice. P20 explained: “In general, all employers I met, they weren’t friendly enough to accept immigrants. It’s highly prejudiced- that locally trained people are better”.

Despite encountering difficulties establishing a desirable career in Canada, P20 maintains a positive attitude about her experiences. P20 suggested how she stays positive and even discussed how she has grown through her experiences by saying:

I’m very blessed person because I had food, I had shelter, I had very, very good experiences, I met very interesting people… I don’t have many relatives here, but I have very, very close friends... And I learned a lot. I hold myself high. I changed myself. I became a more relaxed person, more happy, more self directed (P20).

P20 suggested that the key to staying positive is appreciating all the good things that you have. P20 also pointed out that it is important to remember those who are less fortunate:

Because you see, like I said, my life is very happy. I know other peoples’ story. We’re very blessed. We don’t have… people die in Somalia every day. They don’t have basics: they don’t have food, they don’t have life. About a week ago I met a woman; she was from Africa. And she said that the feeling that she has enough water to drink made her happy. The many that live here, they don’t know that (P20).