AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF HUMAN AGENCY IN THE RETRAINING OF IMMIGRANT SKILLED WORKERS IN CANADA

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 explored the career re-development of immigrant professionals in Canada by centering the investigation on their Canadian retraining journey. The goal of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the transition issues, retraining decision-making process, retraining experiences and outcomes, and coping strategies of the immigrant professionals to uncover the role of human agency in dealing with the existential givens of their Canadian career re-development. Twenty participants, 11 females and 9 males between the ages of 30 and 50, were interviewed for this study. The participants held at least a bachelor’s degree and had at least 3 years of work experience prior to their migration. They received Canadian retraining and had at least 1 year of post-retraining Canadian work experience. Semi-structured interviews were completed and the interview transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory qualitative analysis approach. Similar to previous research findings, the immigrant professionals in this study had intact career identities and meaning prior to their migration. Many participants were confident about transitioning into their original professional field in Canada with some participants having expected to pursue Canadian retraining. The participants, however, experienced systemic career transition barriers in Canada, such as language and acculturation barriers, discrimination, isolation, and non-recognition of their foreign credentials and work experience by Canadian employers. They completed Canadian retraining to cope with these barriers and pursue their career goals. Almost all of the participants shared that their retraining facilitated their career re-development and many were either undergoing or planned on pursuing additional retraining to improve their future career prospects. Throughout their career re-development process, focusing
on their long-term career goals (which provided them with meaning), acceptance and openness, and social supports provided them the perseverance to utilize their human agency. The participants accessed their human agency to revise their meaning-making, create a plan of action, and take action with the intention of pursuing their long-term goals. This career re-development process is summarized in the model proposed by this study, the Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development. The implications of the findings of this study for policy, professional resources, and immigrant professionals are discussed. Suggestions for future research directions are provided.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction to the Study

Canada is by far one of the most multicultural countries in the world, largely due to its high immigration rates (Chen, 2008; Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). With global changes, such as the rapid speed of air transportation and instantaneous electronic transfer of information and capital, migration rates have been on the rise and are continuing to increase (Ahonen et al., 2009; Richmond, 2002). There have been unprecedented movements of individuals across the world in search of better life opportunities, and employment opportunities in particular (Marsella & Ring, 2003; Richmond, 2002).

In recent decades, Canada has seen high immigration rates resulting in an increase in its foreign-born population. From 1986 to 2006, the immigrant population grew from 15.6% to 19.8% of the Canadian population and in 2006, international migration accounted for two-thirds of Canada’s population growth (Statistics Canada, 2008). According to the 2011 National Household Survey, about one in five Canadians (20.6%) were foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2013). Due to sustained immigration and a low percentage of new European immigrants, Canada has seen an increase in the visible minority population over the last two decades. Between 2001 and 2006, 60% of the immigrant individuals were from Asia and 10.5% were from African countries (Statistics Canada, 2008). According to Statistics Canada (2013), in 2010 and 2011, immigrants were mostly from Asia, including the Middle East. In 2010, 58.7% of all immigrants were from Asian countries and in 2011 this rate increased to 59.3%. The Philippines, China, and India have been the top three countries from which immigrants arrived since 2004. Immigrants from these three countries accounted for more than one-third of all immigrants migrating to Canada in 2010 (36.9%) and 2011 (37.6%). This increase in the volume and diversity of immigration challenges the local government and community to facilitate the economic
and cultural integration of the immigrant individuals into Canadian society (Sinacore et al., 2009).

With Canada’s baby boomer workforce reaching retirement age, birthrates declining, and labour market shortages, there is an increased dependence on the increase in immigration rate as a means to increase national productivity and ensure overall economic well-being (Herzog, 2004; Khan, 2007; Reitz, 2005). Since 2006, immigrants have been selected largely for their likelihood to stimulate the economy based on their age, education level, and language abilities. In 2006, 54% of the immigrant individuals migrated to Canada under the “economic” category (Statistics Canada, 2008). Since 2008, the proportion of economic immigrants has surpassed 60%. In 2010, the proportion of immigrants being admitted under the economic immigration category increased to 66.6%, with 62.8% of all immigrants being under this category in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013). A higher population of immigrants holds high foreign qualifications with the proportion of immigrants with university degrees increasing from 31% to 42% between 2000 and 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Given the high demand for immigrant professionals to fill the labour market, such as in Canada, and the stringent criteria for economic migration, the majority of immigrant professionals receive the implicit message that their credentials and experience will allow them to land gainful employment and they immigrate with the intention to further develop their careers (Chen, 2008; Grant, 2007). Unfortunately, many immigrants experience underemployment or unemployment (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Berger, 2004; Reitz, 2001; Sinacore et al., 2009) and do not fair as well as their Canadian colleagues. In fact, although the low-income rates among immigrant individuals declined over the 2000s, immigrant income rates did not improve relative to that of the Canadian-born population and predictably, the increase in high-income rate from 1995 to 2010 was significantly higher for Canadian-born than for the immigrant population.
(Statistics Canada, 2014). This trend indicates the continued presence of income inequality for immigrant workers in Canada. Despite the demand for immigrant professionals to fill the labour market shortages and despite being selected for their ability to integrate into the Canadian workforce of their new host country, immigrants experience systemic employment-seeking and social/cultural barriers during their career development in their new host country (Chen, 2008; Fang, Sammani, Novicevic, & Bing, 2013; Heilbrunn, Kushnirovich, & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008).

One of the main barriers preventing immigrant professionals from integrating into the labour market is the non-recognition of foreign credentials (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Khan, 2007; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Although immigrant skilled workers are admitted into Canada based on their high level of training and extensive work experience from their country of origin, their credentials are not deemed to be equivalent to that of Canadian credentials and they are required to have Canadian work experience in order to be considered employable by many Canadian employers (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Fang et al., 2013; Grant, 2007; Shan, 2009; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Other barriers to acquiring employment include immigrant individuals’ lack of knowledge of the technical language necessary for the job; cross-cultural differences in language; work culture differences; and differences in social customs (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Fang et al., 2013; Shan, 2013; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). In addition to struggling with career transition difficulties, immigrant individuals have to cope with acculturation, adjusting to their new host country, and discrimination from the host society (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Hays, 2001; Horverak, Sandal, Bye, & Pallesen, 2013; Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Ortega, Rosenheck, Alegria, & Desai, 2000).
Due to these systematic barriers, many immigrant individuals must resort to retraining to obtain Canadian credentials in order to acquire employment (Hall & Sadouzai, 2010; Novak & Chen, 2013). However, few studies have investigated the experience of retraining and the impact retraining has on the career transition and career development of immigrant individuals. In this scant body of literature, immigrant professionals have been found to improve their ability to acquire employment, and increased their level of occupation and income through receiving retraining (Gang & Stuart, 2000; Lerner, Menahem, & Hisrich, 2005). Immigrants have generally been found to have no difficulties with course materials (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007) and they report being able to find a sense of identity in the field of training (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998). Some immigrant individuals, however, have also reported financial stress while in retraining as well as limited time to fulfill personal and household duties or spend time with their families (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007). Other difficulties experienced during their retraining included loss in professional identity, decline in self-concept, and discrimination by local retraining staff (Beynon, et al. 2004; Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002;).

Career-identity and self-concept are closely related to existential meaning-making (Chen, 2001). A loss of career and self-identity can therefore lead to a sense of meaninglessness for the immigrant individuals experiencing career transition barriers. Immigrant skilled workers who underwent retraining have been found to experience a loss in self-identity and meaning as a professional when reverting to taking on a student role (Yost & Lucas, 2002). In the face of this career-related existential crisis, immigrant professionals have been found to reframe their unsuccessful career development experiences by thinking about themselves and their circumstances in a different way to maintain a positive self-concept (Ahmad et al., 2004; Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & Diaz-Perez, 2005; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008).
Implicit in these previous findings is the process of meaning-making that immigrants undergo to make sense of why they underwent retraining to maintain a sense of career identity. In order to take a significant backward movement in their career development from being a professional to a student, they would have to justify this with a motivation or purpose. This motivation would allow them to take the necessary actions to acquire the retraining that they presumably already received prior to their immigration. The concepts of meaning-making and purposeful actions suggest that an existential theory (Yalom, 1980) and Bandura’s (1977, 1986) concept of human agency may provide insight on the retraining experience of immigrant skilled workers.

Freedom and responsibility are also inevitable existential realities or givens of existence that are relevant to the immigrant retraining experience. Existential theory postulates that human lives are inherently meaningless and it is the duty of each individual to take responsibility for their freedom to create meaning in their lives (Yalom, 1980). Immigrant professionals have been found to use their action-taking abilities to cope with career barriers (Gardner, 2002), which reflect a sense of taking responsibility of their freedom to create meaning in their lives in the new host country. Retraining represents one such action-taking behaviour (Grant, 2007; Shan, 2009).

Closely connected to the concepts of freedom and responsibility, is the concept of human agency, which, in the context of career development, refers to taking action with intention to reach a goal in one’s career (Bandura, 2006; Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1997). In order to be able to take action with intention, individuals must have undergone meaning-making of why the actions are necessary and taken up the responsibility of bringing about those actions.

The existential concepts of death and isolation permeate the career transition barriers that immigrant professionals have been found to experience. Immigrant professionals experience existential death anxiety when they are forced to forgo their career/self-identity when they experience unemployment or underemployment, and when they have to revert to the role of a
student during retraining (Chen, 2008; Larsen, 2004; Lucas, 2002). Unemployment and job application rejection can be an isolating experience (Maglio, Lee, & William, 2005). The acculturation barriers and discrimination that immigrant professionals experience during their career transition and retraining process can also cause isolation (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Gagnon & Packard, 2012; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Many major career developmental theories either implicitly or explicitly refer to these existential concepts, especially the concepts of meaning, freedom and responsibility, and human agency. For instance, social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996), which is based on Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory, incorporates the interaction between human agency and other key factors in the model, namely outcome expectations, personal goals, and self-efficacy. This model also incorporates environmental factors that the individual cannot control, which is relevant to the career journey of immigrant individuals given the systemic barriers that are beyond their control. The concepts of self-efficacy and human agency allude to the existential notion of taking responsibility of one’s own freedom in this world to establish our career development. The inclusion of the concepts of self-efficacy and goal expectation in the development of career goals also reflects the existential notion of making meaning of one’s career goals.

One can also find existential themes in Super’s Life-span Life-space Theory (Super, 1990; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), which describes the different roles that individuals take at different stages of their lives. Super’s theory implicitly refers to the meaning-making involved in individuals taking on different life roles. It also refers to the necessity of participation, commitment, and knowledge in fulfilling life roles, which reflects the concepts of existential freedom and responsibility, and human agency.
Savickas’ (2005, 2012) Career Construction Theory more explicitly refers to existential meaning. His theory explains the process through which individuals make meaning and career choices given their vocational personality, life themes, and career adaptability. Vocational personality and life themes provide meaning for career choices. The concept of career adaptability touches on the concept of existential freedom and responsibility, and human agency as individuals are required to take action in dealing with career challenges.

The existing major career models and theories appear to refer to overlapping existential concepts such as meaning-making, freedom, and responsibility, as well as the concept of human agency. The prevalence of these existential concepts suggest that individuals undergoing career transformation necessarily face these existential givens and must find a way to activate their human agency to pursue career development. The only career theory that explicitly addresses the important existential concepts within career development is the Existential Career Model proposed by Cohen (2003). This model involves the stages of taking responsibility in career decision-making, evaluation of different career options based on their ability to provide meaning, taking action to implement career decisions, and re-evaluation of whether career decisions provide personal meaning. However, Cohen’s model is limited in that it holds a highly individualistic framework and may not be applicable to individuals who come from collectivistic cultures (Cohen, 2003).

The relevance of existential concepts and human agency to the process of immigrant retraining, the implicit allusion to these concepts within major career models, and the recent formulation of an existential career theory, suggest that these concepts are central to the understanding of the retraining experience of immigrant professionals and the role of retraining in their career development. Therefore, it was the goal of the present study to contribute to the scant literature of immigrant retraining by exploring the roles of human agency, existential
meaning-making, and freedom and responsibility in dealing with the barriers, such as isolation and existential death of self-concept, in the retraining experience of immigrant skilled workers.

Rationale of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the retraining experience of first generation Canadian immigrants who completed their post-secondary education in their country of origin, and had also worked in their chosen field outside of Canada for at least a year. Since Canada has one of the highest numbers of immigrant skilled workers in the world (Hawthorne, 2008), it provided an ideal context in which to investigate the retraining experience of this population. Immigrant skilled workers (‘immigrant skilled worker’ and ‘immigrant professional’ are used interchangeably throughout this study) are confronted by many systematic barriers that can lead to underemployment and unemployment (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). One of the leading concerns or barriers to immigrant career development is the non-recognition of foreign credentials, which leads to many immigrant professionals requiring retraining in order to enter the labour market (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Grant, 2007; Novak & Chen, 2013). Although this requirement for Canadian training pushes the immigrant skilled workers down in their career development, they have been found to experience both positive and negative impact.

Through investigating semi-structured, in-depth interviews with immigrant professionals in Canada, the study endeavored to add to the scant literature pertaining to the role that retraining plays on the career transition of immigrant professionals. This study also sought to provide a deeper understanding of immigrant professionals’ overall career transition issues, retraining experiences and issues, barriers, and methods of coping used. As such, the main research question of the study was:
1) How do Canadian immigrant skilled workers experience their retraining journey in Canada?

Secondary research questions under this broad investigation were related to existential psychology and human agency as most major career theories as well as the limited research regarding immigrant retraining experience implicitly allude to these concepts. Therefore, this study also sought to gain a better understanding of how immigrant professionals cope with existential givens and utilize their human agency in the context of their retraining journey and their career transition. The secondary questions included:

2) How do immigrant individuals make meaning of why they had to gain retraining?

3) How do they take responsibility of their freedom within their career development and decide to gain retraining?

4) What is the role of human agency in retraining?

One of the goals of this study was to contribute to the scant body of literature pertaining to immigrant retraining. This study also endeavored to add knowledge to this subject matter by providing empirical evidence of how immigrant professionals deal with the existential givens in their retraining journey and examine the role of human agency. It was anticipated that taking on an existential perspective on retraining and focusing on human agency would facilitate the understanding of the process of retraining in its entirety through investigating motivations or intentions behind retraining, and how immigrant professionals were able to take responsibility of their own career transition and obtain retraining. With existential and human agency themes being reflected in most of the major career development theories, this study also endeavored to provide evidence to propose an empirically-based comprehensive and integrative theory regarding the retraining experience of immigrant professionals by taking an existential perspective and focusing on human agency. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to add
insight to the thin body of literature regarding the career transition experiences and career development of immigrant skilled workers, particularly on the topic of immigrant retraining.

One of the anticipated practical benefits of this study’s findings included providing knowledge about immigrant professionals’ career transition and retraining experiences that could better equip career counsellors to more effectively support immigrant professionals. Illuminating any disparities between immigrant skilled workers’ motivations behind retraining and the actual outcome of retraining could provide immigrant individuals with a realistic view of what to expect and enable them to prepare for their career transition appropriately. This information could also inform retraining programs of any systemic shortcomings of the retraining resources provided. On a more systematic level, the researcher hoped that the results of this study could help government officials and communities better understand how to implement policies or programs to help immigrants integrate into the local labour market.

Overview of the Chapters to follow

The next chapter (Chapter 2) presents a literature review of the career transition and development experiences and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals. It also discusses some career theories and models that are pertinent in the field as well as relevant to the immigrant professional population. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used in this study. Chapters 4 presents snapshots of the life-career portraits of the participants in this study. Chapters 5 to 9 present the results of this study, with each of the results chapters discussing a specific period of the participants’ immigration and career development phase. Specifically, Chapter 5 presents findings regarding the pre-immigration period. Chapter 6 discusses the initial experience shortly after their immigration to Canada and Chapter 7 presents results relevant to their retraining planning and retraining experience. The results regarding their retraining outcome and post-retraining employment experience are provided in Chapter 8. Chapter 9
presents the participants’ future career concerns and lessons learned. Finally, Chapter 10 presents the discussion section where the results are summarized and a theoretical model regarding retraining experience of immigrant professional is offered. The strengths and limitations of this study, as well as the implications of for practical concerns and future research are also discussed in the final chapter.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter consists of three main sections. The first section reviews the career development barriers and issues faced by immigrant skilled workers, which include: non-recognition of foreign credentials and work experience, language and accent issues, cultural differences, acculturation issues, effects of the barriers, and the coping strategies of immigrant individuals. This section is followed by a section discussing retraining and the effects of retraining. Lastly, the chapter discusses several major career models that describe career development and allude to the concept of human agency as well as existential meaning-making, freedom, and responsibility.

Career Development Barriers

Given the declining birthrates and aging workforce in Canada, immigration policies are facilitating the high rates of immigration of skilled workers in order to alleviate the labour market shortages (Khan, 2007; Reitz, 2005). Immigrant individuals are granted immigration status based on their high qualifications and work experiences. Not surprisingly, most immigrants who immigrate to North America under the ‘skilled workers’ category expect to find meaningful work where they can continue to apply their skill set. Furthermore, North America is perceived to be the land of opportunities where they will be able to further develop their careers. Canada, in particular, has the reputation for being a multicultural nation that invites cultural diversity (Chen, 2008; Li, 2003; Matthews, 2006). Unfortunately, immigrant individuals are instead often met with barriers that hinder their career development and have to make career sacrifices for financial survival (Bauder, 2006; Chen, 2008).

Many immigrant skilled workers have been found to experience unemployment and underemployment (Berger, 2004; Reitz, 2001; Shan, 2013; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakshko 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008) with their rate of underemployment being higher than native workers in
Employed immigrant individuals often hold more extensive work experience than Canadian-born workers who are working at the same level. Many immigrant professionals also hold jobs that are physically demanding in industries where the potential for injury is high and/or hold jobs that are low in salary (Crollard, de Castro, & Tsai, 2012; Fang et al., 2013; Larsen, 2004; Pransky et al., 2002; Salminen, Vartia, & Giorgiani, 2009; Schenker, 2010).

In Canada, 42.1% of immigrant workers between the ages 25 to 54 were overqualified in terms of education level for their jobs while only 28.1% of Canadian-born workers were overqualified in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Foreign-trained immigrant professionals have been found to receive lower wages than Canadian-born workers (Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005; Reitz, 2005), particularly those who landed in Canada within the last 10 years (Statistics Canada, 2009). Immigrants also had a lower share of union coverage, higher shares of involuntary part-time work, higher shares of temporary jobs, and lower shares of employer-sponsored pension plans and life insurance coverage than Canadian-born workers (Statistics Canada, 2009). For example, immigrant professional engineers have been found to be hired on more project-based jobs than to hold permanent positions in Canada (Shan, 2013). In 2008, immigrants who landed more recently were more likely to work for smaller firms and in different occupational groups than Canadian-born individuals (Statistics Canada, 2009).

The following sections discuss some common career-seeking barriers that lead to the immigrant skilled workers being unemployed or underemployed. The barriers include non-recognition of foreign credentials, language and accent barriers, cultural differences and discrimination.
Non-recognition of Foreign Credentials and Work Experience

One of the largest hurdles that stand in the way of immigrant individuals landing employment that will allow them to both contribute to their new country of residence and further develop their careers is the lack of recognition for their foreign credentials (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007). Recent immigrants, who have been in Canada for less than 10 years, were found to have an overeducation rate of 48% as compared to the 31% of native Canadian workers (Wald & Fang, 2008). Foreign education or school programs are not perceived to be equivalent to that in Canada. Foreign work experience is also not recognized by professional registration members who have been reported to require references from Canadian employers (Girard & Bauder, 2005). However, immigrant skilled workers are selected to immigrate under the economic category based on their high levels of education, work experience, and language proficiency (Chen, 2008; Heilbrunn et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Therefore, they often have higher levels of education and more extensive work experience than local Canadian workers (Sinacore et al., 2009) and not surprisingly, they expect to be able to find meaningful work that would allow them to continue with their career development (Grant, 2008).

Despite meeting these high immigration criteria, their foreign qualifications and work experience are not considered to be transferable or equivalent to that of Canadian credentials and they are asked to obtain Canadian work experience (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Bauder, 2003a; Chen, 2008; Grant, 2008; Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010; Nwosu, 2006). This systemic barrier gives rise to a catch-twenty-two situation whereby in order to be marketable, immigrant skilled workers require the Canadian work experience that no one will offer them unless they already have the experience. In Canada, immigrant professionals’ foreign education has also been shown to be discounted and devalued (Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010; Kustec, Thompson, & Xue, 2007; Reitz, 2005). Especially for those who are foreign
trained in regulated professions, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers etc. (Novak & Chen, 2013). For instance, although foreign trained teachers are deemed highly desirable immigrant professionals due to their high levels of education, most Canadian jurisdictions require them to repeat some or all of their training (Beynon et al., 2004).

In Canada, workers are required to have completed a university or college degree, completed work experience under the supervision of a licensed professional in the field, passed the required examinations, and demonstrated language proficiency (Ontario Immigration, 2011). In order to re-enter their regulated professions, regulatory bodies require immigrant professionals to take expensive and culture-biased occupation-specific tests in order to re-gain their qualification levels (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009). These tests contain culture-biased content and they are in formats that are unfamiliar to the foreign-trained professionals, such as multiple-choice test format (Girard & Bauder, 2005). If they fail these culture-biased tests, they may have to wait one year before they can rewrite the exam, which further delays their career development (Novak & Chen, 2013). Immigrant professionals are often then asked to gain significant retraining, which is a major barrier in their career development and brings about financial burden due to the expenses involved in retraining (Hall & Sadouzai, 2010; Novak & Chen, 2013). Furthermore, retraining leaves immigrant professionals little time to dedicate to work, which places further strains on their financial situations. For the immigrant professionals who have landed employment, there is little time left for them to gain training due to the long work hours that they usually have to uphold, which makes it more difficult for them to re-enter their professions of expertise (Ahonen et al., 2009).

Employers are usually unwilling or unable to hire skilled workers who are not licensed in Canada (Khan, 2007). Therefore, immigrant professionals are unable to work in their field of expertise, which they were assessed upon when approved for immigration. Some scholars view
credential regulations as a way for the dominant class to restrict access, privileges, and opportunities for the subordinate classes (Khan, 2007). They see credential assessment as a tool used by individuals with more power to restrict internationally educated professionals from entering into regulated professions. Educational institutions, licensing bodies, industries and the like have the power to tighten and increase the entrance requirements in order to further benefit the local elite (Koch, 2004).

Language and Accent Barriers

Another prominent barrier pertains to language issues. Although immigrants who are granted economic immigrant status in Canada must pass the official fluency language criterion (English or French), they still find themselves to be confronted with language barriers (Chen, 2008; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). For the context of the present study, only the impact of English proficiency is explored. The requirement of French language fluency is beyond the scope of this study. Employers have been found to be hesitant to hire immigrant professionals due to immigrant individuals’ lack of proficiency in English (Hakak et al. 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). One reason might be that while they are capable of reading and writing English, they lack fluency in speaking and listening in English (Chen, 2008). Cross-cultural differences in language also render language difficulties for immigrant individuals who are unknowledgeable of cultural-specific uses of the language (Chen, 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008). Immigrant professionals also experience difficulty entering the labour market due to their non-Canadian accents, which causes Canadians to perceive their English fluency to be deficient (Chen, 2008; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Hakak et al. 2010; Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006). Although language courses are available, they do not focus on the technical language that would be useful for the immigrant individuals’ workplace (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Thomas, 1992).
Language proficiency has been taken as a good indicator of acculturation in past research (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Bautista, 2005). Skills in both English and the immigrant individuals’ native language were found to contribute to the decrease in stress related to acculturation for Asian immigrant individuals in America (Lueck & Wilson, 2010). The loss of their native language was found to increase their experienced acculturative stress. Therefore, providing immigrant individuals with bilingual options may help them cope with and reduce their levels of acculturative stress. However, they would require a strong socio-structural support to facilitate this bilingual opportunity (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

A lack of proficiency in English also makes it difficult for immigrant individuals to access health care and other services because they cannot communicate with the service providers (Coffman & Norton, 2010; Gee, Walsemann, & Takeuchi, 2010). Low English proficiency also makes it difficult for immigrant individuals to create social connections (Coffman & Norton, 2010), which have been found to dilute the negative effects of career transition and acculturation difficulties (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Blustein, 2001; Fang et al., 2013; Kagitcibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart, Ward, Jose, & Narayanan, 2010) and help immigrants find employment (Hagan, 1998; Hakak et al., 2010).

*Acculturation Barriers and Cultural Differences*

Canada is by far one of the most multicultural countries in the world with two-thirds of its population growth resulting from its high immigration rate (Statistics Canada, 2008). Immigrant skilled workers come from all over the world and bring with them a host of different cultures. Not only must they deal with searching for new employment and adjust to the workplace, they must deal with adapting to the new culture and integrate into society at the same time (Flannery et al., 2001; Hays, 2001; Ortega et al., 2000). The process whereby immigrants of one cultural group learn and assume the behaviours of another cultural group that they are
exposed to is referred to as acculturation (Ho, 1995, p.12). According to Berry (2001, p.616), acculturation is a process that involves and results in consequences for both the dominant cultural group as well as the minority/non-dominant group with there being a much larger impact on the non-dominant group.

Berry’s (1980) acculturation model states four main acculturation strategies used by the non-dominant group: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1980; Berry, 2003). When the individuals do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity and want to adopt the new culture, they are said to be using the assimilation strategy. On the opposite spectrum, separation occurs when individuals wish to hold on to their original culture and avoid interacting with those belonging to the new host culture. Integration is the strategy whereby the individuals wish to maintain their original culture as well as wish to be a part of the new host culture. Lastly, marginalization occurs when the individuals neither wish to maintain their original culture nor do they desire interaction with the new host culture. This last strategy is usually the result of a failed attempt at assimilation due to discrimination from the dominant group. Therefore, the acculturation strategies that immigrant individuals use are determined by both the newcomers themselves as well as the dominant groups (Berry, 1974).

Canada announced its Policy of Multiculturalism in 1971 to enhance acceptance among all ethnocultural groups (Berry, 2006). It emphasizes both the maintenance of heritage cultures and identities as well as equal participation of all ethnocultural groups in the dominant society (Berry, 2006). Bicultural acculturation, whereby immigrants value both their home culture as well as the culture of their new host country, is generally believed to best facilitate successful career development – as opposed to only valuing the culture of one or the other (Yakushko et al., 2008). Therefore, Canadian Policy of Multiculturalism strives to achieve integration and not assimilation, separation, or marginalization of the dominant and minority groups.
The national surveys revealed that there was a high endorsement of integration and low endorsement of separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Berry et al., 1977). The members of the larger Canadian society saw cultural diversity as being a positive phenomenon and endorsed multicultural ideology as a good way for ethnocultural and immigrant individuals to relate to each other. According to Krau (1982), immigrant individuals should display openness to social contacts and acquire new social values in order to gain acceptance from work colleagues and the community at large. Therefore, successful adaptation requires social extraversion and social learning. Krau (1982) proposed an immigrant career model consisting of career crystallization, vocational retraining, job entry and trials, establishment, and maintenance. Assuming that the immigrant skilled worker successfully reaches the stage of establishment, the stage of career maintenance can only be achieved after the immigrant individual has overcome the main difficulties in social adaptation and enculturation (Krau, 1982), which is the process by which a person learns the requirements of their new host culture and acquires values and behaviours of that culture (Grusec & Hasting, 2007, p.547).

Despite having policies that attempt to integrate newcomers, Canadians were found to view West and North Europeans more positively than other ethnocultural groups. In addition, immigrants were viewed less positively than Canadian-born individuals of the same cultural origin as the immigrant individuals (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977). Furthermore, immigrants were less accepted than residents who had already settled in Canada.

Cross-cultural differences in social norms between immigrant individuals’ country of origin and new host country can cause immigrants to experience anxiety (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). Cross-cultural adjustment and career transition are very much interrelated with successful adaptation facilitating positive career transition experiences and successful career seeking enabling cultural adjustment (Chen, 2008). Unfortunately, cross-cultural differences in
work culture, job-search and application process, and immigrant individuals being unfamiliar with social customs of the host country, can lead employers to perceive immigrant skilled workers as being incompetent and therefore hinder immigrants’ career development (Chen, 2008; Wang, 2002; Yakushko et al., 2008).

Whereas assertiveness is culturally desirable in the Canadian workplace or in European cultures in general, it is not so in Asian cultures. This difference leads Asian immigrant professionals to be viewed as incompetent if they do not display assertiveness (Moss & Tilly, 2001; Shan, 2013). Similarly, the North American work culture values multitasking and efficient time management, which are not necessarily valued by all cultures (Yakushko et al., 2008). This difference can lead to host employers’ covert or subconscious discrimination towards these immigrant professionals with different cultural backgrounds (Shan, 2013). The experience of discrimination largely affects the adaptation process of immigrant individuals. Discrimination influences the way in which youth acculturate, greatly undermines psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), and increases acculturative stress with increased levels of discrimination (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

Immigrant individuals also bring with them social customs from their home country, which may be very different from that of the North American culture. This may make it difficult for the immigrant workers to develop social networks that would be useful to facilitate their search for jobs or resources (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010). For instance, Latin American immigrant professionals have reported experiencing learning to search for jobs according to Canadian cultural norms and building professional networks in Canada to be demanding and difficult (Hakak et al., 2010). Furthermore, immigrant individuals might have attained their jobs in their country of origin through the help of connections through family
members or friends (Yakushko et al., 2008). Therefore, they may not be familiar with the job-search and application process that is the norm in North America.

**Discrimination**

Individuals from the host culture may see professional immigrants as being competition for employment and result in unfriendly or discriminatory behaviour towards the immigrant workers (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Chen, 2008; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Employers and recruitment agencies have been found to hold prejudiced attitudes towards minority and immigrant applicants and feel wary of causing resentment amongst the existing employees by hiring immigrant workers, and therefore opt for hiring non-immigrant or non-minority workers instead (Fang et al., 2013; Horverak et al., 2013; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Rooth, 2010; Tiboulet, Dambrun, Tourret, & Uhlen, 2012). This factor contributes to the difficulty immigrants experience in acquiring employment.

Highly skilled visible minorities who immigrated to Canada have been found to experience considerable downward mobility in their career development more so than native-born Canadians and immigrants from Western European countries (Picot, 2004). For example, those immigrating from Asia and Africa have been found to find it very difficult or impossible to gain recognition of their foreign credentials from Canadian employers or to acquire employment that utilized their foreign training (Grant, 2007). They resort to taking unskilled jobs in order to meet financial needs for their families, but most of them end up earning less than $30,000 a year despite having university degrees.

The devaluation of the immigrant skilled workers’ foreign credentials, the requirement of Canadian work experience and job-search barriers due to their accents can be seen as a subtle form of discrimination towards immigrant individuals (Esses et al., 2006; Hakak et al., 2010). Research has shown that individuals with foreign accents are frequently seen as having lower
aptitude, intelligence, and social status than individuals who speak with a local accent (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). These judgments, which are based solely on accents and a disregard for job skills, may lead to differential treatment of the immigrant individuals, (Creese & Kambre, 2003; Esses et al., 2006; Purkiss et al., 2006). Furthermore, cultural differences in workplace behavioural norms, such as the Western cultures placing higher values in assertiveness than non-Western cultures, can lead to covert discrimination from employers against immigrant workers (Shan, 2013). Having Canadian work experience may often be relevant to the job; for example, having Canadian experience may indicate a cultural fit for the job or possession of knowledge that is specific and difficult to acquire (Esses et al., 2006). However, past research has also found employers with subtle prejudices to use the requirement of Canadian work experience to rationally justify the refusal to hire immigrant workers (Bauder, 2003a; Esses et al., 2006).

Effects of Career Development Barriers

The employment issues and barriers are stressful and can lead immigrants to suffer from poor mental health such as depression and anxiety (Aroian & Norris, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008). Immigrants who have trouble finding employment experience negative impact on their psychological well-being and delay in psychological, socio-cultural, and economic adaptation to their new country (Aycan & Berry, 1996, Yost & Lucas, 2002). Barriers in finding employment and economic need result in the immigrant individuals having no choice but to work under poor conditions (Ahonen et al., 2009), which lead to poor health and injuries (Azaroff, Levenstein, & Wegman, 2004; Malievskaya, Rosenberg, & Markowitz, 2002). Underemployment and unemployment also lead to loss of social economic status (SES), which can negatively affect immigrant individuals’ self-concept (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009).

An individual’s career is a form of self-identity (Chen, 2008). Unfortunately, many immigrants experience a loss of vocational identity during their immigration transition due to the
career-seeking barriers (Yost & Lucas, 2002). This loss of career identity results in a loss of meaning and selfhood in life, which leads to negative psychological consequences such as anger, worthlessness, and hopelessness if they do not have the internal or external resources to cope (Chen, 2008). A decrease in occupational status and SES also leads to dissatisfaction with their lives and decreases the likelihood of immigrant professionals seeing themselves as being accomplished (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009).

The longer the period of unemployment, the more likely the immigrant workers experience stress, negative self-concept, alienation from society and difficulty adapting (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Acquiring employment decreases feelings of isolation and facilitates networking and friendship building, which would facilitate learning of their new host culture and English skill building (Yakushko et al., 2008). However, the immigrant population is faced with many barriers to finding successful work opportunities.

Of the immigrant professionals who managed to acquire employment, many of them have been found to experience discrimination at the workplace (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Discrimination experienced by immigrant individuals at their workplace, as characterized by experienced racism, mistreatment and dangerous working conditions, has been found to adversely affect their health (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009). Experienced ethnic discrimination in the form of negative treatment, prejudice, xenophobia, harassment, and threats lead to higher levels of stress (Lueck & Wilson, 2010) and depression (Finch, Hummer, Kolody, & Vega, 2001).

Coping Strategies

Immigrants have been found to utilize a range of coping strategies in order to deal with the career development barriers. Social support has been shown to be an important source of coping whereby immigrant individuals receive emotional and instrumental help to cope with the
stressful immigration transition (Blustein, 2001). Networking with people of the same country of origin has been shown to help immigrants find employment (Hagan, 1998; Hakak et al., 2010) and family relationships help to dilute the negative impacts of acculturative stress (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Kagitcibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart et al.; 2010) and the general stress of immigration (Hovey, 2000). Those who do not immigrate with family have been found to socialize in order to buffer the loneliness due to the loss of familiar social ties (Ahmad et al., 2004).

In the face of the many difficulties within their immigration transition experiences, immigrant individuals’ motivation and resilience have also been found to facilitate success in their integration into the labour market of their new host country (Boneva & Frieze, 2001). This is consistent with Chen’s (1997) suggestion that perseverance is one of the key characteristics required to cope with career difficulties in an effective manner. Possessing the will to continue trying in the face of difficulty by maintaining a positive attitude towards uncertainty and being prepared for difficulties protects them from the detrimental effects of the stressful events. This ability to remain positive about uncertainty refers to the next coping strategy, flexibility.

The ability to be flexible and open in thinking about one’s career is another key characteristic that enables individuals to think of alternatives to more effectively cope with the stressful situation (Chen, 1997). In an ideal world, everyone would be able to attain his or her career goals. However, that is often not the case and more often than not reality falls short of how individuals hope and expect their career development to progress. Being able to perceive a compromising career situation in a more flexible manner would help lessen the negative thoughts attached to the experience and thereby enhance the ability to think of alternatives to cope (Chen, 1997). Immigrant individuals’ existing coping strategies may not be sufficient for their new circumstances and they have to be flexible enough to change their coping strategies and develop
new coping behaviours in order to prevent long-term stress and a negative impact on their physical and mental health (Schmitz, 2001).

Previous studies have shown that having a high ability to tolerate ambiguity, in other words, to perceive uncertain or unfamiliar situations as challenging and interesting instead of stressful, enhances successful adaptation and can prevent identity conflict of immigrant individuals (Leong & Ward, 2000; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). Cognitive flexibility, such as open-mindedness and willingness to consider new and unconventional ideas, has also been shown to prevent distress levels by facilitating awareness of alternatives in any given situation and the willingness to be flexible and adapt (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). Tolerance of ambiguity and cognitive flexibility haven been found to facilitate action-oriented coping and a sense of control in immigrant individuals (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008), whereas low ambiguity tolerance and non-flexible individuals have been found to be less receptive to cross-cultural adaptation (Leong & Ward, 2000; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

Another cognitive strategy immigrants have been found to use to cope with the transition barriers is re-framing. In other words, they think about themselves and the situation differently in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Ahmad et al., 2004; Farley et al., 2005; Khawaja et al., 2008; Kosic, 2004; Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003). Immigrant individuals may also avoid thinking about the stressful situation in order to avoid mental distress (Acharya & Northcott, 2007; Goodman, 2004) or minimize their experienced discrimination to avoid facing social rejection (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010). Focusing on the future is another cognitive coping strategy that immigrants have been found to use in order to cope with their transition barriers (Goodman, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008).

Action-taking is another coping strategy that has been found to help immigrants deal with the immigration barriers (Gardner, 2002). For example, active job-searching by using newspaper
ads and the internet have been found to help immigrant job seekers successfully land employment (Fang et al., 2013). Their search activity, such as their active, adaptive, and goal-oriented behaviours, and positive attitudes are important characteristics that help them cope with career transition difficulties (Gardner, 2002). This is consistent with Chen’s (1997) proposed concept of projectivity, which is the concept of tapping into one’s human agency and undergoing constructive career planning and taking action as being one of the main factors to help individuals cope with career difficulties. The emphasis is on the fact that individuals are not passive entities but should instead take an active role in working towards career goals. Related to immigrant professionals’ ability to utilize their motivation, resilience, flexibility, and action-taking coping strategies is their choice to acquire retraining as a strategy to gain employment.

Retraining Experience

As discussed, non-recognition of foreign credentials is by far one of the main barriers to the career transition of immigrant professionals (Esses et al., 2006; McGinnity & Lunn, 2011). Formal credential assessments performed by the Canadian assessment agency is reported to be of little help and only a small number of immigrant individuals found it to help them acquire employment (Grant, 2007). Given the non-recognition of foreign education and work experience, as well as unfavourable regulations of reaccreditation, many immigrant individuals are required or feel forced to gain retraining in order to bridge themselves to the Canadian labour market, re-enter their field of profession, or continue on in their career development (Grant, 2007; Shan, 2009). However, few studies have looked at the retraining experience of immigrant individuals and how their retraining impacted their overall career development transition experience.

Positive Impact of Retraining

Acquisition of local qualifications has been shown to be helpful for employment seeking (Lerner, Menahem, & Hisrich, 2005; Zeng & Xie, 2004). Lerner and colleagues (2005) found
that occupational retraining programs in Israel increased the chances of immigrant skilled workers finding employment, increased their level of occupation, and increased their level of earnings. Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2005) found that individuals who obtained their education from Canada, the United States of America, or the United Kingdom, typically earned more than those who did not. Retraining in the host country was found to contribute to the adaptability of immigrant professionals’ human capital in their new host society and therefore facilitated human capital transfer (Gang & Stuart, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Shan, 2009). The positive outcomes of the retraining programs were more pronounced for ethnic minorities and for females, as they experienced greater downgrading of their credentials and higher occupational loses after immigrating as a result of discrimination (Gang & Stuart, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005). The retraining programs also helped the immigrant professionals to gain social networks and social capital through interactions with representatives of agencies on a regular basis, acquire knowledge of the system, and gain networks with other immigrant individuals.

Immigrants have generally been found to have no difficulties with course content and most of them expressed high levels of interest and enthusiasm in their studies no matter which field they were in previously (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007). Some teachers who took the required Canadian education courses had favourable retraining experience in that instructors created opportunities for them to engage in educational discourse and allowed them to express their professional beliefs and practices (Beynon et al., 2004). The teachers identified themselves as learners and perceived their retraining as possibilities to extend their profession. This allowed them to conceive their position as being consistent with their professional identities. The immigrant teachers’ career identities were further enhanced by the practicum placements and supportive classroom teacher colleagues.
Immigrants have reported to gain retraining in a different field that they feel is relevant to their original field of expertise or one from which they can gain a career identity. Gorbatova and Eaglstein (1998) looked at the retraining experience of new repatriates from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Israel who took retraining courses in social work. The participants reported three subjective and two objective reasons for taking the retraining program. Specifically, they reflected that the element of working with and helping people in the social work program was similar to their previous field of work, they identified with the caring nature of social work, and helping others raised their self-esteem in the face of the decline in their social and economic status. Their objective reasons for retraining included obtaining a university diploma and the promise of the retraining leading to employment.

*Negative Impact of Retraining*

Although retraining has been shown to improve their chances of landing employment as well as offer them a sense of identity, the process of retraining is not without its difficulties. While receiving retraining, immigrants have reported to experience difficulties with language, concerns of the possibility of gaining employment, and anxiety about the implications of low language proficiency on employment seeking (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998). Some immigrants, whose homes and place of retraining were located in different towns, reported that the staggered class hours resulted in them having to travel back and forth between the two towns. This schedule resulted in insufficient time for immigrants to meet financial obligations, such as housing loans and their children’s education. Financial hardship is commonly reported and immigrants have suggested that increased financial assistance would be helpful (Grant, 2007). Retraining scheduling also created difficulties for them to spend time on their other personal issues such as housekeeping, family, and keeping up with their studies (Gorbatova & Eaglstein,
Immigrant individuals have also suggested that more advanced language training and more opportunities to retrain would be helpful (Grant, 2007).

Requiring immigrant individuals to gain Canadian credentials through retraining moves them backwards in their career development. Their identity as professional experts in their field is demoted to the identity of a student. A loss of career identity results in loss of meaning and selfhood and negatively affects their psychological well-being (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). Their self-concept is negatively impacted by their perceived cognitive dissonance over their past and present status incongruence (Krau, 1982). Initial strategies used to cope with the cognitive dissonance may include attempts at adjusting the self-image by methods such as decreasing the self-image to suit their decreased status. However, a change in self-image may not be enough to cope with the existing career developmental issues (Krau, 1982).

Some immigrants undergoing retraining have reported to experience discrimination. For example, some foreign trained teachers who received retraining in teaching encountered critical local classroom teachers who treated the foreign-trained teachers as disentitled newcomers by overtly criticizing the newcomers and shutting them out of the classroom conversations (Beynon et al., 2004).

Non-immigrant adults who attended school while working full-time reported to have felt overwhelmed by having to juggle school and work, and saw their career progress as being delayed by challenges and barriers, such as work requirements for overtime and scheduling conflicts (Gagnon & Packard, 2012). The more hours the students spent at work, the higher the likelihood that they experienced work-school conflict, which has also been found to lead to higher chance of quitting school (Butler, 2007; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). These adults also reported feeling like outsiders due to their age and full-time work status (Gagnon & Packard, 2012). Coping strategies reported included reducing their efforts in school, sacrificing sleep, and
making meaning of their experience by focusing on their career advancement opportunities that they hoped their training would bring. Although they experienced hardships, they reported experiencing synergy between their dual school-work roles.

**Theories and Models**

Given the systemic career development barriers, immigrant professionals have been found to revert to the role of a student when retraining and/or changing their field of profession, which results in a transformation in their self-identity (e.g. Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). They have been found to undergo meaning-making of their retraining and of their new self-identity as students. For example, they believe that retraining in a field related to their previous profession was necessary for them to obtain employment and to maintain some sense of career-identity (e.g. Lerner et al., 2005; Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998). These micro-level processes, such as making-meaning of their experience and taking action to pursue retraining with the intention to obtain their goals, in the face of macro-level systemic barriers, evoke existential concepts of meaningfulness/meaninglessness, freedom and responsibility, as well as the concept of human agency. However, there is limited literature that explores the relevance of existential concepts within career development and career transition, and none have examined existential concepts within immigrant retraining. Additionally, given the scant literature on retraining, there is currently no career theory or model that addresses immigrant retraining.

The rest of this chapter discusses existential concepts and human agency, and their applicability to the immigrant retraining experience. Then, some of the major career models are explored to offer ways of conceptualizing the immigrant retraining process and illustrate how they all allude to existential concepts and human agency. This helps to demonstrate the importance of the goal of the current study, which was to investigate retraining of immigrant
skilled workers using an existential perspective and to examine the role of human agency on retraining.

Existential Psychological Theory

Although existential concepts are not explicitly addressed in the major career development theories that exist in the literature today and are not typically associated with career counselling, those concepts permeate the process of career development and transition, which involves transformations in self-identities and personal meaning (Maglio et al., 2005). For immigrant professionals, the systemic career barriers that they face are an inevitable reality. These inevitable realities that must be overcome are, in existential philosophical terms, “givens.” Existential psychotherapy addresses the conflicts residing in us that are derived from the givens of our existence (Yalom, 1980). These givens or ultimate concerns include death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Death is an inevitable reality that comes in conflict with our desire to live. Although, freedom is commonly perceived as a positive concept and something to be desired, the absence of external structure inherent in freedom implies that the individual is wholly responsible for his or her own actions and ultimately his or her own life. The absence of structure and direction comes in conflict with one’s need for them. Another source of conflict lies between one’s desire for connectedness and one’s isolation or one’s coming into and leaving the world alone. Finally, one’s meaning-seeking nature comes into conflict with the intrinsic meaninglessness of our world.

Discussions of these existential givens and their relevance to the retraining experience of immigrant professionals will now follow. While the existential concepts of meaninglessness, and freedom and reasonability, have been thought to be the most pertinent key concepts related to the context of the process of career development (Cohen; 2003) and the pursuit of retraining of
immigrant professionals, the concepts of isolation and death are also entrenched in the career development barriers that immigrant skilled workers experience.

*Meaning*

“Nothing in the world has significance except by virtue of one’s own creation. There are no rules, no ethical systems, no values; there is no external referent whatsoever; there is no grand design in the universe” (Yalom, 1980, p. 221). Here, Yalom (1980) conveys the meaninglessness and freedom inherent in one’s existence. The intrinsic meaninglessness of our existence, which conflicts with one’s need to make meaning of one’s life, gives rise to one kind of existential dilemma. Meaning, in the existential sense, refers to having a sense of purpose, intention, goal, or function. As such, having a sense of meaning in life is necessary for generating a hierarchy of values in which to help create a structure of how to live (May & Yalom, 2000). Gestalt psychology holds that focusing on meaning-making facilitates our awareness of the here-and-now. This process-oriented approach helps individuals understand their present circumstances, leading to greater existential insight and facilitates action towards more meaningful living (Chen, 2001; Maglio et al., 2005).

Meaning has long been addressed in vocational psychology literature both implicitly and explicitly (Chen, 2001). An example of an indirect focus on meaning-making is Holland’s (1997) personality type theory, which connects personality types with different occupations. Implicit in this theory is the development of awareness of one’s personality type and making meaning in one’s choice of career in light of one’s personality. Similarly, in Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscription and Compromise (1981, 1996) individuals are theorized to be more likely to compromise self-concepts that are less central to the self, with sex-type being most central to one’s self-concept, followed by interest, and prestige being the least central. In Gottfredson’s theory, individuals derive meaning from these self-concepts, which allow them to perform acts
of compromise in a meaningful manner. On the other hand, models such as social cognitive career theory (SCCT) address meaning in a more explicit manner (Chen, 2001; Lent et al., 2000). This model is based on three key concepts: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. The interplay of these concepts involves meaning-making, where social cognitive learning from internal experiences and external circumstances integrate into a meaningful system on which individuals base their actions or human agency (Chen, 2001).

Humans make meaning throughout their lives in all contexts, be it in their work-life or personal life (Chen, 2001). Career theorists, such as Super (1990), claim that one’s career identity reflects a part of one’s total self-concept, which reflects the notion that there are no clear boundaries between one’s work-life and personal life (Chen, 2001). In other words, one’s career provides meaning and self-identity, which infiltrates into all aspects of one’s life. For example, Mather (2008) found that students who were working towards developing careers in the international humanitarian field experienced their work and studies as a context for transformative learning and meaning-making. They found meaning in helping the disadvantaged and having a connection with the scholars who were interested in the same cause. They also moved through a process of self-discovery in becoming more aware of their privilege but also discovered similarities between themselves and those who live in places vastly different from their society.

Immigrant professionals who migrate to a new country under the skilled worker’s category are approved for migration based on their credentials and work experiences (Khan 2007; Sinacore et al., 2009) and therefore self-identify as professionals who plan on landing meaningful employment (Chen, 2008; Matthew 2006). Unfortunately, their foreign credentials are unrecognized by local employers and many immigrants experience unemployment or underemployment as a result of the systemic barriers (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007). This
experience is contrary to their intention, expectation, and meaning-making of their migration. Immigrants have been found to reframe their unsuccessful career development by thinking about themselves and the situation in a different manner in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Ahmad et al., 2004; Farley et al., 2005; Khawaja et al., 2008; Kosic, 2004; Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003). In other words, immigrant individuals use meaning-making as a coping strategy to cope with an unfortunate circumstance by creating new meaning in their experience. Immigrant professionals who underwent retraining lost their self-identity and meaning as professionals and reverted to the role of students (Yost & Lucas, 2002). The immigrant individuals have been found to cope by adjusting their self-image (Krau, 1982), again reflecting active meaning-making in coping with their career backtracking.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

The existential theory holds that there does not exist any meaning or grand design. One must create one’s own meaning in life. In essence, one is free to make meaning of one’s existence in whichever way one chooses. This freedom is limited only by the existential givens, which include personal and environmental barriers, such as diseases, racism, etc.

Closely related to our freedom to make meaning of our existence is responsibility (May & Yalom, 2000; Yalom, 1980). “Freedom extends beyond being responsible for the world (that is, for imbuing the world with significance): one is also entirely responsible for one’s life, not only for one’s actions but also for one’s failures to act” (Yalom, 1980, p. 220). Contemplation of life under this realization of our freedom and responsibility has been described to give rise to a sense of groundlessness, which leads to a fundamental anxiety of existence. In order to escape from this anxiety, we seek out some sort of structure or authority, even if the authority is a tyrant. Existential philosophers, Heidegger and Sartre, suggest that the most predominant means of
coping with the anxiety is to perceive our world as independent of our constitution (Yalom, 1980).

Yalom (1980) described defenses we use to deny our awareness of our responsibility in order to avoid the dread of the feeling of groundlessness. These defenses include compulsivity, displacement of responsibility to another, denial of responsibility (playing innocent victim or losing control), avoidance of autonomous behaviour, and decisional pathology. By acting compulsively without deliberation, one obliterates choice and avoids the problem of responsibility. Displacing responsibility on to another person allows one to avoid assuming personal responsibility. Playing the innocent victim of events that one has unwittingly caused or contributed to and temporarily entering an irrational state of mind or “losing control” serve to deny one’s responsibility. Another defense involves the refusal of taking action to resolve a problem even though the action necessary is known. One might also avoid willing (i.e. wishing and making decisions) to deny one’s responsibility. Much like displacement of responsibility, one might relinquish one’s choice to someone else or some external event.

Yalom (1980) spoke about existential guilt accompanying the awareness of responsibility in existential psychotherapy. Guilt in the existential sense refers not only to feeling guilty over transgressions against others, but also of transgressions against oneself. Specifically, existential guilt lies in failing to fulfill one’s full authentic potential. Similarly, Horney (1950) theorizes that we unconsciously compare our actual selves to our potential selves and the discrepancy between them gives rise to self-contempt.

In the context of the career transition of immigrant professionals, immigrants have the freedom and responsibility to take action towards obtaining their career development goals within the limits of their new host society. They are solely responsible for taking it upon themselves to create their career journeys as there does not exist any prescribed program or
action plan provided to them. In this sense, it is conceivable that immigrant skilled workers would experience a sense of groundlessness or anxiety regarding their freedom in the existential sense. In fact, immigrant professionals have been found to utilize their action-taking abilities as a coping strategy against the career barriers they face (Gardner, 2002). This coping strategy reflects a sense of taking responsibility for their freedom to create a better scenario in the face of the many systemic and cultural barriers.

In sum, humans strive for meaning in order to lead a fulfilling life and feel a sense of guilt when they fail to fulfill their responsibility to construct their own structure to obtain meaning. In other words, the existential perspective on the human condition requires the element of human action or human agency to be present for self-actualization to be attainable.

Death

“It is one of life’s most self-evident truths that everything fades, that we fear the fading, and that we must live, nonetheless, in the face of the fading, in the face of the fear” (Yalom, 1980, p. 30). Death is one of life’s existential givens and one’s attitude towards death impacts how one lives and fares in one’s life (Yalom, 1980). Although death leads to the termination of one’s life, it is the acknowledgement of death that saves one’s life. According to Yalom and existential philosophers, such as Heidegger, to deny and ignore the reality of death is to exist in a state of forgetfulness. This state of forgetfulness results in the preoccupation with everyday diversions or distractions and an inauthentic way of living. It is only through being in a state of mindful awareness of one’s mortality that one can take responsibility for one’s own being and live an authentic life. Being in this mindful state allows one to embrace the possibilities and limits within one’s life in order to take responsibility of one’s freedom and create personal meaning. The fact and concept of death forces humans to live more authentic lives and appreciate living. Although Yalom speaks about death in the literal meaning of it, he also
discusses covert death anxiety, which occurs during major life situations, such as loss of employment (Yalom, 2009). According to Yalom, major life decisions that involve the act or experience of loss can elicit the awareness of the finite nature and limitations of our existence, which can evoke death anxiety.

In relation to career transition, unemployment can be seen as a small death and experienced as a state of nonbeing, especially in Western cultures where one’s work identity is so central to one’s sense of self (Maglio et al., 2005). This small death can therefore lead to uncertainty and suffering. A new career can only begin once the previous career dies, which can lead to a sense of loss (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014). Similarly, it is not unimaginable that the change or lowered level of one’s field of work or job prestige may involve psychological distress. However, this change must be acknowledged and accepted in order for new possibilities to be generated and career development to occur.

Immigrant professionals experience a loss of their career identities due to the systemic barriers (Yost & Lucas, 2002). Some immigrant professionals experience unemployment as a result of these barriers (Yakushko et al., 2008) and others lose their prior professional identity as a result of taking lower level jobs or returning to the role of a student to obtain retraining (Chen, 2008; Larsen, 2004; Yost & Lucas, 2002). The loss of employment and professional identity as well as major decision-making to return to the role of a student evokes themes of existential death anxiety. According to existential psychological theory, immigrant professionals must acknowledge the death of their previous career identities to be able to take responsibility for their own career destinies and explore other avenues of career development.

Isolation

“Each of us enters existence alone and must depart from it alone” (May & Yalom, 2000, p. 285). Yalom (1980) identifies three types isolation: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and
existential isolation. Whereas interpersonal isolation deals with loneliness resulting from isolation from people and intrapersonal isolation refers to denial of one’s own feelings, desires, judgment and potential in favour or others’ wishes, existential isolation refers to the basic inevitable isolation of human existence. Existential isolation exists with or without interpersonal connectedness and engagement. It is the unbridgeable gap between oneself and everyone else. In order to grow as a person, one must separate, be self-reliant, and independent. However, to relinquish interpersonal fusion leads to a confrontation with the dread of existential isolation, in other words, there exists conflict between growth and isolation. One also faces this existential isolation when one is confronted with death, since no one can die with us or for us. Existential isolation is also brought to the forefront when one is confronted with freedom and responsibility, as one is alone in that no one else but the individual is responsible for one’s life.

Unemployment is an isolating experience when one is competing against other people for jobs (Maglio et al., 2005). The applications, interviews, and rejections when employers deem you a bad fit for the position or company can instill a sense of loneliness in individuals. Immigrant individuals have been found to suffer unemployment due to systemic career development barriers (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008) that can lead to feelings of isolation. They have also been found to experience acculturation barriers and discrimination during their career transition process as well as during the retraining process, which can cause a sense of loneliness and isolation as well (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Gagnon & Packard, 2012; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Increased social contact and support from friends, family, or community have been shown to help immigrant professionals deal with career development barriers (Ahmad et al., 2004; Blustein, 2001; Stuart et al., 2010). Social support has been found to be helpful to an individual’s experience of implementing action plans and dealing with unemployment, and a
lack of social support was found to hinder these tasks (Maglio et al., 2005). As such, it has been suggested that individuals would benefit from encouragement to accept their feelings of isolation and reconnect with and draw on social resources (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014).

_Human Agency_

According to existential theory, there is no intrinsic meaning in life and we are responsible for the active search and creation of our unique purpose (Corey, 2001). Closely related to these existential givens is human agency, a concept coined by Bandura (1977, 1986) in his social cognitive theory. Bandura (2001) defined human agency as an one’s ability and potential to exercise some control over one’s life through foresight, motivation, affect, action-taking, self-awareness, meaning, and life purpose (Chen, 2006). Individuals are seen as contributors to their life circumstances and not merely products of them (Bandura, 2006).

The four core properties of human agency are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2006). _Intentionality_ refers to forming of intentions with action plans and strategies to actualize them. _Forethought_ involves setting goals and anticipating likely outcomes to guide and motivate actions. Through visualizing future goals and anticipated outcomes in one’s cognitive representations, one’s future is brought into the present, which guides and motivates one’s behaviours. When one’s forethought involves long-term matters of value, one gains meaning in life. The third property, _self-reactiveness_, involves constructing the appropriate course of action and to motivate and regulate the execution of the action plan. One’s self-regulation links one’s thoughts and actions. Lastly, human agency requires _self-reflectiveness_, which is one’s ability to be self-aware in one’s self-efficacy, evaluate one’s thoughts and actions, reflect on meaning of goals, and make corrective adjustments where needed.
Bandura recognizes that individuals are not autonomous agents and that they exist in a context where human functioning is a product of interplay between intrapersonal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). Within this context, individuals make casual contributions to the course of events through their agentic actions. The concept of human agency reflects existential meaning-making and purposefulness. One’s actions are motivated by one’s underlying intentions or goals, and the awareness of these goals and intentions give one’s life and actions meaning. Human agency also reflects existential freedom and responsibility in that one is free to choose one’s goals and actions but one also has the responsibility to take it upon oneself to set these goals and take the necessary actions to influence one’s relationships and environment in order to obtain one’s goals. Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory adds that the prerequisite for human agency is the belief of self-efficacy. Unless individuals believe that they have the ability to reach their goals through their actions, they will have little motivation to take action or persevere in the face of difficulties. Also, without an accurate expectation of self-efficacy, it is unlikely that one’s actions will lead to fruitful outcomes (Chen, 2002).

In the context of career development, human agency refers to the combinations of one’s intention and action that leads to making things happen in one’s career (Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1997; Cochran & Laub, 1994). The emphasis is not only on possessing the will to do something, but also on concrete action-taking (Chen, 2004). Intention guides action, while action materializes the intention (Chen, 2006). Neither one of these constructs alone suffice to initiate human agentic functioning. Individuals who possess human agency will have the intention to try their best and take action in doing so even in the pursuit of a compromised career outcome. Possessing the motivation and the ability to take concrete action in compromising situations would allow individuals to exercise control over their compromising situation and facilitate a positive career outcome in the long run. Without the intention or ability to take any action in a
compromising situation would lead to no positive change in the individuals’ circumstances and would not provide a sense of self-efficacy or a sense of control over their circumstances.

The industrial occupational era required individuals to learn and perform a trade throughout their lives. However, in the current information era, knowledge and technical skills are constantly evolving and updated. Therefore, employees are now required to take charge in their self-development to meet the changes of career demands over the course of their lifetime (Bandura, 2006). Much in the same way, immigrant skilled workers are required to self-develop through retraining in order to gain the required Canadian credentials in order to meet the Canadian standards to continue their career development. Therefore, immigrant professionals need to access their human agency in order to take the necessary actions, in most cases gain retraining, to reach their goals of re-entering their original field of work, retraining in their field of interest, or retraining in a field where employment opportunities are more abundant.

Returning to a student role after having earned high credentials and gained work experience in their home country is undoubtedly a large compromise to make in order to continue their career development in Canada. The concept of positive compromise, as coined by Chen (2004), states that open-mindedness is required in addition to human agency in order for an individual to gain the ability to exercise more control over a reality that is often beyond human control. Open-mindedness is the concept of having an open attitude and maintaining the flexibility to think bigger and wider (Chen, 2004). Space for change in intention and action allows for more options to be considered and for motivation for further action to be enhanced (Chen, 2006). In other words, when an individual is more flexible and change-oriented, he or she will become more readily adaptable to changes and be able to create optimal changes to a compromising situation (Chen, 2004). Without the ability to be open-minded in a compromising situation, individuals may fail to be able to see the different ways that they can deal with a
situation in order to make the most out of it. The ability to be open-minded or flexible is quite relevant in the case of immigrant retraining. Without the ability to view their career transition journey in a flexible manner, they would likely be unable to take advantage of retraining opportunities, which have been shown to facilitate a more positive career outcome (Lerner et al., 2005; Zeng & Xie, 2004).

Existing Major Career Models

Three major career development theories that can be applied to and aid the understanding of the career transition journey of immigrant professionals will now be discussed. The theories presented include the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), Super’s Life-span, Life-space Theory (Super et al., 1996), and the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2012). The Existential Career Model (Cohen, 2003) will then be described. For each of the theories, the application for the career transition and development of immigrant professionals as well as the implicit existential and human agency themes within each model will also be discussed.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994, 1996) and is based on Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory whereby the interaction of the individual’s environment, memories, beliefs, preferences, self-perceptions, and behaviour are taken into account. According to SCCT, career development is based on an individual’s experiences between the environment and personal factors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Yakushko et al., 2008). Personal factors include gender, race/ethnicity, disability/health status, and ability, and the environmental or contextual factors include background contextual factors and proximal influences (Lent et al., 2000; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Sharf, 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). Background factors are environmental factors that the individual cannot control such as availability of opportunities to develop learning experiences and experiences that
lead to learned gender roles and academic skills (Sharf 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). Proximal influences are the direct factors that affect the individual’s academic and career choices, such as available role models and opportunities in a desired field (Lent et al., 2000).

The three key concepts of SCCT are the individual’s self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. They are related to each other and affect each other in various ways (Lent et al., 1996). Self-efficacy, a concept coined by Bandura (1989), is an individual’s beliefs about his or her abilities, which change according to the context of the situation. Personal factors and background contextual factors have an impact on self-efficacy (Yahushko et al., 2008). Self-efficacy affects the development of interests, which in turn affects his or her educational and career goals. Outcome expectation is the individual’s estimate of the probability of a positive or negative outcome, which also affects an individual’s interests and goals. Self-efficacy may be more influential than outcome expectation or vice versa depending on the situation, but they both lead to certain interests. One is more likely to develop an interest for an activity that one believes one has a high ability in or will lead one to success. Interests then lead to choices of personal goals, which then organize an individual’s behaviour to guide his or her actions towards achieving those goals. These actions then lead to improvement in performance of the activities that are related to the goals. The outcome of the individual’s performance then leads to learning experiences, which in turn affect his or her self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Immigrant skilled workers are faced with many systemic barriers that prevent them from using their foreign trained credentials in their new host country. In the SCCT model, these barriers can be seen as the contextual factors that affect their self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Yakushko et al., 2008). The proximal influences include all the systemic barriers such as non-recognition of foreign credentials and requirement of Canadian work experience. Other proximal influences that impact retraining experiences include oppression and
discrimination (Yahushko et al., 2008). Discrimination is a barrier that many immigrants have to face, which negatively affects the development of their interests, skills and outcome experiences. The non-recognition of foreign training as well as the negative attitude that Canadian trainers have towards foreign-trained individuals can be seen as forms of discrimination (Beynon et al., 2004; Esses et al., 2006; Hakak et al., 2010). This in turn decreases self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which hinders their ability to have a positive retraining experience.

The background contextual factors that may have an impact on their retraining experience include the accessibility to or availability of retraining resources and attitudes of local individuals at the retraining programs. Their familial, social, educational and economic factors from their country of origin are also background contextual factors that affect their retraining experience in their new country of residence. Other background contextual factors that influence the immigrant professionals’ experience during retraining include their sets of unwritten rules of social engagement, behaviours, perceptions and thoughts derived from their background and origins (Bauder, 2006; Bourdieu, 1997). The rules and values from their country of origin also determine whether it is more important to hold any job in order to make an income or to regain their credentials in their original field of expertise, which would lead them to either finding another lower level job or gaining retraining in order to return to their field of expertise.

Personal factors, such as adaptability, resiliency, and values may influence immigrant professionals’ decision to retrain, their experience of the retraining, and their ability to cope with career development barriers in general. Their ability to change their attitudes, values and behaviours to adapt to or acculturate with those of the new culture would assist in gaining a positive retraining experience (Yahushuko et al., 2008). For example, being able to adapt to the English language would allow for a positive experience. In fact, the ability to acculturation and the level of English proficiency affect the individual’s psychological well-being. According to
Miller and Chandler (2002) and Miller and colleagues (2006) found that immigrant women from the former Soviet Union who were not acculturated and not proficient in English were found to suffer from higher levels of depression. Another form of acculturation pertains to culture specific skills such as multitasking, which is a skill valued by the North American culture (Yahushko, 2008). Personal inputs and contextual factors both in turn affect the immigrants’ self-efficacy and outcome expectations. SCCT also addresses their expectations of what the retraining programs might bring them, which would impact immigrant professionals’ interest and goals with regards to completing a retraining program.

SCCT elaborates on the interaction between human agency and the other key factors, such as outcome expectations, personal goals, and self-efficacy, thereby broadening the scope of human agency. It shows that human agency not only affects an individual’s career development, but it also impacts other interconnected factors such as interest development, attitudes and values. (Chen, 2006). According to Chen (2006), the concept of human agency in SCCT is parallel to the one conceptualized by Bandura (2001). Human agency reflects self-efficacy and encompasses the integration of self-efficacy and important constructs of human intentional action such as, intrapersonal, interpersonal, contextual, and environmental factors in the individual’s life. According to SCCT, self-efficacy is the core foundation that allows people to exercise human agency (Chen, 2006). The building of self-efficacy is vital and facilitates the broadening of considered career options (Packard & Babineau, 2009). Self-efficacy expectation is often perceived as synonymous with personal agency in career development and counseling (Chen, 2002). Adults may experience increase in self-efficacy when attaining an entry-level job or completing a certificate within a field of interest. Especially since the immigrant individuals have to face many challenging systemic career development barriers, accomplishing such tasks as acquiring a job or credential could provide them a sense of accomplishment. Acquiring a
sense of achievement would increase the immigrant workers’ beliefs about their capabilities and would likely provide them with the motivation and intention to pursue their career goals.

**Super’s Life-Span Life-Space Theory**

Super (1942, 1990) focused on the social context and personal needs of clients that are making career choices. In 1953 and 1980, Super began developing theoretical propositions of career development by drawing from developmental psychology and personality psychology theories, which resulted in Super’s Life-span Life-space Theory. Super’s (1990) theory focuses on self-concept and developmental theory, where the self-concept is based on the personal needs, values, interests, and abilities, and developmental theory is based on the learned experiences through interacting with the social context or environment (Super, 1990; Super, et al., 1996). Super saw self-concept as a product of the interaction of the self with society. It is through an individual’s interactions with his or her family, friends, school, and coworkers that the individual’s biological characteristics, social roles, and evaluations of others’ reactions towards the individual all interplay to give rise to the individual’s self-concept. The self-concept is thus a subjective and socially constructed manner that an individual views himself or herself and the world (Sharf, 2010). According to Super (1990) and Super and colleagues (1996), career development is a process of developing and applying the self-concept. He saw career choice as a developmental process and not a point-in-time event. For Super, the process of choice, entry, adjustment, and transition to new career choice occurs over a whole life cycle.

Individuals are conceived as existing in two primary dimensions called life-space and life-span (Super et al., 1996). Life-space represents the social positions occupied and roles that people play throughout their lives – child, student, leisure, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner. The importance that an individual places on each role depends on which point that individual is in his or her life (Nevill & Super, 1986). For example, roles of leisure,
student, and child are important in childhood whereas roles of citizen, and worker gain more importance in adolescence. Individuals differ in the importance that they assign to work according to their current stage of life (Super, 1990). The nature in which individuals are involved in each role also changes throughout life and often these roles overlap (Nevill & Super, 1986; Sterner, 2012). Involvement of the life-role depends on an individual’s participation, commitment, knowledge, and value expectations. Participation involves taking action within a role, such as learning about a role, improving skills pertaining to a role, or even just talking to people or reading about an activity related to the role. Commitment is the desire to be active or involved in a role, which may include future planning about a role. Knowledge involves gathering information about a role either by experiencing it or by observing it. Whether or not a role can fulfill an individual’s values refers to the value expectations of a role.

Life-span represents the stages of career development that individuals go through throughout their lives. Individuals begin with growth, whereby they become concerned about the future and work towards doing well in school, developing good work habits and attitudes, and increasing control over their own lives. The next stage they undergo is exploration, where they crystallize, specify, and implement their career choice. Individuals then go through establishment, where they try to stabilize, consolidate, and advance in an occupational position. If they are happy with the current occupation and would like to continue with that endeavour, they will enter the stage of maintenance. Here, individuals will try to hold on to what they have achieved, gain new skills and knowledge and find innovative means of performing. If, on the other hand, they decide to change occupation, they will re-cycle through the first few stages starting with exploration. Disengagement is the final stage whereby individuals undergo deceleration, retirement preparations, and retirement. The life-span describes the process in which individuals choose and adjust to the different roles in the life-space.
Existential themes are indirectly referred to in Super’s Life-span Life-space theory. Super’s theory conceptualizes career choice as the implementation of one’s self-concept, which is socially constructed through the interaction between the self and the social dimensions, such as community, school, family, peer groups, and the job market (Super et al., 1996). This socially constructed subjective self-concept helps individuals understand and make meaning of their career choices and experiences. As individuals’ self-concept and environment change, so too do the role of the life-space and the stage of the life-span change in order to accommodate a match between the their self-concept and their career. When immigrant professionals immigrate to Canada, their life circumstances change, as do their social dimensions, and they experience isolation, at least during the initial period. For instance, immigrant professionals have been found to experience culture gaps (Yakushko et al., 2008) and discrimination (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009) within their new social environment, which can imaginably lead to a sense of isolation and have a negative impact on their self-concept. The systematic barriers within their career environment (social dimension) most likely change the meaning-making of their career choices and experiences from one that focuses on interest or prestige to one that focuses on financial survival (e.g. Sinacore et al., 2009).

Life roles allow individuals to fulfill values and meaning in the existential sense (Sterner, 2012). New roles develop as what individuals perceive as meaningful and important evolves and individuals take on different roles in their life-space. Within the life-space developmental stages, existential themes can influence career decisions (Sterner, 2012). For instance, having a purpose or meaning in the form of ideals and values can provide individuals with the strength to strive towards those goals in the face of social barriers or limited resources or opportunities that prevent them from moving through life stages (Sterner, 2012; Van Deurzen, 2002). Sterner (2012) suggests that exploring the meaning of the barriers and immigrants’ responsibility to
work towards their goals may be helpful to move them along their life span stages. Immigrant professionals are often forced to make changes to their life-space due to the systemic barriers. In order to cope with these barriers, immigrant professionals have been found to pursue retraining (Grant, 2007). This involves a change of life-space from the role of a worker to the role of a student. As Sterner (2012) suggests, the retraining process likely involves making meaning of the reason for retraining and in the field of retraining.

Super’s concepts of involvement in life-role, i.e. participation, commitment, and knowledge, are relevant to the actions that immigrant professionals must take in order to face the systemic barriers e.g. obtain retraining. These concepts implicitly denote the requirement of human agency as well as acceptance of existential freedom and responsibility to fulfill a role. These concepts reflect the need for individuals to take it upon themselves to act with intention. In order for immigrant professionals to persevere through the systemic career barriers, the themes of human agency and existential responsibility taking are likely to play a significant role.

Super’s concept of re-cycling is particularly relevant to the immigrant professionals who undergo retraining as they have to disrupt their career advancement and return to the early stage of growth in order to do so. Super recognizes that not everyone follows his proposed life stages in the same order (Super, 1990). He acknowledges that most individuals will reassess their careers at certain points of their lives and undergo recycling and re-enter the exploration stage. During this re-cycling through the stages, an individual experiences “death” of their previous career identity. This stage also reflects a sense of meaning-making involved in re-entering an earlier career development stage and human agency in order to initiate action. Super’s life-span and life-space theory sheds light on how immigrant individuals must essentially start from the very beginning of their career development process and relinquish their pre-migration accomplishments in hopes of re-entering their field of expertise through retraining.
Closely related to existentialism is Savickas’ (2005) Career Construction Theory, which contains existential concepts such as meaning, human agency, and authenticity or identity. Savickas’ Career Construction Theory is a meta-theory that involves four main concepts that are derived from existing theories within the field of psychology. The concepts address vocational personality, developmental tasks of career adaptability, dimensions of career adaptability, and life themes (Savickas, 2011a). Savickas draws from Holland’s personality theory to understand the socially constructed attitudes, interests, and abilities that lead to the careers that people choose to build for themselves. To Savickas, Holland’s personality theory is dynamic and changing rather than involving stable traits.

Savickas explains career adaptability, in other words, how people deal with career difficulties, by drawing from the developmental tasks described within Super’s life stage model. The developmental stages include growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement (as previously discussed in Super’s life-span model). Savickas recognized that individuals do not necessarily undergo all of the tasks nor do they only occur at a specific point in one’s life. Instead, individuals may enter any of these developmental tasks whenever they decide to make a change to their careers. Savickas also addresses the process of adaptability or the dimensions of career adaptability, which he sees as psychosocial concepts that are unique for each individual. The dimensions that facilitate an individual’s ability to adapt to career issues include concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. An individual’s concern about their career leads to planning and action taking to improve his or her future career situation. Control refers to an individual’s ability to make his or her own decisions in order to take control over his or her career issues. Curiosity refers to the stage when an individual begins to question his or her career-related choices and becomes open to exploring different career options. In order to be able
to explore different options, they require confidence, which Savickas proposes should increase as they address smaller daily-life problems. The concept of developmental tasks and dimensions of career adaptability are particularly relevant to the career transition experienced by immigrant skilled workers, as many of them are forced to recycle and make changes to their careers due to the systemic barriers.

The last concept that Savickas addresses in his Career Construction Theory is life themes, which describes the socially constructed meaning that individuals give to their career choices. Savickas derived this concept from Adler’s lifestyle concept, which theorizes that one’s style of life explains the career choices that one makes (Savickas, 2011a, 2011b). According to Savickas, lifestyle, early recollections, and the five major life tasks reveal important themes within an individual’s life and give meaning to career choices. Savickas conceptualizes that lifestyle (an individual’s historical style of living) and early recollections (the earliest memories that an individual can recall) provide important themes and meaning to decisions made later on in the individual’s life. The five major life tasks refer to self-development, spiritual development, occupation, society, and love, which according to Adler, determines lifestyle (Savickas, 2005). Adler also recognizes that occupation is more often than not related to social interest, or the desire to help others.

The concepts within Savickas’ career construction theory reflect existential themes. For instance, the concepts of vocational personality and life themes involve self-identity and socially constructed roles, which are related to the existential concept of meaning. In other words, one’s self-identity and social roles provide meaning and purpose to one’s chosen career. That one’s roles are socially constructed also touches on the concept of existential isolation and one’s need for interpersonal connections. The concept of developmental tasks and dimensions of career adaptability are related to the existential concepts of freedom and responsibility, where one must
take up the responsibility of one’s freedom to make choices within one’s career journeys in order to cope or problem solve through the career difficulties. Additionally, career adaptability is also closely related to Bandura’s concept of human agency, whereby one is required to take it upon oneself to act on career challenges with the intention of improving one’s career situation. Career adaptability, particularly the notion of *curiosity*, is synonymous with the idea of open-mindedness in Chen’s (2004) concept of positive compromise, whereby one has to be open to trying different strategies to improve one’s career. In particular, immigrant professionals, whose credentials are not recognized in Canada, must be flexible and open to taking on a student role (self-development task) versus a professional role (occupational task) in order to gain retraining.

In sum, the career construction theory, can be used to aid the understanding of how immigrant professionals make meaning of why they have to gain retraining, and how they cope with having to back track in their career development and potentially fulfill dual student-worker roles. This theory touches on how their meaning-making is related to their ability to cope or utilize their human agency to take action towards gaining retraining in order to further their career development.

*Existential Career Model*

Another model closely related to existential theory is Cohen’s (2003) existential career model. Cohen applied existential theory to career development and is one of the first authors to propose a vocational decision-making model from an existential perspective. This model involves four stages: responsibility, evaluation, action, and re-evaluation. During the first stage, individuals become aware of their own freedom and responsibility in their career-decision making. Those who are anxious about their own freedom and responsibility may transfer their career choice responsibility to others such as family members, teachers, or career counselors. Once they have accepted their freedom and responsibility, they then enter the evaluation stage
where different career options are evaluated for their ability to provide meaning and purpose to their lives and facilitate an authentic existence or self-actualization. This is followed by the action stage whereby the career decisions are implemented.

According to Cohen’s model, individuals who shunned their responsibility may act impulsively by failing to evaluate their career decision thoroughly or they may act compulsively by acting on career decisions made by others. If these defenses are used, the individuals will be prevented from an authentic existence and fulfillment or satisfaction from their career. In the last stage, they re-evaluate whether their career decision provides them personal meaning and a means of leading an authentic existence. If they reject their own responsibility and freedom in their career decision-making, they will begin the whole process from the first stage until meaningful and fulfilling vocation is obtained.

This career development model is applicable to the career transition and development of immigrant individuals who would have to undergo the first stage of being aware of their freedom to either undergo retraining or continue to struggle to re-enter their field and the workforce. According to this model, once immigrant professionals accept that reality, they would evaluate retraining options, after which they would take action on their decisions. They would then re-evaluate whether their retraining offered them a sense of meaning and purpose to live authentically or gain a sense of authentic career identity.

Cohen’s model, however, is limited in its highly individualistic perspective and may not be as applicable to collectivistic cultures (Cohen, 2003). This model emphasizes the need for an individualistic decision-making process. It does not take into account the important role of social context in the decision making of those who come from a more collectivist culture and frames the socially determined decision-making as shunning responsibility. There is also a lack of consideration for the contextual factors that may influence career decision-making. Although the
themes of career-decision making in this existential career model are quite pertinent to the immigrant professional population, the limitations of the model would have to be addressed in order for it to provide a comprehensive understanding of the career development process of immigrant professionals who may come form collectivist cultures and are confronted with contextual systematic barriers that influence their decision-making.

Traditional career counseling approaches match individuals’ skills, abilities, interests, and value with career opportunities without considering the complexity of vocational development circumstances that veers individuals off the standard career developmental trajectory (Savickas, 2000; Sterner, 2012). This is especially true in the context of the career development of immigrant skilled workers who experience career development difficulties due to systemic barriers. Even though it is recognized that these traditional methods are limited in their effectiveness, counselors continue to apply them (Guindon & Hanna, 2002). As we can see, the major models and theories of career development appear to overlap and touch upon similar key concepts. This overlap suggests a need for the development of a more integrative model that addresses individuals as entities who exist in a context in which they must make meaning and take action. A more integrative model that incorporates the philosophical theories regarding ultimate existential givens, the micro level issues (i.e. the individuals’ experiences and behaviours), and the macro level issues (i.e. the external systematic and societal barriers that impact the career development and retraining experience of immigrant professionals) is needed.
Chapter 3 Methodology

This research study was completed as a part of a larger study, How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants’ vocational well-being, conducted by Dr. Charles Chen (principal investigator) and six of his graduate student researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. While, the current study, similar to the larger study, explores the retraining experience of the immigrant professional participants, this current study focuses on a subset of topics that are most relevant to the research questions as well as the interview questions that are most relevant to topics of existential psychology and human agency.

Qualitative analysis was performed in this study to examine the retraining process of adult immigrant skilled workers in Canada. Specifically a grounded theory approach was used. The following sections address the rationale for using qualitative methodology and describe the grounded theory approach used.

Rationale for Qualitative Design

Until the last few decades, psychology has largely been a quantitative field due to its conception as a science in the nineteenth century (Gelo, Braakmaan, & Benetka, 2008). In the 1960s, psychologists, especially those involved in research of social phenomena began to question the appropriateness of the quantitative research approach within their work. They began looking towards a more naturalistic, contextual, and holistic approach of learning about human beings, which is now known as qualitative research. Many of the qualitative methods have their roots in the anthropology, psychology, and sociology disciplines dating back to the late 20th century (Travers, 2009; Williamson, 2009) and it has since incorporated conceptual principles and methodologies of political science (Brod, Tesler & Christensen, 2009). Qualitative methodology has been widely used in health sciences research to help improve health care provided to patients (Gillespie, Chaboyer, Longbottom, & Wallis, 2010; Jansen, Foets, & de
Bont, 2010; Todres, Galvin, & Holloway, 2009), as well as in educational research to aid enhancement in education provided to students (Angell, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009; Burch, 2010; Ntuli, Keengwe, & Kyei-Blankson, 2009).

The differences between quantitative and qualitative research lie in the philosophical and methodological assumptions (Gelo et al., 2008). Quantitative research is rooted in the empiricist or positivist paradigm, whereby there is assumed to be one single, objective, and true reality (Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Gelo et al., 2008). Its research designs are based on this ontological foundation that the world exists independently and that individuals can learn about the world by studying it using the scientific method (Duffy & Chenail, 2008). Quantitative research methods include experimental and non-experimental designs (Gelo et al., 2008), whereby theories of causal or correlational relationships between variables of interests are operationalized in order to be measured and quantified (Flick, 1998). This approach of testing phenomena based on theories is deductive and theory-driven. It requires the researcher to be separate and detached from the research participants in order to limit any researcher bias (Gelo et al., 2008).

The qualitative research approach, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that there are multiple, socially, and psychologically constructed realities, and that there is an inseparable relationship between the researcher and what is being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gelo et al., 2008; Speziale & Carpenter, 2003; Williamson, 2009). Qualitative research asks questions to uncover truths that exist and develop a complete understanding of how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Williamson, 2009). In contrast to quantitative studies, which emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal and correlational relationships between variables, qualitative analysis focuses on processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The perceptions of the individuals are captured from an emic approach from the insider’s perspective (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003) through different data collection methods.
such as interviews, observations, and written documents (Patton, 2002). It differs from quantitative research in that it considers the social and cultural construction of the variables of interest as integral to the concepts under objective examination, rather than correlating or factoring out these influences (Brod et al., 2009). Furthermore, qualitative analysis provides a means to explore subject areas of which little is known as well as a means to gain novel understanding of a known phenomenon (Stern, 1980).

The differences in the underlying assumptions about the world and methodologies between quantitative and qualitative research suggest that the type of research method used in a study must consider the nature of the phenomena being investigated and the questions that the study endeavors to have answered. Given the largely deductive and theory-driven nature of quantitative research, it is most suitable for studies that aim to confirm theories, predict a phenomenon, and measure change of previously measured phenomenon (Gelo et al., 2008; Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco, 2003). Without a clear idea of the phenomena being operationalized, quantitative variables may encode information ambiguously and a meaningful interpretation of events and their relationship would not be possible (Toomela, 2008). Studies that look to explore phenomena, develop a theory based on observations, have a social impact, understand complex phenomena, and examine the past would be more suited to use a qualitative methodology.

Given the scant literature and the lack of available theories on the subject matter of this research study (the retraining experience of immigrant professionals), an exploratory qualitative research methodology would be most appropriate. The immigrant retraining experience is largely a socially constructed process whereby the circumstances surrounding this process are very much systemic and environmental. Using a qualitative research approach would allow for the exploration and gaining an understanding of the complexity of the immigrant professionals’
experience through the retraining process within a socially circumscribed situation. It is also this study’s goal to develop a theory based on empirical findings that can help us understand the immigrant retraining process and to ultimately facilitate positive change for immigrant professionals on a social and systemic level, which calls for a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research methodology varies widely in its terms, concepts, assumptions and analytic principles, allowing study designs to be tailored to specific research purposes and can add great richness to data interpretation (Brod et al., 2009). Qualitative analysis requires a nonmathematical process of interpretation that manages words, languages, and meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) from the full and rich descriptions provided by participants who are experiencing the studied phenomenon (Williamson, 2009). The research process usually involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that is not easily reduced to numbers and related to the social world and concepts and behaviours of people within it (Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson, 1998). Data can come from interviews, observations, documents, records, and films. As such, qualitative research has often been referred to as a soft science (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to maintain credibility, scientific rigor can be accomplished by having a sound scientific study methodology and protocol, including a semi-structured interview guide, appropriate analysis of the data and documentation of findings (Brod et al., 2009).

Data analysis procedures involve conceptualizing and reducing data, elaborating categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, and relating through a series of prepositional statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis engages exploration, discovery and inductive logic (Patton, 2002). First, data is broken down during coding, compared, and then placed in categories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Similar pieces of data are nested under similar categories and different data create new categories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This coding is
carried out to discover concepts and relationships in the data, which are then organized and reduced into theoretical explanatory schemes. These findings are then fed into descriptions, models, or theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

*A Grounded Theory Approach*

There are many different approaches to conducting qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The most commonly used qualitative methods in the health sciences research are ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory (Williamson, 2009). The grounded theory approach supposes that theory is grounded in data rather than presumed at the outset of the research (Brod et al., 2009). This approach is appropriate for the current study, as there currently exists insufficient literature on career retraining of immigrant skilled workers. Therefore, emergent the theories should come from the data.

Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in the 1960s as a result of their research program on dying in hospitals (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Their goal was to derive a theory that is grounded in the data that is most suitable for the area of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) combined two data analysis processes in order to properly generate theory from the data. The first process involves the analyst coding the data then analyzing the codes to verify a given proposition or hypothesis. The second process involves the analyst inspecting the data for properties of categories, using memos to track the analysis, and developing theoretical ideas (Walker & Myrick, 2006). They determined that neither of the processes were enough to properly generate theory from the data and developed a hybrid approach by combing the explicit coding procedure of the first process and the style of theory development of the second process through the constant comparative method (Walker & Myrick, 2006).
Grounded theory has since evolved and Glaser and Strauss have gone their separate ways, producing literature on their own methods of grounded theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Glaser has remained more faithful to classic grounded theory whereas Strauss and Corbin have revamped the classic method (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Although both Glaser’s and Straus’s versions use coding, constant comparison, questions, theoretical sampling, and memos in order to generate theories, they differ in how these processes are carried out (Walker & Myrick, 2006). It is the methodology rather than the ontological and epistemological aspects of their respective versions of grounded theory that are the main course of divergence (Heath & Cowley, 2004). They place a different emphasis on induction, deduction, verification, and the form that the theory should take (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Glaser’s method involves two levels of coding processes, substantive and theoretical coding (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Substantive coding consists of open and selective coding, where categories and their properties are produced. Theoretical coding is where the substantive codes are weaved together into a hypothesis and theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Strauss and Corbin’s method is divided into three levels, open, axial and selective coding (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Both Glaser and Strauss acknowledge that the researcher will not enter the field free from ideas (Health & Cowley, 2004). However, whereas Glaser emphasizes that prior understanding should be based only on the general problem in order to maintain the analyst’s sensitivity to the data, Strauss sees specific understandings from past experience and literature as useful to stimulating theoretical sensitivity and generating theories (Heath & Cowley, 2004). According to Glaser, knowledge in literature of close relevance can veer the emerging theory away from its true path whereas Strauss believes that it is important to be aware of what is known of the subject
of investigation in order to formulate the research question (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Despite this disparity, both comparative methods ensure sensitivity to the data.

Glaser views induction as the key process whereby the analyst moves from the data to empirical generalization to theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Glaser criticizes the emphasis on deduction where the analysts ask numerous questions and speculate about what might be rather than what exists in the data (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Strauss and Corbin, on the other hand, use experience and literature to guide their analysis. They maintain that the role of induction should not be over-stressed and they emphasize the roles of deduction and verification. According to Strauss and Corbin, deduction should be followed by verification or validation and elaboration from data comparisons to ensure emergence of data (Heath & Cowley, 2004) rather than forcing data to emerge. Verification of the data and categories is a constant process performed through constant comparisons of incidents in previously coded data and newly coded data (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) method was used. The rationale behind this decision included the fact that Strauss and Corbin’s method allows for deduction and more familiarity with the literature. Although there is a dearth of literature on retraining pertaining to the immigrant skilled worker population, some studies have explored the effects that retraining have on career seekers and the existing barriers of immigrants’ career development. Allowing for the knowledge of such previous findings and how the prior theories fared helped to guide this study to find more relevant questions to ask when looking at the data, which facilitated research that was more relevant to the literature and advancement of the existing literature. In order to ensure that the findings of this study were empirically derived from the data, the need to validate the findings by constant comparison was kept in mind throughout the analysis. All researcher presumptions about the topic were at the forefront of the researcher’s
awareness so as to not sway the analysis. Another reason for using Strauss and Corbin’s method was that it provides clear and structured analytic procedures, which provide guidance to novice researchers to generate data-derived theory regarding socially bound issues (Fassinger, 2005; Heath & Cowley, 2004). Therefore, Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory was a suitable choice of methodology for the current study.

**Procedures**

Twenty English-speaking immigrant skilled workers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were recruited by the researcher for this study as a part of Dr. Charles Chen’s Immigrant Retraining research project, which aimed at interviewing a total of 100 participants. There is currently no consensus with regards to the ideal standard sample size for qualitative research (Trotter, 2012). The general principle of determining the ideal qualitative sample size is based on the concept of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In other words, the sample size is determined to be large enough when collection of new data does not add any new themes or concepts to shed light on the investigation. The concept of saturation offers a conceptual guide but there exist little practical guidelines for estimating samples sizes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The literature that does offer guidelines for actual sample sizes differ in their suggestions. For example, Creswell (1998) suggested 5 to 25 participants for phenomenology methodology and 20 to 30 participants for grounded theory. Guest and colleagues (2006) found that saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews and recommended that 12 participants are sufficient if the purpose of the study is to describe a shared experience and behaviour of a homogeneous group. Green and Thorogood (2009) stated that most qualitative researchers have found that interviewing beyond 20 participants tends not to provide new information.
Although the current study examined the experiences of a homogenous group (immigrant professionals in Canada who received Canadian retraining), the participants came from a range of different countries and had a diverse pre-Canada educational and work experiences. Therefore, it was more appropriate to interview more than 12 participants for this study. Given that Green and Thorogood (2009) found 20 participants to provide saturation of data, the present study interviewed 20 participants with the intention of capturing the diverse experiences of the participants and attempting to ensure that saturation could be reached.

The participants were recruited through advertising in the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) public transit system as well as distributing flyers and posting advertising posters in the community (see “Participant Recruitment Poster” in Appendix A). The nature of the research project was clearly explained via the initial telephone or email contact (see “Telephone Script of Initial Contact” in Appendix B and “Email Script of Initial Contact” in Appendix C). As such, these prospective participants were able to make a well-informed decision concerning their willingness to participate. A financial compensation of $35 was made to each participant in the study. The respondents were screened over the telephone, using a short interview to ensure that they met the study’s participation requirements. Prospective participants were informed of all the content described in the Consent Form (see Appendix D) including the nature and purpose of the study, and the participants' rights during the interview and in this study. At the end of the phone or email contact, an appointment for the interview session was made with each participant who agreed to participate and met the criteria of the study. The participants were asked to bring a photocopy of their certificate of retraining as proof of having completed Canadian retraining. For the individuals who were not interested in participating or did not meet the criteria for the study, the researcher thanked them for their interest and wished them well.
The appointments took place in a private meeting room at the OISE Psychoeducational and Counselling clinic. At the beginning of the appointment, the participants were given the Consent Form to review and provided the opportunity to ask questions. After informed consent was obtained, the participants were asked to provide basic demographic information relevant to the interview content (see Appendix E for “Participant Demographic Information”), which the researcher recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each participant attended an interview session for approximately 90-120 minutes in duration (see "Theme Questions for the Interview" in Appendix F).

The interviews were semi-structured to allow for interviewees to introduce issues and concerns that may not initially have been anticipated by the researcher. The interview questions were framed as general themes that acted as a guide, but not as a rigid format, for the research interviewer. This interview approach aimed to help the interviewees reflect upon and share their subjective views and experiences. Some of the questions were particularly relevant to the themes of existential psychology and human agency. For example, the questions “What is your understanding of why it became necessary for you to pursue retraining in Canada?” “How did you feel about having to take this retraining?” “What were some of the main lessons you learned from your retraining experience in Canada?” and “How did you decide what to do when you had to make a compromise in your retraining?” tapped into the existential theme of meaning-making as well as the theme of intention of human agency. Other questions such as, “What actions did you take to make your retraining experience possible?” and “How important were your own actions in setting up and completing your retraining?” facilitated the exploration of themes of intentional action-taking (i.e. human agency) as well as existential themes of freedom and responsibility.

At the end of the appointment, the participants were asked to fill out a receipt to indicate that they received their $35 of compensation for their participation (see “Receipt of
Compensation for Participation” in Appendix G). The interviews were audio recorded, transferred on to a secure server as mp3s, and erased from the audio recorder immediately following the interviews. The audio recordings were also saved on CDs, of which there were two copies. A professional transcriber was hired to transcribe the interviews into written format. She agreed to the confidentiality of the participants’ information and was provided with a copy of the CDs containing the interviews, which she returned upon completion of the transcription. The transcriber also password protected the Microsoft Word files of the transcripts to further protect the participants’ confidentiality. The electronic audio files, CDs, electronic transcripts, and demographics Excel sheet were all labeled using a pseudonym to protect the participants’ confidentiality. The consent forms, receipts, photocopies of their retraining certificates, and interview CDs were all locked in a secure location in the research facility. Only Dr. Chen and the researchers involved in this study had access to the key. All electronic files including participant demographic information, audio files of the interviews, and interview transcripts were all stored on a password protected secure server, to which only Dr. Chen and the researchers of this project had access.

Research Participants

Purposive sampling based on a specific list of criteria was used (Patton, 2002). The participant selection criteria of this study were based on the National Occupational Classification Matrix (NOCM) system of Human Resources Development Canada (Immigration Canada, 2013). This means that before coming to Canada, each research participant must have already in his or her country of origin (a) obtained a university degree, and (b) worked full-time in a professional occupation for at least three years (two years more than required by the NOCM to ensure that they had developed a sense of career identity prior to immigration). Additional eligibility criteria for the current study included (c) being 25 years of age or older, (d) having
immigrated to Canada between January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006, (e) having engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professional and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation, (f) having held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of 1 year after having completed Canadian retraining, (g) being fluent in English (interviews were conducted in English), and (h) having never previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date. These study criteria are based on the requirements that Immigration Canada use to determine the eligibility of individuals who apply to immigrate to Canada under the Federal Skilled Worker category (Immigration Canada, 2013). However, our criteria were more stringent than those listed under the Federal Skilled Worker immigration category to ensure that the participants were highly qualified skilled workers who could provide current accounts of experienced career barriers and retraining experiences.

The first two criteria ensured that the participants received their credentials and experiences elsewhere, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would have been confronted by the commonly experienced career barriers faced by immigrant skilled workers. The second and third criteria warranted that the participants had already begun their career development process and had a good sense of their career identity. The fourth, fifth, and sixth criteria facilitated the investigation of current and up-to-date immigrant career transition issues as well as allowing enough time to have transpired for the participants to have undergone their new career development process in Canada, experienced the career barriers, received retraining, and developed opinions and feelings about their retraining. The participants were required to have English proficiency as the interviews were conducted in English. For the purpose of this study, immigrant professionals who immigrated to a French speaking province that were required to have French proficiency was beyond the scope of this study.
The participants included 11 females and 9 males who ranged from 30 to 50 years of age, with the average age being 41.1 years. In terms of country of origin, 7 participants were from China, 4 from India, 2 from Iran, 2 from Serbia, 2 from Russia, 1 from Sri Lanka, 1 from Greece, and 1 from Peru. All of the participants immigrated to Canada on an Independent Skilled Worker visa, except for one participant whose immigration was sponsored by a family member. The participants arrived in Canada between the years November 1999 and September 2006. Therefore, their duration of stay in Canada ranged from approximately seven to fifteen years.

Fifteen participants received a bachelor’s degree prior to their immigration, with 1 participant having completed a medical degree, 3 participants having obtained a master’s degree, and 1 participant holding a doctorate degree. Their length of pre-Canada work experience ranged from 3 years to 13 years. Most of the participants obtained a diploma in Canada, while one participant obtained a bachelor’s degree and four of them completed a master’s degree.

Summaries of the profiles of the participants in this study are provided in Chapter 4 in order to provide a context for the results presented in the Chapters 5 to 9. Refer to Appendix H for an overview of the participant characteristics and demographics.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were coded using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) analytic approach, which involved open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the process of open coding, the concepts were identified and their properties and dimensions were discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data analysis involved microanalysis where the data were broken down into discrete parts and analyzed in detail, line-by-line in order to generate the categories. Comparative analysis was used to decide whether the data is similar or different from the rest of the categorized data and grouping similar phenomenon under the same categories. Categories were
further differentiated into subcategories, which described when, where, and how a phenomenon was likely to exist.

During axial coding, the subcategories were related to their category through statements depicting how they were related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subcategories can be seen as conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences. Conditions are the “why”, “where”, “how come”, and “when” descriptions of the category. Actions or interactions are the responses the individuals made to the issues or problems, usually the “whom” and “how” descriptions of the category. Consequences are what happen as a result of the actions/interactions or the failure of action/interactions to deal with the issue. Open and axial coding were not necessarily sequential steps.

A category was considered saturated when no new information emerged in the category from further coding. The next step, selective coding, involved integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, the central/core category was selected to represent the main theme of the research. All the other major categories were related to this core category and it explained variation within categories. The concepts were then integrated. Reviewing and sorting through the memos that were kept throughout the analytic process facilitated the integration process. Memos are the written records of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, and questions that the researcher had throughout the process. Memos helped the researcher record the direction of the research and integrate the concepts.

After the overarching theoretical scheme was outlined, the theory was refined by reviewing for internal consistency and gaps in the logic, filling in poorly developed categories, trimming excess categories, and validating the scheme. NVivo 10 computer software was used to analyze the interviews. Proponents of computer coding suggest that computer software programs are especially helpful for large amounts of qualitative data because they can reduce the amount
of time spent on manual and clerical functions and increase the thoroughness of handling data (Brod et al., 2009). Computer software was geared to facilitate the analysis process but the actual analysis was very much still a function of the researcher.

Methods for Verification

The data analysis was validated by comparing the scheme against the raw data. The transcripts were reviewed at least once prior to the analysis and at least twice during the analysis to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the interview information. During the analysis, the coded data were continuously compared to the data within the category to verify the fit of the data. Memos were also kept in order for the research to keep track of coding rationale, which facilitates the verification process. In addition, the researcher maintained on-going discussion and collaboration with the study’s principal investigator, Dr. Charles Chen, in the generation of themes. Possible researcher biases based on the researcher’s own background were also kept in mind to prevent the analysis from being swayed by her personal biases.

As someone who had lived in countries, such as South Africa and Canada, where a large portion of the population are immigrants, the researcher possesses a passion for understanding the experiences and struggles of immigrant individuals in their new home countries. This passion grew when she migrated from South Africa to Canada and became an immigrant herself. She had a chance to experience some of the immigration transition issues, such as adapting to a new environment and lacking social networks. She also had the opportunity to meet fellow immigrant individuals who experienced their own transition issues. The researcher also learned that many immigrant individuals, especially those who immigrated at a more mature stage of their lives, often struggled vocationally. She encountered taxi drivers and general store clerks that were once medical doctors or lawyers back in their home countries. These encounters spurred the
researcher’s interest in gaining a better understanding of the career transition and development difficulties of immigrant professionals.

Given that the researcher initially moved to Canada with the intention of pursuing higher education and has had the fortune of experiencing the benefits of obtaining such training, she may hold a positive biased attitude towards Canadian training. She remained cognizant of the need to prevent her biased view of Canadian training from influencing her interpretation of the interview data. The researcher was also careful not to impose her own experience as an immigrant on to the experiences of the immigrant professionals in this study.
Chapter 4 Life-Career Participant Portraits

This chapter presents a clear picture of the career transition and retraining journeys of the participants in this study. These narratives facilitate the reader’s appreciation of the gestalt of the participants’ experiences and gain a sense of intimacy and familiarity with them to facilitate the reader’s appreciation of the findings of this study. The participant summaries offer a brief description of their post-secondary education and employment background prior to immigration, reasons for immigrating to Canada, expectations regarding their vocational transition, any expectations pertaining to Canadian retraining, their retraining experiences in Canada, outcome of their Canadian retraining, occupation at the time of the interview, and future career concerns and aspirations. In order to keep the identity of the participants confidential, they were each randomly assigned a pseudonym.

Participant 1

P1, a 46-year-old male from Russia, immigrated to Canada in November 1999 with his wife and children. He completed a Bachelor of Engineering degree from Russia and had worked as a director of new business development fund for the government. He was concerned about the economic and political climate in Russia at the time and was informed about the many career opportunities in Canada by a business partner. He immigrated to Canada in the hopes of improving his career and his family’s quality of life.

After arriving in Canada, he attempted to register his own business company but he was unsuccessful. He sought help from job agencies and job developers and held low paying survival jobs in bakeries, construction, and moving companies. Within the first year of being in Canada, their family savings had dwindled and they had to apply for social assistance, which led P1 to feel a great deal of shame. Eventually, the stress eroded his marriage and he and his wife divorced. The week after arriving in Canada, he decided to gain retraining in order to acculturate
and familiarize with Canadian culture and law. He completed a paralegal diploma and subsequently completed a private investigation diploma. He found the retraining experience in Canada to be similar to his training experience from home and his instructors to be supportive. As a result of his retraining, he felt that he gained skills, experience, and more confidence.

After completing his retraining, P1 worked as a private investigator for an investigation services company for about 6 months and was then recruited by the investigations department of a national bank where he worked for 3 years. He then quit his job after feeling that he did not receive a reasonable pay raise and he returned to survival jobs. P1 then completed an accounting assistant diploma, which he financed using funds from his employment insurance. Unfortunately, he remained unemployed for a year after he completed his diploma. He then went to the United States to complete a master’s in international marketing at a prestigious university. After his graduation, he received a contract position with a research group in Canada for a few months and continued to struggle to find full-time employment. He was offered a job by an agency for an entry-level position but P1 was unable to take the job because the salary was not high enough for the tuition debt that he had incurred from his master’s program.

P1 was unemployed at the time of the interview and searching for paid research projects in which to participate. Overall, he was unsatisfied with his current work-life. He stated that he lost the best years of his life. He shared that he was unable to attend his mother’s funeral in Russia due to financial constraints for which he felt ashamed. He also expressed self-blame for quitting his job before he acquired new employment. P1 felt confused and hopeless about being unable to find employment even though he was educated and motivated. Despite experiencing career barriers, he remained hopeful and focused on the possibility for change. His future career development goal was to find a job in which he could fully use his abilities to contribute to an organization, help people, or return to his original field of international business. He was also
considering additional retraining in order to keep his knowledge current. His advice to new
immigrants was to secure a new job before quitting a current job and to do job market research
before deciding in which field to retrain.

Participant 2

P2 was a 48-year-old female from Serbia who immigrated to Canada in May 2005 with
her husband and two daughters. She completed a medical degree, a specialization in pediatrics,
and a master’s degree in respiratory medicine from her home country. She enjoyed working in
the medical field and felt that it provided her with a sense of pride and identity. She decided to
immigrate to Canada with her family due to the political and economic unrest in Serbia at the
time. She was confident in being able to find work in her profession due to her many years of
work experience. The Canadian Embassy had informed her that she would be required to write
re-licensing exams in Canada in order to regain her medical license. However, she did not expect
the process to be as long as it was and she did not expect to have to gain retraining.

When P2 initially arrived in Canada, she experienced a cultural gap, social isolation and
felt lost in her new environment. In attempt to cope with the transition, she completed English
courses, sought out social connections, searched for employment, and attempted to adapt to the
Canadian political economic system. She found family supports and networking to be the most
helpful in coping with job search barriers. Unfortunately, P2 was unable to land any employment
due to being over-qualified and lacking Canadian work experience. She attempted to gain
reaccreditation but she failed the exam by two points. She did not to retake the exam because of
the high cost and her reduced self-confidence. P2 also decided that the process of regaining her
medical license, which she discovered would take 3 years or longer, would be too lengthy. As a
result, she decided to follow the footsteps of a close friend, who retrained in clinical research,
and completed a one-and-a-half year diploma in Clinical Trial Monitoring and Research Site
Coordination. She also chose this program to gain retraining in a similar medical field where she could use her previously gained medical knowledge.

As her retraining was in a similar field, P2 found the retraining to be similar to her education from Serbia. She enjoyed learning about this new specialization, the workplace, the Canadian research regulations, and the flexibility to take courses online to be at home to take care of her children. The knowledge that she gained through her retraining provided her with increased confidence. However, she experienced some language barriers during retraining and she found some of the topics to be of less practical value. During her retraining, her husband took care of their children, and she received supports and useful information from her friend and classmates.

Two years after completing her retraining, P2 landed a volunteer position at a hospital as a clinical researcher where she stayed for 2 years. This volunteer opportunity provided her with Canadian work experience, job references, and the chance to familiarize with the work environment. She then held two short contract positions working as a clinical research monitor before landing her current position as a clinical research project coordinator, which she has held for over 3 years. P2 reported enjoying the good work environment, working with her colleagues, the job benefits, and the opportunity to continue gaining knowledge through her job. She also gained a sense of career identity and self-worthiness as a new Canadian from her employment. The only negative aspect to her job is that she wanted a higher salary. P2 obtained further retraining and completed a program management certificate course and a professional grant development workshop in order to improve her skills for her current job. Her future goals were to maintain her job and financial security and to continue to acquire further training in order to pursue a higher-level position as a clinical project manager. Her advice to new immigrant professionals was to do research on the Canada job market prior to coming to Canada so that
they know what to expect and what job options to focus on. She also advised immigrant individuals to listen to the career advice from friends and other immigrant professionals as well as to keep an open mind and be flexible about their career goals when facing barriers to re-entry into their original field of work.

**Participant 3**

P3 was a 47-year-old female who immigrated to Canada from Serbia with her husband and daughter in April 2002. P3 had a medical degree from Serbia and she worked as a medical doctor at a hospital prior to her immigration. She enjoyed her field of work but she did not like the nightshifts and work stress. Although her work was important to her, her family was equally important. Her family decided to emigrate from the former Yugoslavia due to the political instability at that time. She expected to have difficulty re-entering the medical profession and therefore planned to gain Canadian retraining to become an ultrasound technologist. She hoped that retraining would prevent her from having to take lower level survival jobs.

When she first arrived to Canada, she experienced language barriers and attempted to improve her English by taking ESL courses, reading, and watching television. She had planned on pursuing training in ultrasound technology, but due to her language barrier, she decided to pursue the cardiology technologist diploma as the language requirement was lower for the program. She found this program through an online search. She spent the first two years in Canada improving her English and gaining retraining, while her husband worked a few survival jobs. This initial transition period was stressful for P3 as she had to balance studying and taking care of her family. She developed Grave’s disease, an autoimmune disease, which she believed was partially related to stress. About one month after she completed her diploma, she worked in a private clinic as a cardiologic technologist for a few months. She then decided to complete a Clinical Research Coordinator diploma as she felt that this change in specialty would facilitate
the utilization of her knowledge and help her find a less physically demanding job. She had
serendipitously stumbled upon this program while reading a newspaper. She found this program
a little more challenging than she had expected due to language barriers.

After completing the Clinical Research and Coordinator program, it took about 6 months
and 30 interviews before she was able to find a job as a research coordinator in a hospital due to
her lack of Canadian work experience. She had been working at the hospital for the last 8 years.
P3 shared that her retraining was necessary for her to gain a deeper knowledge necessary for her
clinical research position. She was offered higher paying work but she declined the offer as the
job involved frequent travelling which would have meant time away from her family. She
continued taking courses every year to continue learning. Her work position at the time of the
interview was the highest level available in her department and she felt that she had succeeded in
her career development as a result of the retraining that she had received in Canada. P3 reported
feeling content with her career and did not intend on pursuing any future training. However, she
intended on attending refresher and upgrading courses to maintain her skills. Her advice to new
immigrants was to learn English prior to their immigration and to be open to different career
options rather than only pursuing their pre-Canada career.

Participant 4

P4 was a 38-year-old female from India who immigrated to Canada in September 2006.
She obtained a bachelor’s degree in pharmacy from her home country, which included practical
training in industrial and hospital settings. She worked as a registered pharmacist in
pharmaceutical marketing in India, after which she moved to Australia to study naturopathy and
she worked part-time in retail pharmacy for about 5 to 6 years. While in Australia, she
experienced difficulty finding employment and expected that she would have to restart her career
development in Canada. She was prepared to gain Canadian retraining in order to learn the
Canadian regulations and requirements within the pharmaceutical industry. She expected that the retraining experience would be similar to her previous educational experience and that it would help her acquire employment.

When P4 arrived in Canada, she applied for work in her field through employment agencies and she engaged in online professional networking. She experienced a lack of systematic support available to help immigrant workers find employment. She also discovered that employers only recognized Canadian training and work experience, and devalued her foreign knowledge and training. The employment resource centers were only able to help her find labour jobs. P4 found that the most useful way of coping with the job search barriers was to accept the difficult reality and move on. Fortunately, she was able to land a job as a medical market researcher shortly after her move to Canada through an online job application. However, the position offered no job security and paid a low wage. Therefore, she decided to pursue Canadian retraining to leave the marketing industry and enter the healthcare pharmaceutical industry. She decided to obtain retraining instead of re-licensing as she did not want to spend 2 years re-learning information that she had already gained through her pre-migration education.

Through an online search, she found a diploma program in Professional Regulatory Affairs at the Academy of Applied Pharmaceutical Sciences. She was unable to attend this program until she was laid off from her job 2 years later as she was ineligible for Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) while she was employed. During her retraining, she worked as a medical market researcher on a part-time basis. She did not find it difficult to balance work and retraining as she was already knowledgeable in the retraining topics due to her pre-migration education. She was familiar with the practical western learning style as she had already been exposed to western training in Australia. She found the instructors to be very knowledgeable and enjoyed relearning the information from the new perspective of her instructors.
Unfortunately, she was unable to land a job in industrial pharmaceuticals after her retraining, which she attributed to employers being reluctant to hire individuals of a different ethnic background. Had she known that this would be her outcome, she stated that she might have chosen to retrain in different field. With the help of a friend, she registered her own company and had been working as a freelance pharmaceutical consultant and market researcher. She enjoyed being self-employed as it provided her with full control of her work, the opportunity to discover her own skills, and a stronger career identity and confidence. However, she stated that she would require systematic support for newcomers to find employment or assistance in entrepreneurship in order to be able to fully utilize her skills. Finances were her main career-related concern. She did not intend on retraining in the future, because she did not believe that it would help her gain employment. Her goal was to live in the moment and to continue working. Advice that P4 provided newcomers included refraining from taking advice from prior immigrants and to instead make their own decisions. She noted that the negativity of prior immigrants may negatively impact newcomers’ decision making. She also advised newcomers to be open to gaining new skills and knowledge and to learn from the practical teaching style in Canada.

Participant 5

P5, a 44-year-old single male from Russia, immigrated to Canada in March 2003. He completed a Bachelor of Engineering degree and specialized in metallurgical engineering. The program included practicums that he completed at factories. After his education, he worked as a finance manager but found his job to be insufficiently challenging or meaningful. He decided to immigrate to Canada due to the political environment in Russia at the time and to provide his siblings and future children with a better future. During his immigration application process, he sent his engineering degree to Ottawa for approval. Prior to his immigration, he expected that it
would be difficult to find a job but he was open to any type of job that he would initially hold. His goal was to eventually change his field of work to something that provided him with more meaning.

Two weeks after arriving in Canada, P5 started taking some English courses, accounting classes, and preparation courses for admissions to business school for life insurance investments. He failed the provincial licensing exam and decided that he did not want to enter this field. He was unable to find a job in his field and ended up working some general labour jobs. After 2 years, he decided to pursue a college diploma in Addictions and Community Service Worker at the advice of his friend. His motivations for retraining were to improve his future and to self-actualize through training in an altruistic field that he found meaningful and interesting.

P5 found the retraining to be more work than his education experience from his home country. He felt that his maturity helped him to cope. While he was completing his retraining, P5 worked part-time as a waiter and donated blood to support his own finances. He stated that his job negatively impacted his retraining attendance and performance. However, he accepted the difficulties because he recognized that he had chosen to retrain out of his own volition and he completed the two-year program in a year. Although, the retraining did not lead to employment, he felt that he gained knowledge, a social network, acculturation, flexibility, and creativity. He also discovered his own abilities to learn and that the mental health field was a good fit for him.

Through the help of a friend, he landed a job in the TV and movie industry. P5 also took an internship in the movie industry to obtain a certificate to become a union member in order to increase his salary. He then worked as a background actor, deliveryman, and waiter. He was working in customer service and acting at the time of the interview. Although he did not have job stability, he gained a sense of career identity as he found the entertainment industry to be interesting and enjoyed working with people. Overall, he was satisfied with his career experience
even though he recognized that he was not successful by any objective standards. P5 expressed a sense of acceptance of his career outcome and recognized that his career path was a result of his own choice. Therefore, despite the barriers that he faced, he continued to pursue a career in which he could help others and continued to be interested in the field of psychology. He was planning on obtaining additional retraining within this field to further his knowledge, as he believed that his retraining diploma only offered entry-level training. Advice that he gave to new immigrants was to work hard, continue to learn, use previously gained soft skills, and to let go of their previous achievements.

Participant 6

P6 was a 45-year-old female who emigrated from India to Canada with her husband and two daughters in December 2002. She had a Ph.D. in Botany from India and worked as a college lecturer, teaching undergraduate students and conducting research. Her job was important to her identity and she enjoyed her field of work. P6 and her family immigrated to Canada as her husband, who worked as a university professor, was looking to improve work-life balance and to provide their two daughters with a better quality of life. P6 did not expect to have to gain retraining and thought that she would be able to land employment immediately upon arrival in Canada.

P5, however, was unable to acquire employment as a professor after arriving in Canada. She attended a newcomer’s center and contacted her parents’ friends in Canada for support. She took a job at Subway sandwich, an airport security job, and a job that involved bringing environmental awareness to the public, where she was fired after several days for not having a Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.). P6 felt that she was being discriminated against as the employer subsequently hired a non-immigrant individual without a B.Ed. degree. She was advised by the community center to gain retraining. She was unable to enroll in a master’s
degree or Ph.D. program due to a lack of financial resources and was advised to obtain a B.Ed. degree by an immigrant friend. She completed a B.Ed. program in India as she had passed the deadline for programs in Canada and she was ineligible for OSAP until she had resided in Canada for one year.

After returning to Canada, P6 held an airport security job and a factory job, and volunteered at a school for a year. For the past 6 years she had been working as a supply teacher. She completed retraining courses in business management, leadership, clinical research associate, and a co-op with the Ministry for Environment to be more competitive in her search for a full-time teaching job. Although, she was informed that the clinical research associate course would provide job search supports and lead to employment, she received no such supports. She also completed special education and guidance counseling courses from York University.

During this retraining, she worked part-time during the evenings, which left her with little time to sleep and led to a great deal of distress. She enjoyed meeting new people and learning from her peers but found the retraining to be too theoretical. P6 experienced unfair negative treatment from a teacher, which she believed was because she had a higher degree than her teacher. She saw the retraining programs as moneymaking corporations that did not aid her career development and continued to experience difficulty landing a full-time teaching position post-retraining. P6 believed that employers were reluctant to hire her because she was overqualified and more expensive to employ. She was working as a part-time supply teacher at the school that she had volunteered with while also working as a store stocker. P6’s employment situation left her with no time to spend with her family. Her husband was in poor health, leaving P6 as the sole financial support for the family.
P6 shared that she had given up searching for a full-time job as she lost income every time she declined a teaching job for a job interview. She was taking a course in geographical information systems. Despite her lack of career success after retraining, she believed that completing the required courses to become a special education teacher would improve her career. However, holding a full-time job was a requirement for the courses, which rendered P6 ineligible. P6 reported to have given up on her career development and advised individuals with foreign graduate degrees not to immigrate to Canada. Her advice to future professional immigrants was to gain retraining immediately after immigration instead of taking survival jobs. She also recommended that they search for jobs that are related to their retraining to gain Canadian work experience.

*Participant 7*

P7, a 34-year-old female, immigrated to Canada from India in February 2003 with her parents. She held a bachelor’s degree in microbiology and a master’s degree in biotechnology from India, and she worked as a researcher. P7 decided to immigrate to Canada to join her brother who was already living in Canada, and to further her career by pursuing a Ph.D. in Canada. She expected to find better career prospects in Canada, and did not expect difficulty remaining in the same field of research nor did she expect having to undergo retraining. Prior to her immigration, she contacted a few professors who conducted research in her area of interest and received invitations to meet with them upon her arrival.

After she arrived in Canada, she immediately sought out job opportunities and applied for a Ph.D. program. She experienced difficulty finding a job due to her lack of Canadian work experience. After being unemployed for about 3 to 4 months, she took a low paying job at a gift store in a hospital and was later promoted to an assistant manager position. Fortunately, she had the financial support of her brother who was already established in Canada. She did not find job
consultants at the YMCA to be helpful as employers within her field refused to consider hiring her. She experienced a lack in the appropriate support within her field to guide her in the right career development path. She was denied admission for the Ph.D. program and was told to pursue a master’s degree, which had a negative impact on her confidence. She was depressed for the first 2 to 3 years of being in Canada and she developed polycystic ovarian syndrome. She completed two university courses in human anatomy upon the request of the university in order to apply for the master’s program. Unfortunately, she was not admitted due to insufficient grades. Through the recommendation of a friend with whom she volunteered, she applied for and completed a two-year fast track Bachelor of Applied Sciences in Public Health and Safety program about a year-and-a-half after immigrating to Canada.

P7 found the retraining to be more competitive than she had expected. She also felt that she was discriminated against by her professor who expressed disbelief at her good performance. In the first year of her studies, she continued working part-time as a cashier and in the summer she took a job with the city doing labour work for the research project. She found it difficult to balance work and school as she was studying full-time and working on the weekends. She discontinued working in her second year of school. Fortunately, she was able to receive grants and scholarships, which helped to decrease her tuition. She then landed an internship position where she was later hired and obtained her license. She felt that her Canadian degree improved her career options. As a result of her retraining, she gained an increased sense of confidence of her skills and abilities, career identity, and self-worthiness as a new Canadian. She also gained a social network that provided her with job offers.

P7 had been working as a Communicable Disease Investigator for over 5 years. She found the job interesting and it led to admiration from her family. However, she disliked the red tape and slow pace of government employment. She was in the process of completing an
executive program in health care administration in order to find a more challenging employment. P7 shared that since she was financially stable, her career values shifted from monetary-based to valuing the challenge provided by her job. She was open to the possibility of a future change in career values. In terms of her future career, she foresaw racism as being a possible barrier. Overall, she found the retraining and being flexible in her career development strategies and career goals to be most helpful in facilitating a successful career transition experience. P7 recommended that immigrant skilled workers gain retraining if they are unable to find employment in their field in the first 6 months to a year of being in Canada. She also advised that immigrant skilled workers be flexible in their career development strategies and remain open to changing their career goals in order to improve their chances for a successful career transition experience.

Participant 8

P8 was a 42-year-old male from India who immigrated to Canada in June 2002. In India, he earned an undergraduate degree in engineering and a master’s degree in business administration. He worked as a program manager for a company specializing in commercial vehicle lubricants. He enjoyed the challenge provided by his job, the international exposure, and he was proud to be part of the large organization. He applied for immigration due to his wife’s decision to immigrate to provide a better environment for their child. P8 moved to Canada alone and his family joined him several months later. Although, career development did not play a major role in his immigration planning, he was confident that he would be able to land the same job in the Canadian branch of his company and only thought of retraining as a backup plan.

Contrary to his expectations, he soon learned that employers dismissed credential equivalency except for fields that lacked professional skilled workers, such as engineering. He took 16 courses with employment services and language training courses to help with his
language barrier but he found the courses unhelpful and too basic. In order to acculturate, he found it helpful to seek services from a psychologist at an employment resource center as well as mentor and teach financial account management to local students as a volunteer. He acquired a warehouse job shortly after arriving in Canada and held that job for 15 months. Through networking with other immigrants, he discovered that none of them had succeeded in their career transitions and he decided to retrain. Within 6 months of arriving in Canada, he contacted a university that recommended that he apply to an MBA program. He found the director of student affairs to be very useful in providing him with information and encouragement.

P8 thoroughly enjoyed his retraining experience and regained his confidence when his hard work on his first assignment was recognized by his professor. He also enjoyed learning from his peers, gaining cultural knowledge, and acquiring practical skills. He completed an assignment on wine, which he enjoyed so much that he subsequently completed a program about wine and became a freelance consultant for the wine industry. He used his retraining as a means of networking with companies in his field by offering to volunteer his services to them for his school projects. During his second year of school, his financial stressors led him to reach out to a CEO of an energy company who he met at one of his MBA classes. The CEO referred him to a data entry job for UofT students, but P8 obtained a high paying full-time position working as the head of operations for an energy company due to his high pre-Canada qualifications. He did not find it difficult to balance work and school since retraining was easy for him.

P8 then worked for the government for 4 years, specializing in home solar energy management, after which he found another job through the recommendation of one of his previous customers. He had been working as a Vice President in energy and utilities for the Americas for over 8 years. He enjoyed his job and the responsibilities of leading a team. He proudly identified as a Canadian as his job involved promoting Canadian companies globally. He
believed that it would have taken him a lot longer to establish his career had he not taken the retraining. His advice to new immigrants was to have self-confidence in their own abilities, not to waste time taking workshops given by employment services, and to learn about the differences in cultural customs to increase their chances of success during job interviews.

*Participant 9*

P9 was a 42-year-old female from China who immigrated to Canada with her husband and daughter in February 2001. She had a Bachelor of Arts degree in education from China, and first worked in a bank and then as a manager on the education board. She described having a successful work-life but had decided to immigrate to Canada because she did not like the politics in her work place and wanted a peaceful life. Prior to her immigration, she did not engage in any career preparation except for completing some English classes and she did not anticipate having to retrain in Canada.

After arriving in Canada, she worked in factories. After about half a year, she decided to retrain in accounting to acquire employment because she was not expecting to return into the education field due to her language barriers. Her friend had informed her that it would be easier to land employment in accounting and provided her with information about a college. P9 took an English course and prepared for the program admissions exam. She completed co-op programs through this retraining program. Through her co-ops and post-retraining job applications, she landed jobs in banks, pharmaceutical companies, and was working as a business analyst in an accounting firm at the time of the interview. She attributed her success at landing employment to luck and her own positive personality characteristics.

P9 found the retraining to be practical, providing her with skills that were useful in her employment in Canada. She stated that retraining was necessary for her to gain employment, which led to her increased self-confidence and sense of control over her future. Although, she
did not consider herself to be successful, she expressed that she was satisfied with her job. She enjoyed working with her colleagues and her flexible work schedule, which allowed her to take care of her family. She expressed concern over not holding a higher qualification, such as Certified General Accountant (CGA) or Chartered Accountant (CA) certification. However, her priority was to take care of her children. Thus, she sacrificed further training and she did not regret her decision.

In terms of her future career, P9 hoped that her work-life remains the same. She also expressed some desire to eventually return home to China. She shared that if she were financially able, she would like to retire in 10 years and return to China to build schools for the poor.

Overall, she felt both glad that she was able to come to explore her opportunities in Canada and a sense of regret for immigrating as she believed that life would have been easier back home. Her advise to new immigrants was to first improve their English skills and to work hard towards their goals without trying to take any shortcuts.

Participant 10

P10 was a 43-year-old female from Sri Lanka who immigrated to Canada in September 2001. In her home country, she completed a bachelor’s degree in business administration. She registered with the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants but did not obtain her designation. After her graduation, she worked as an account assistant for a shipping company for 6 months after which she was promoted to an accountant position. She was satisfied with her job as she found it challenging and it provided her with the opportunity to learn. Her career was very important to her sense of self. On the other hand, she disliked the corrupted economic infrastructure in Sri Lanka at the time as well as the crowded commute to work. She had always intended on immigrating elsewhere to further her career development, improve her quality of life, gain prosperity, and pursue higher education. She had spoken to a friend living in Canada to
gain information about her friend’s career transition experience. Thus, P10 expected to experience difficulty in re-entering her field and knew that she would have to be flexible in taking survival jobs in the beginning but that she would eventually re-enter her field. She did not anticipate retraining in Canada to be necessary for her to obtain a job but she had intended to retrain in order to obtain her accounting designation.

When she first arrived in Canada, she felt happy and welcomed by the country, and had the support of a close friend. She experienced some transition difficulties including language barriers, adjustment to the cold weather, and cultural difference in social customs. Finding employment was important for her since she was in Canada alone and did not have any financial supports. Although she was determined to find a job in her original field, she was also open to holding survival jobs for financial purposes. P10 found gaining information from her friends and seeking help from recruitment agencies to be the most helpful. She had to adapt to the job search culture in Canada and learn how to self-promote her knowledge and skills. After 3 months, she began holding survival jobs including on-call manufacturing line work, mail sorting, and a call center job. She disliked the night shifts and the physical demands of the survival jobs but in hindsight, she was glad that she had the chance to hold those jobs. She then landed a job as a senior accountant at an insurance company through an agency. P10 was very happy about this job as she re-entered her original field of passion. She described experiencing some discrimination in the workplace as she was denied promotions due to her communication issues even though she had an English educated background and was performing well at work. This experience caused her to feel demotivated and hurt.

Two to 3 years after she immigrated to Canada, P10 decided to pursue a diploma in Ontario Management as a result of her employer encouraging retraining and offering to provide the funds. She also decided to gain retraining to learn the appropriate business language, gain
more training for her current job to increase job security, and improve her job prospects within her field of interest. She spoke to others to gain information, consulted a program counselor, and discussed her retraining goals with her training manager at work, who helped her plan her retraining. She later completed a Canadian Management Leadership Program, which was also funded by her employer. P10 found that although the content of her retraining was similar to that of her education back home, the learning style was different. She had to adapt to doing more written assignments, group work, and open book exams. However, she had expected these differences from information that her friends had given to her. She also did not find the retraining difficult due to her knowledge from her previous education. She felt that she gained knowledge and skills to better manage her relationships with her Canadian colleagues, who were culturally different from her. She found the other students and the teachers to be supportive. P10 continued working as a financial analyst for investment accounting while undergoing retraining on the weekends. She did not find it too difficult to do both as she did not have children to look after. Her employer was supportive in giving her some paid time-off. However, her social life was slightly negatively impacted due to her busy schedule.

As a result of the retraining, P10 was promoted to supervisor. Her retraining helped her adapt to the differences in business culture in Canada, learn culturally appropriate communication, and gain team-managing skills. She reported that her retraining was necessary for her to be competent in her profession in Canada. With her increased confidence from the retraining, she felt more encouraged and decided to complete her accountancy designation so that she could become a consultant. The department in which she was working was outsourced, which led to P10 holding the same position at another company. She then left Canada for a short period when her husband moved overseas for his job. P10 recently returned to Canada with her husband and she began a new job as a financial analyst for an insurance company, which she
landed through connections with a previous colleague. She found her work interesting and challenging.

P10 stated that her work experience, educational background, confidence, openness to learn and retrain, as well as networking were factors that helped her succeed in her career development in Canada. Her main concern for her future career development was to obtain her designation as an accountant. Her only concern regarding further retraining was her age and that she was now at a more advanced stage of her career development. Her goal was to be a leader of a team and she was considering the option of starting her own business. Her advice to newcomers was to obtain their designation and to be open to obtain retraining, even if it is in a different field in order to improve their chances of finding employment.

Participant 11

P11 was a 30-year-old female from Iran who immigrated to Canada with her husband, P13, in September 2005. She completed a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering degree and held summer co-ops in Iran. She then worked as a chemical engineer prior to her immigration. She enjoyed her chosen field and her job paid her well. However, she wanted to pursue a higher degree in order to improve her career development. Both P11 and her husband decided to pursue higher education in Canada, where they believed they would have better career opportunities. Her goal was to find a job in chemical engineering research. She expected an easy transition, as she was informed that Canada is a multicultural country. She did not know what to expect in terms of career prospects, but she had a backup plan of returning to her home country if she was unable to find employment after obtaining a master’s degree in Canada. After her husband was accepted by a university program, she applied to a master’s program in the same city as his program and was accepted as well.
P11 had received information about Canada from her friends who were already living in Canada prior to her migration. Therefore, she knew what to expect and was able to adapt quickly to the new environment. Further, immediately entering her master’s program made her transition easy and helped her maintain her confidence levels. She completed a master’s degree in chemical engineering in Canada. During her retraining, she worked as a teacher’s assistant (TA) and research assistant (RA), which were paid by her research supervisor. She knew upon notification of her admissions into the master’s program that she would have paid TA and RA work. She found the master’s program to be very similar to her education experience back in Iran and she found it easy to adapt without having to change her learning style. She had also received information about this program from her friends who previously completed the same program. Ultimately, P11’s experience was consistent with her expectations. She enjoyed the facilities, equipment, and school environment, which she found to be better than her education setting in Iran. She did not enjoy having to pay tuition as education in Iran was free, but she was able to pay her tuition using her salary from her TA and RA work. While pursuing her studies, she received support from her family from Iran, her friends, and her supervisor. She felt a sense of control, because she was able to meet her own goal of obtaining her training.

During her second year, P11 was offered a job to remain at the research lab to continue her work. She had been working in this position for 4 years. Her job allowed her to work from home and she was able to move to Toronto with her husband. She was satisfied with the way that her career turned out. The only factors that she disliked about her employment were the long hours and the deadlines that she had to meet. Upon reflecting on her journey, she reported that she could not have landed her current employment without her master’s degree. Through her studies, she realized that she had an increasingly strong interest in research in her field of work.
Her career identity remained strong as a chemical engineer and she felt proud as a Canadian citizen.

In terms of future goals, she stated that she might be interested in a higher level position such as a project manager position. She felt confident in the possibility of obtaining this goal, as her employer was reportedly happy with her work. She did not intend on pursuing any additional retraining because she was satisfied with her work and would like to place her focus on her current career. Her advice to newcomers was to be patient in their immigration transition process and to gain retraining because it is difficult to obtain employment without Canadian education.

Participant 12

P12 was a 38-year-old male who immigrated to Canada in August 2005 from China. He completed a double degree in earth science and international business. He then worked as an economic analyst, where he collected and analyzed economic data for a publishing group that largely published children’s textbooks. He enjoyed his work because his role was important within the organization but he felt that the market for this field was unstable due to China’s one child policy. He was always interested in English and took courses to take the TOEFL, GRE, and IELTS exams. During those courses, he met many individuals that intended to move abroad to America, Canada, and Australia who suggested that he consider immigration. P12 decided to apply for immigration when his work-life became too busy and the market for his field began to plummet. He hoped the move would improve his work-life and career development but he was not confident that he would be able to find employment in Canada. He attended an international conference held by the Canadian Publishers Association to network and was informed that there were no work opportunities. P12’s back up plan was to retrain in the import and export business in Canada to learn about local business processes. He researched the Canadian job market, which suggested that retraining in accounting would be another good option. A friend of his, who was
in Canada, recommended gaining Canadian training through a college program instead of a university program as a university degree would take 4 years.

When he first arrived in Canada, P12 was excited and found people generally to be friendly. He experienced some language barriers and had to adjust to cultural differences. He used ESL materials from the library to improve his English. His plan was to first find employment and then pursue retraining. Finding employment was important for P12 as he wanted to sponsor his wife’s immigration to Canada. He searched for employment in international business and applied for jobs online. Fortunately, P12 was able to find a job after a month of being in Canada. The company had many business projects with China and hired P12 as a purchasing agent due to his Chinese language abilities. He also attributed his job search success to his English knowledge, the Canadian living and job market research that he did prior to his immigration, and his supportive friends who provided him with a lot of information. He had been working as a purchasing agent for the past 6 years. P12 stated that the pay was satisfactory for the position and his co-workers were friendly.

About one month after he landed in Canada, P12 decided to pursue retraining to gain local education, increase confidence for his job, increase his salary and improve his chances of obtaining employment should he need to find a new job. Although the retraining did not lead to an increase in his salary, his employer was supportive of his retraining and paid for half of his tuition. His friends provided him with suggestions for which college to attend and the steps required to set up his retraining. He completed a certificate program in import and export business at a college. During his retraining, P12 learned to give class presentations, which he did not have to do during his education in China. He liked the concrete examples that his instructors used to demonstrate ideas but he found it difficult to understand one instructor who did not enunciate when speaking. P12 found there to be little opportunity to develop peer relations as the
classes only took place once a week. As he had expected, he performed well and completed his certification with honours due to his knowledge from his educational background from China. During his retraining, he continued to work as a purchasing agent. He found that his learning from the program complemented his work experience and did not find it difficult to balance both as he only had one class per week.

In hindsight, P12 felt that it was necessary to gain Canadian retraining to learn about the Canadian-specific practices in the field and to obtain credentials that would be recognized by Canadian employers. He experienced a slight increase in his confidence after retraining but he already had much of the knowledge from his previous education. Through his retraining, he recognized his own flexibility in changing his career from being an economic analyst to a purchasing agent. In terms of compromises that he had to make during his retraining, P12 felt that he had to sacrifice his leisure time spent with his family. Nevertheless, he was determined to obtain his retraining.

P12 was satisfied with his employment at the time of the interview because it provided him the opportunity to use the knowledge gained from his pre-migration and Canadian training. He also reported enjoying the good work environment and positive relationships between him and his employer and co-workers. Overall, he felt fortunate to have landed this job as he felt that his life was back on track and he was confident in sponsoring his wife’s immigration to Canada. Through gaining more work experience at his job, he was gaining an increased sense of career identity. P12 would like to pursue additional retraining in inventory control in order to improve his performance at work and be able to utilize all his skills to contribute to the company. He stated that his education from China and proficiency in English were the factors that helped him succeed in his career development in Canada. His career goal was to remain at his current job and to continue gaining work experience there to become a veteran to improve productivity of
the company. The most important career-related lesson that he learned was to be flexible and adaptable to a new job. His advice to newcomers was to be responsible and diligent, and to join a professional association of their field.

**Participant 13**

P13 was a 30-year-old male from Iran who immigrated to Canada with his wife, P11, in September 2005. In Iran, he completed a bachelor’s degree in architecture and worked as an architectural technician for a government company. He enjoyed the flexibility of the job and the human interaction component, but he disliked the disorganization at his work. His career was important to his sense of self and he believed that one’s occupation builds one’s character. He wanted to immigrate to another country after he completed his education in order to gain experience elsewhere. He decided to immigrate to Canada as he knew Canada to be a multicultural and immigrant-friendly country. His goal was to remain in architecture and gain more experience working as an architect in Canada. Through his research, he knew that he would require a Canadian master’s degree, as he would in Iran, and complete a three-year internship in order to become a registered architect in Canada. P13 and his wife researched master’s level programs for their respective fields and both applied to programs in the same city once their immigration had been approved. He expected to experience language and cultural barriers during his retraining. However, he was resilient and believed that he would adapt quickly. He was also confident that he would do well because he performed well academically in Iran and he believed that his knowledge and skills were transferable to his retraining in Canada. P13 did not expect to have much control over his initial employment and he knew he had to first gain Canadian work experience.

When P13 arrived in Canada, everything was as he had expected because he had spoken to individuals who had previously immigrated to Canada. He stated that Canada was welcoming
and other than adjusting to the Canadian weather and finding a place to live he did not experience transition difficulties. He began his retraining in a Master’s of Architecture program immediately after he arrived in Canada, which helped him make friends and connect with the Iranian community at his school. His wife also provided him with emotional support. He did not work while he underwent retraining, because architecture firms were unable to hire him as an architect until he completed his master’s degree. However, he and his wife had savings from Iran to support themselves financially. P13 found the program to be similar to his education experience from Iran and he found the professors to be very knowledgeable. Through his degree, he gained more knowledge and an increased sense of career identity. He also shared that the retraining allowed him to immerse into the professional community and gain a sense of self-worthiness as a new Canadian. The only aspect he disliked was that thorough instructions were not always provided and he had to learn through trial and error. During his retraining, he received emotional support from his wife, family from Iran, and friends. He also made friends through sports and his wife. Through his retraining experience, he learned that making plans and investing in those plans helped him to succeed.

In 2007, P13 completed his retraining and took a paid three-year internship at an architecture firm, which provided him with Canadian work experience and requirement for an architect license. He enjoyed his internship as he had a helpful mentor. After working at his internship for 3 years, he was hired as a full-time employee and transferred to a branch in Toronto, where he had been working for the last 6 months. He enjoyed the creative aspect of his work and being able to make decisions and take control of his projects. He reported that his job provided him with a sense of self-efficacy as he felt he was able to contribute at work. However, with the added responsibilities, he was experiencing more work stress and less time to spend with his wife. He was also experiencing stress from being far away from his family members in
Iran, but he coped by focusing on his job when he was at work. Overall, he stated that being punctual, detail oriented, objective, and retraining helped him succeed in his career in Canada.

P13’s goal was to continue to gain work experience and confidence in his field of work. He would like to become a partner or an associate in the firm. He was confident about his future career prospects as he was given equal opportunities and not discriminated against. He intended on pursuing future retraining to gain a license in Leadership in Environmental Energy to also specialize in green buildings. In terms of lessons that he learned or advice that he would provide newcomers, he stated that it is better to immigrate sooner rather than later in one’s life in order to gain more immigration experience to help with the immigration transition. He also advised newcomers to do their research regarding what to expect during the transition period prior to immigration.

Participant 14

P14 was a 37-year-old male who immigrated to Canada from China with his wife in May 2003. He completed a bachelor’s degree in computer technology from China and worked as a software developer for the government. His job was enjoyable and he had good relationships with his colleague. He was encouraged by his friend, who had already immigrated to Canada, to move to Canada to further develop her career. P14 decided that this was a good idea as he saw a lack of new career opportunities within the government sector in which he was working. Although, he was expecting his career transition to be difficult, he did not expect to have to gain any form of retraining.

After arriving in Canada, P14 began revising his resume, applying for jobs online, and networking with his friends for job search information. He had intended to acquire employment in his original field of work. Unfortunately, he remained unemployed for 3 to 4 months, which led him to feel very frustrated. Some job search barriers he encountered included language
barriers, his pre-immigration education and work experience being unrecognized, and not having any Canadian work experience. He sought help from government support service centers, which only helped P14 land labour jobs. P14 obtained an accounting job, which he held for a few months. He felt overqualified for his jobs and decided to take ESL courses and gain retraining at the recommendation of his friend. He completed an advanced college diploma in Computer Programming and Analysis Co-op Ed. He chose this program in order to re-enter his original field of work and for its co-op program, which he felt would lead him to employment. He also knew that this college had a good relationship with the bank at which he was interested in working.

During his retraining, he did not work and his wife financially supported the family. Overall, he enjoyed the retraining experience and reported that the teamwork and tests helped him to learn even though he found it a little difficult to adjust to the new learning style. He also stated that the retraining gave him a chance to acculturate, as well as to improve his English and communication skills. Although, his training from his home country did not help him land employment, P14 found that his previously gained knowledge provided him with the basic knowledge for his retraining. He shared that he worked hard to compete with the other students and graduated as valedictorian. He landed a co-op information technology (IT) position at a bank, where he was hired as an employee. This job offered him Canadian work experience and an opportunity to learn about Canadian work culture. After 4.5 years, P14 quit this job as he felt that there were too many policies at the workplace. He then joined a foreign currency exchange company, where he had been working as a software developer for the past 6.5 months.

Overall, P14 enjoyed his employment, however, he reported feeling a sense of isolation from his colleagues as they were all family oriented. He also reported that his leadership skills were not being used and so he was currently taking additional courses to improve his managerial
skills. He felt hopeful about his career prospects, as the job market was good for his field. He planned on moving to another bank in order to further his career. P14 was considering additional retraining in financial investment to meet more friends and network for his career development. His advice to new immigrant skill-workers was to gain retraining. He also recommended that they be open and flexible in changing their field of work and retraining depending on the job market.

Participant 15

P15, a 39-year-old female from China, immigrated to Canada with her daughter in March 2002. Her husband had immigrated 10 months prior to her move. Prior to her immigration, she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature and focused on adult education, which included an internship of 3 to 4 months. After graduation, she worked as a university instructor, teaching English to managers and project directors for 7 years. She also coordinated an international project for overseas students and visiting schools at the university. She enjoyed the work and the exposure to Western cultures as the university admitted many international students. Her work was very important to her sense of self and she devoted her life to her job. However, she reported experiencing sexism in the form of preferential treatment for her male co-workers and a glass ceiling for the female employees. She decided to immigrate to Canada to escape that work environment as well as to experience Western culture and have a better family life. Her husband, along with other immigrants in Canada, informed her of their difficulties re-entering their professions. Therefore, P15 expected that she would have to take survival jobs.

P15 had planned on pursuing a master’s degree or Ph.D. in Canada in a practical field instead of in English due to her language barriers. However, due to lack of funds, she had to acquire employment and save money before pursuing further training. During the initial period of her immigration transition, P15 had to cope with transition stressors, a lack of social supports,
and her two months unemployment, which placed strain on her marriage. During this difficult time, she found it helpful to remind herself that it was her own choice to immigrate, focus on the beauty of Canada as well as on her own determination to succeed. She worked at a call centre for 3 days and then quit because the sales expectations were too high. She then sought job search training at a Caribbean community organization that was recommended by her husband. To her surprise the manager offered her a job to be a job search workshop facilitator for newcomers. They hired her for her Chinese language skills and her ability to work with Chinese-speaking clients. She reported feeling grateful for her job as it offered her financial livelihood, Canadian work experience, and social support. Since then, her relationship with her husband improved. The concept of community centres was new to P15 and she was very much in favour of the availability of free services to those in need. She then worked at another non-profit community centre where she reported experiencing discrimination from her director. She noted feeling unhappy and isolated. During this time, she developed cancer, which she believed was related to the work stress.

After working there for 2 years, she serendipitously discovered a newly developed master’s program in immigration and settlement studies at a university. Though her employer offered to fund a diploma program in career counseling at a college, P15 decided to pursue the master’s degree because she wanted to further develop her career and she enjoyed working with adult newcomers. She found the program and teachings to be more practical and interactive than her training from her home country. During her second year, she gained more confidence as she learned more and was able to use her work experience in her school presentations. She used her computer skills to include multimedia in her presentations to distract her professor from her language barrier. She continued working full-time while completing her retraining at a part-time capacity. She felt that her retraining compromised her work performance and required her to
sacrifice time spent with her family. Fortunately, she received support from her husband, teachers, and a friend. She stated that the retraining helped her realize her full potential and helped her become more competent in her current field of work. Through her retraining, she learned that her pre-immigration education and work experience are helpful and important in her overall career development.

After working at the two community centres for 7 years, she pursued a government job in order to gain job stability and more time to spend with her family. For the past 2 years, she had been working for the government as an immigrant counselor assistant. P15 reported that her retraining helped her land her current employment, which she indicated had a more respectful work environment. However, she felt overqualified for her current job given her master’s degree. She applied for higher positions but she had no luck despite receiving positive feedback during interviews. She learned that the employers usually already had someone in mind that they want to hire. Other future career development concerns P15 reported included language barriers and a lack of a professional network. Her long-term goal was to either find a higher level position or start her own company and she believed that this would allow her to use her potential fully. She also expressed a desire to pursue a Ph.D. degree in education or cultural studies in the future. Her advice to new immigrants included being open-minded, maintaining family support, networking, and gaining Canadian education.

Participant 16

P16 was a 43-year-old male from China who immigrated to Canada with his wife and daughter in October 2004. He completed a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering in China and he completed a practicum during the summer of his last year at a manufacturing company. After a one-year probation and 4 years of work experience, he gained the title of a senior engineer. He then worked as a production or processing engineer at a big manufacturing
company that produced parts for old fashioned TVs. He was quite satisfied with his job as he felt that he was able to contribute to the company’s goals. On the other hand, he disliked the corruption of his workplace in China. He shared that one’s career is considered to be a central focus in one’s sense of self in China and that his career was a high priority to P6. He decided to immigrate to Canada as the industry that he was working in began to decline and the company filed for bankruptcy. P16 also shared that there was ageism in the workplace in China. Therefore, he decided to come to Canada to find new career opportunities. Prior to his immigration, he took some English training. He expected to be able to find work in the same field in Canada and he did not expect to have to undergo retraining due to his work experience.

Contrary to his expectations, P16 had difficulty finding employment in his original field in Canada. He experienced job search barriers such as cultural differences in the way that the same jobs were described in Canada, his education and work experience were unrecognized, and he did not have the Canadian work experience that employers required. He felt anxious about his family’s finances and took a survival job working as a general labourer for a magnet materials company for almost a year. He found this job through a classmate. Since he was unfamiliar with the field, he asked his supervisor for direction but was not given help. He then took survival jobs at an auto parts company for about 4 months. It offered very low pay and he found the job too physically demanding. During this initial period, P16 took ESL courses to improve his English. He felt that no one was able to help and that he had to struggle on his own. He then received employment insurance benefits and sought help in community centres, immigration centres, and employment agencies. He declined a co-op offer at a windows manufacturing company, as he could not see a future career in this field.

Two years after immigrating to Canada, P16 decided to pursue retraining. At the recommendation of his friend, he attended a college because he did not want to undergo a long
university degree due to his age. He considered applying for a pharmaceutical program but decided to obtain a fire protection engineering technical diploma instead as he believed that this program would lead to a higher chance of finding a secure job. In addition, he felt that he had the background knowledge for fire protection engineering from his university education. He found the retraining to be quite easy as he already had the knowledge from his pre-Canada education. He enjoyed the group work and gaining practical knowledge, however, he stated that he had expected to learn more from the program than he felt the program offered. To occupy his time, he began working part-time designing fire prevention systems for his professor during the second year of the program. P16 found it easy to balance work and retraining, as the program was easy for him. He stated that his part-time work provided practical hands-on experience related to his retraining. Overall, he stated that he had a positive retraining experience and that his retraining provided him with a new opportunity to change his career. He also stated that he experienced a sense of pride in the field of his retraining as it ensures the safety of people and their properties.

P16 graduated as one of the top students and was recruited by a risk management services company, where he had been working for the past 2 years. He did not want to work in the insurance industry, but he recognized that the job market had declined and decided to take the job. Unfortunately, his pay decreased due to economic issues. He would prefer to work on more in-depth fire protection design than on general insurance. He had an interview with a designing company but he believed that he was not offered a job because he was older than the staff in that company. He did not feel a sense of career identity from his job as he did not enjoy insurance work and he accepted that earning money to support his family was more important. He was thinking about pursuing additional retraining in insurance to improve his chance for a promotion. However, he was debating this decision, because he did not want to remain in the insurance sector. His advice for future immigrant professionals was to gain retraining immediately after
immigration instead of taking survival jobs. He also recommended that they search for jobs that are related to their retraining to gain work experience.

Participant 17

P17 was a 40-year-old female who immigrated to Canada with her husband and children in October 2004. She completed a bachelor’s degree in engineering in China and she completed four internships. She did not pursue the engineering professional license as she decided to move into the business field. She worked as a buyer and business analyst. She was very satisfied with her job as her tasks had a positive impact on the company, which gave her a sense of importance. She had heard positive reviews about Canada from her friends and she wanted to escape the nepotism in her work environment and reduce the pace of her work-life. She had expected her job search to be difficult due to Canada being a new environment for her. However, she was confident that she would be able to overcome the difficulties through hard work. She was also flexible in the type of work she took within the business field, which provided her with confidence. She took English language classes prior to her migration and she did not expect to have to retrain, as she felt confident in the transferability of her degree and work experience from China.

When she first arrived in Canada, P17 experienced transition difficulties such as balancing her childcare responsibilities and job hunting, language and cultural barriers, and adjusting to the slower Canadian pace of life. She coped by changing her attitude and accepting her circumstances. Although, she sought help from job hunting resources, she stated that the consultant did not provide any useful information and instead pushed her to apply for survival jobs. P17 was unemployed for about a year and this had a negative impact on her mental health and physical wellbeing. She was extremely worried about their family’s future and wellbeing to the point that she experienced all-day vomiting and was taken to emergency. Her husband was
forced to take a labour job for financial survival, which made him very unhappy, and P17 took some entry-level jobs, such as part-time work at a front desk in a community center that her friend recommended. She declined an offer that would have led to a career as a community worker as she wanted to remain in her original field of work.

After a year of living in Canada, P17 decided to gain retraining after finding that her friend was retraining at a university. She hoped that retraining would lead to a better paying job. She completed one year of a two-year college program in shipping and customer service, after which she switched to the Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management program as she felt that this program better suited her previous work experience. She chose a college program over a university program due to the difficult TOEFL test required for admissions to the university. During the retraining she continued to work part-time at the community center. P17 was offered a job in transportation and shipping in an international business company but she declined the offer due to the low salary. Although, she did not initially feel that it was necessary for her to retrain, in hindsight, she felt that the retraining was more helpful than she had expected and that she was able to apply what she learned to her current job. P17 felt that she gained competence in her English skills and learned how to speak like a Westerner. However, she also felt that the retraining was too easy for her because she had a university education background. Her retraining led to a change in career identity from business analyst to buyer.

After she completed the retraining program, she landed an internship position with the help of a job consultant. Although, it was a low paying job, she stated that it was a good organization and that it provided her with Canadian work experience and made her more marketable. She had been working in this position for the past 4 years. However, her boss reportedly did not want to give her a raise or hire her as a regular employee. She experienced less control or authority in her current job than in her job in her home country. She also noted that her
job did not offer her professional experience, which she perceived to be a barrier to landing a new professional job. She was searching for a higher paying job. She stated that it would take a promotion for all of her skills to be utilized. She did not intend on pursuing further retraining due to the time and financial commitment that it would entail and she was not sure that more retraining would be helpful. Her advice to new immigrants was to bridge the cultural gap by getting along with others by avoiding arguments at the workplace, adapting to the new environment, and participating in community activities and seeking help from others to adapt.

**Participant 18**

P18 was a 46-year-old male from China who immigrated to Canada with his family in April 2004. He completed a bachelor’s degree in hydraulic engineering in China. After working as an engineer for 6 to 7 years, he was licensed with the title of Senior Engineer. He worked as a consultant for a hydropower station. P18 decided to immigrate to Canada as he found the work-life in China to be too busy and that it was having a negative impact on his health. He also wanted his family and children to have a better living environment. Prior to immigrating, he expected his transition to be difficult and that he might need to return to university and hold entry-level jobs. He expected that he might have to retrain and was considering pursuing a master’s degree to improve his chances of finding employment, though he did not have any specific retraining plans.

When P18 first arrived in Canada, his goal was to first find an entry-level job to learn the technical codes and work environment, then pursue re-licensing to apply for higher level jobs. He experienced difficulties with the language barrier and he was unemployed for about 9 to 10 months. He sought support through agencies, such as Skills for Change and the Chinese Professional Association in Canada, and had a mentor who was a seasoned engineer. Through the recommendations of his friends, he learned about a co-op program that helped him with job
searching and he obtained a volunteer position with the help of a teacher. P18 began by volunteering in a consulting company and was hired after 3 months to work as a designer. He was encouraged by job coaches from agencies and by his manager to retrain to obtain his Professional Engineer license. He completed two courses for which his tuition was covered by his employer. His course choices were influenced by his manager and his future career goals.

During the retraining, P18’s main goal was to pass the exams. He felt that the exams were challenging for immigrants as the questions were not taught in the courses. However, he noted that he was able to do well due to his practical experience from his pre-migration work experience. Overall, he stated that his retraining experience was similar to his education from his home country. P18 continued to work while completing his retraining. He found it difficult to balance taking his two retraining courses and working at the same time. Therefore, he chose to complete one course at a time and took 6 months to complete both courses to prevent his retraining from having a negative impact on his work performance. P18 reported that his retraining and re-licensing improved his career opportunities in Canada, as well as increased his confidence and his salary. He shared that he had to sacrifice time spent with his family but that it was necessary for his career development to gain retraining. As a result of his retraining, P18 was hired into a higher position to work as a Senior Engineer at a consulting company, where he had been working for the past 6.5 years. P18 saw his retraining as necessary to acquire the license for his career development. He then worked for a short duration in concrete consulting.

At the time of the interview, P18 was working at a provincial power generation company, a client of his previous work place. He shared that focusing on his goal as well as focusing on utilizing his previous experience helped him succeed in his career transition. In terms of future career concerns, P18 reported that he was concerned about job security and that he was planning on continuing to seek out job market information. He was, at the time of the interview,
completing a leadership development program paid for by his employer. He was also taking English training courses. P18 planned to gain additional training in technical software in the future to enhance his job security. His advice, for new immigrant skilled workers, was to remain in their original field of work and take advantage of the previously gained knowledge and experience.

**Participant 19**

P19 was a 50-year-old female from Peru who immigrated to Canada with her husband and children in February 2001. She held a Bachelor of Science degree in midwife studies, which included a one-year internship that was required to obtain a license in the field. She worked in hospitals and private clinics as a midwife in Peru. P19 enjoyed her work as a midwife but decided to emigrate because the environment was unsafe because of the political system. She did not expect to have to gain any formal retraining in Canada and thought that it would be easy to re-enter her original field of work. P19 only expected language to be an issue and was given the impression by the Canadian Embassy during her immigration process that her professional field was in high demand in Canada.

About a week-and-a-half after arriving in Canada, P19 found a general sales position by chance while taking a stroll. She also found vocational services to be very helpful. She attempted to retrain in nursing but she was informed by the Toronto Board of Education that she was required to obtain a Canadian high school diploma. She completed math, biology, and chemistry credits, underwent ESL training, and took a course on basic midwifery terminology at a university. P19, however, chose to pursue retraining in social services because obtaining a high school diploma would have taken too long. She continued working in general sales to save some money to pay for retraining in a midwifery program. She also volunteered at a hospital in an attempt to re-enter her original field of work. Her biggest source of support was her husband who
also worked and helped to look after their children. P19 then worked part-time with children at a community center and studied full-time at a college where she completed a community worker/social service worker diploma. She found this program through an online search. P19 experienced stress while trying to balance part-time work, full-time studies and taking care of her children. She felt neglected and lied to by the system. After she completed her training, she landed a job in mental health services. She engaged in additional mental health workshops and went on to work with women with mental health issues and subsequently with the elderly.

She was working with abused women and children. She had been working part-time as a residential counselor and worked with victims of abuse for the past 8 years. Even though she expressed that her job was stressful, she really enjoyed it. She shared that the most influential factor in helping her succeed in her career transition were self-determination and having faith. She also shared that she did not believe in luck and that she believed in effort, sacrifice, dedication, and perseverance. She had plans for additional training in social work in order to maintain her competitiveness in the workforce. Interestingly, even though P19 considered herself as having succeeded in her career transition, she shared that she would have preferred to remain in Peru due to the struggles she experienced in Canada. Her advice to new immigrants was to gain cultural competence by exposing themselves to individuals from different cultural backgrounds through retraining. She also recommended new immigrants to focus on their previous work experience instead of attempting to build a career in a different field.

Participant 20

P20 was a 46-year-old male from Greece who immigrated to Canada alone in March 2004. He completed an English preparation course in English media and a Bachelor of Science in computer engineering in Germany. He worked as a network specialist at a university and enjoyed his work responsibilities, however, he felt that there were no opportunities for him to do the
research that he wanted to do. He immigrated to Canada on the recommendation of a friend and expected a better work environment in Canada. Prior to his immigration, he obtained his degree equivalency from a Canadian university. He was confident that he would be able to find work in his profession in Canada due to his education and work experience. He was planning to pursue a master’s level degree in his field and had researched the programs available in Canada.

When P20 initially arrived in Canada, he experienced culture shock. He did not like the transportation system and high taxes. He coped with the transition difficulties by maintaining his cultural identity, and he took up sports and attended community centers to develop a social support network. He searched for work in his original field by applying for jobs online but found it unhelpful. He taught tennis for a while and acquired a job through networking at an art exhibition after several months. P20 worked as an information technology specialist for the government for 3 years. He then worked in several jobs as an IT helpdesk specialist in Montreal for about 4.5 years. He subsequently moved to Toronto, where he had been working as a service desk network specialist and supervised a team. He found his friends to be very helpful for emotional support and they encouraged him to network, which he found to be most helpful in finding employment.

After 3 or 4 years in Canada, P20 decided to retrain following the recommendations of his friends. He also wanted to retrain because his workplace was updating their computing system and he felt the need to update his skills for his job. He researched programs and spoke to professors and instructors. Barriers P20 reported to have experienced during his retraining planning included a sense of isolation and his own pessimism. He completed a college diploma in wireless networking technologies. During the retraining process, he questioned his own decision to retrain due to his age and felt that he should be further along in his career development. He coped with this stress through sports and with the support of his friends and
family. While he was retraining, P20 continued to work part-time as an IT network specialist. He noted that he had to adjust to and manage his two schedules. He enjoyed making friends at his program but disliked the unhealthy food options on campus. He found his retraining to be similar to his pre-immigration education and he attributed this to the fact that the IT field is the same in any country. During his retraining, P20 had the unexpected opportunity to take a newly developed course, from which he gained updated knowledge. Through updating his skills and knowledge in his field, he gained confidence and an increased sense of career identity. As a result, he felt more encouraged to pursue his career goal as an information security specialist. He also discovered that he was a sociable person through his ability to connect with the other students who were younger than him by 15 to 20 years. P20 was pleased to discover that Canadians were not ageist. As a result of taking courses for retraining, he did not have time to return to Greece to visit his family. Instead, he video called them on Skype to keep in touch.

After his retraining, P20 began networking to search for a job. His friend introduced him to someone, who sent his resume to human resources of the company where he was currently working. He enjoyed the social aspect of his job and the good work-life balance. The only aspects that he disliked about his work were sitting in front of the computer for long periods and close-minded colleagues who were not open to new ways of working. His career identity remained the same as it was prior to his immigration as his retraining and job were both in his original professional field. He was satisfied with his work-life thus far. Overall, he felt that his positive attitude helped him to succeed in his career development. He also stated that networking provided him with the chance for a job interview. He was intending on taking more courses to learn more about IT security in order to find work as an information security specialist. However, he remained flexible in adapting his career goals to the constant advancement of the IT field. P20’s advice to new immigrants was to network with previous immigrants prior to
immigrating in order to gain information about potential career barriers, retraining options, and requirements.

**Concluding Rationale**

The above 20 participant portraits were presented to provide the reader with a sense of familiarity for the overall experiences of the participants. The next five chapters (Chapters 5 to 9) present the results of the study, which are based on the narratives provided by the participants. Therefore, familiarity of the participants’ narratives provides the context and meaning that is necessary to understand and appreciate the themes and quotes that are presented in the results chapters.
Chapter 5 Results

Pre-Immigration Experiences and Expectations

All 20 participant interviews and responses were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. Although each of the participants had their own journey, the analysis aimed to capture the common essence among their vocational transition and retraining experiences. The emergent themes from the analysis that reflect the immigrants professionals’ experiences throughout their career and retraining journeys are presented in the current chapter and next four chapters. All of the themes that are reported were supported by at least 3 participants. The emergent themes are organized under the following five chapters: Chapter 5 Pre-immigration Experiences and Expectations, Chapter 6 Initial Experience in Canada, Chapter 7 Retraining Planning and Experience, Chapter 8 Retraining Outcome and Post-Retraining Employment Experience, and Chapter 9 Future Career Concerns and Lessons Learned.

The interview questions (see APPENDIX F) provide an organizational structure within which to present the themes in a chronological and systematic manner. Overviews of all the themes discussed in each of the respective results chapters (Chapters 5 to 9) are presented in tables at the beginning of each of chapter. The tables present the organizational themes, major themes, and subthemes. The organizational themes are the first level themes that organize the major themes and subthemes according to the chronological structure of the interview questions, which reflect the career development stages. The second level themes, nested under the organizational themes, are the major themes, which describe the main findings of the participants’ career development and career transition experiences. The subthemes are the third level themes that are categorized under and further elaborate on the major themes.

This chapter presents the beginning of the participants’ journeys in their immigration transition. The themes in this chapter describe their pre-Canada work experience, the reasons for
the immigrant skilled workers immigration to Canada, and their career transition and retraining expectations. Please refer to Table 1 for an overview of the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 1

*Themes of Pre-Immigration Experience and Expectations*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational themes</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Canada work</td>
<td>Positive Work Experience ($n = 19$)</td>
<td>Enjoyed the field ($n = 7$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of career identity ($n = 14$)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Sense of accomplishment ($n = 7$)</td>
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<td>Opportunity to learn ($n = 7$)</td>
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<td>Satisfactory pay ($n = 4$)</td>
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<td>Good social network ($n = 3$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Negative Work Experience ($n = 16$)</td>
<td>Stressful work-life ($n = 5$)</td>
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<td>Negative work environment ($n = 5$)</td>
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<td>Job instability ($n = 3$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No opportunities for growth ($n = 3$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reason for Immigration</td>
<td>Improve Quality of Life ($n = 12$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improve Work-life ($n = 13$)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape Poor Economic and Political Environment ($n = 5$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pursue Higher Education ($n = 3$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gain Life Experience ($n = 5$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Transition</td>
<td>Confidence in Career Transition ($n = 14$)</td>
<td>Previous education and work experience ($n = 9$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Help from others ($n = 4$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work hard towards the goal ($n = 3$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expected Career Transition</td>
<td>Difficulty finding employment ($n = 8$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Difficulties ($n = 10$)</td>
<td>Language barriers ($n = 3$)</td>
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<td>Difficulty re-entering original field of work ($n = 7$)</td>
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<td>Flexibility in type of work taken ($n = 5$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retraining Expectations</td>
<td>Did Not Expect Retraining ($n = 9$)</td>
<td>Previous degree and work experience ($n = 4$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expected to obtain work in original field ($n = 4$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expected Retraining ($n = 11$)</td>
<td>To obtain employment ($n = 6$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To re-enter field ($n = 5$)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To learn Canadian laws and regulations ($n = 3$)</td>
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When asked to talk about their work experience prior to their immigration to Canada, the participants’ descriptions reflected both positive and negative work experiences. All participants except for P5, who worked as a finance manager, enjoyed their field of work. A summary of the education and employment background of the participants is provided in Chapter 3, Research Participants, and a table that summarizes the participant demographics is presented in Appendix H.

**Positive Work Experience**

All of the participants except for P5 provided examples of what they enjoyed about their jobs. Their responses reflected 6 main sources of enjoyment from their careers including enjoyment or interest in their field of work, a sense of career identity, a sense of accomplishment gained from their jobs, opportunities to learn and grow, and the social network that they had at their place of work.

**Enjoyed the field.** Many of the participants shared that they enjoyed their pre-Canada field of work and what their job responsibilities entailed. This is best denoted by participants, such as P2 and P14, who reported a complementary fit between their jobs and personalities. P2, who worked as a pediatrician, stated, “I really enjoyed to work, specifically to work with children and to help the children. And this is some connection with my personality because I found that this is what I really want to do.” When speaking about his pre-Canada job as a software developer, P14, echoed that it was his “interest” and his “favourite job.” He explained,
“Because I’m a person who likes to quietly do some troubleshooting stuff…not like a businessman, more open to other people.”

*Sense of career identity.* Closely related to their enjoyment of their field of work, most of the participants reported to have had a strong sense of career identity prior to their immigration. For example, P11, who worked as a chemical engineer, reflected an acquisition of her career identity through having control over choosing the career of her interest. She stated, “I think it was because I picked this field, and I picked the work and the job that I wanted, I was very happy and I think it was pretty central [to my sense of self].” P16 described a cultural influence in the importance of career to his identity in his statement: “I think in China, we are educated that our work, our job. It is our life. Personal life is secondary.”

*Sense of accomplishment.* Some of the participants enjoyed their work due to the sense of pride, self-esteem, and accomplishment that they obtain from taking on important responsibilities at their places of work, being able to contribute to the company, and receiving respect from others for their work. When asked how satisfied P17 was with her career prior to coming to Canada, she provided a response that succinctly reflected the sentiment regarding her sense of accomplishment that was reported by the other participants: “Very satisfied…. I was given some important things to do, and my work will affect the strategy of our company. So it made me feel kind of important…. the respect you get when dealing with people.”

The participants also reported a sense of pride in their experienced successes within their careers. For examples, P2 stated, “I found that this is what I really want to do and all the success I had there, it was very fantastic. I was very recognized by colleagues, by university, by patients, by parents, as a very great physician.” P9 similarly noted her success: “I was very successful, because I was the youngest manager in my whole bureau, like education board, I was the youngest one.”
Opportunity to learn. For several participants, the challenging work responsibilities, global exposure, and training that were offered by their jobs provided them with career enjoyment. For example, P8 and P16 both reflected their enjoyment in the challenges offered by their work when asked how satisfied they were with their career. P16 said:

We need to work hard and achieve the goals, and there are always some challenges here, and we don’t know what will happen…. Lots of things we need to do, and that makes your working life very full and interesting. (P16)

P8 similarly stated, that he was satisfied with his career due to the “challenging” nature of his pre-Canada job and also added that his job offered “Good exposure globally.” This enjoyment of exposure to other cultures through their employment was similarly reported by P1: “It was nice…. I travelled a lot and I used to meet different people a lot and they had business opportunities.” P14 shared that he enjoyed the training opportunities as well as exposure to other cultures and countries through his employment:

We had so many new things, all new stuff that we could participate. When I was working in the government, they provided some training, not free training, but some training programs. We could go somewhere. It was not traveling. We could go to have some training courses, but after the training courses, we had some spare time to actually go traveling in those places. (P14)

Satisfactory pay. For a few participants, their enjoyment from work came from their salary. For example, when asked about her career satisfaction, P11 stated, “The payment was good, the salary was good. I was very happy with it.” Both P17 and P18 referred to their sufficient salary when referring to what they enjoyed about their pre-Canada employment.

Good social network. A few participants described enjoying the positive social connections and networks that they developed at their place of work. For instance, P2 reflected a sense of nostalgia for the connections that she made in her pre-Canada place of work and P14 shared that he was able to develop social connections with his colleagues due to a lack of language barrier:
As I mentioned previously, I had very good work environment and I had a very good relationship with all my colleagues and I will always remember them in very good way. They miss me so much because, as a person, I was very friendly and I made very good relations. (P2)

P14 echoed, “We [employees] have a good relationship with all the colleagues as well because we speak the same language. We have good relationships both in work and after work, so it was pretty enjoyable.”

_negative_work_experience_

Although all participants but P5 reported to have been satisfied with their careers prior to moving to Canada, many of the participants reported that there were certain aspects of their jobs that they did not enjoy. Of note, P5 was the only participant who had a desire to change his field of work to something else that he would find more meaningful. P5 said:

When I came here, being 35 years old, I realized I lost interest for my engineering career. Actually, I felt it even when I was studying 4th or 5th year after my military service because it looked like my life attitude changed. When I saw what was going on in reality, and also deep inside I realized that I have to do something with people than with the pavement or machines or computers and so on. I could be much more useful doing something. (P5)

Some of the dislikes that the participants shared about their pre-Canada employment included work stress, negative work environment, instability of the job market, and the lack of opportunities for growth within their place of work.

Stressful work-life. Some participants reported disliking the stressful job responsibilities. They shared that they experienced stress from the busy work environment, long work hours, and having to continue to learn and adapt to the constantly changing work environment. For example, when describing what she disliked about her job, P17 said, “Stressful. We had to keep learning…and the job can be different every day, every month, so it was kind of stressful.” When describing his pre-Canada job, P18 stated, “Very busy. Sometimes I feel it’s too tight, that we have to work day and night. Sometimes there’s no vacation, no weekend even.”
**Negative work environment.** Several participants reported that they disliked the corrupt or unregulated workplace environment, sexism, and work politics. For example when asked to describe what she disliked about her work, P10 explained, “There is no rigid labour law [in Sri Lanka]”, and described the workplace infrastructure in Sri Lanka as “seedier.” P15 and P4 reported disliking the sexism experienced in their workplace:

I was a female teacher, so compared to my coworkers, who were male teachers I didn’t get the same thing as them from my employer…. I was tenured at that university, but as a female teacher, I couldn’t get free housing, free daycare. But if I’m a male teacher, I get everything free. (P15)

P4 echoed, “In India, there was too much politics in the workplace and it was more of a male dominated kind of job. It’s like you always need to be under somebody. You can’t make your own decisions.” When describing what she disliked about her pre-Canada workplace, P9 mentioned the workplace politics and stated, “People fight against each other under the table. The higher the position you are. There is a lot of drama over there. I don’t like it. That’s the reason that I wanted to immigrate to Canada at that time.”

**Job instability.** A few participants reported that they lacked job security due to the economic instability and political circumstances in their country at the time. For example, P1 and P12 explained:

I didn’t like the way the Soviet Union collapse because when you live in a country and you have security for the future and suddenly the next day you have nothing. No job, no money. I was upset… but at the same time I was working hard and I saw the opportunity and I came to Canada. (P1)

Our publishing business normally focuses on education material, like textbooks, so there’s not too much of a market competition. The government designs the number of your production volume and because of the one child policy in China, the total quantity of students decreased. That directly means our sales dropped down. So that made me not very confident for my future, for our business. (P12)

**No opportunities for growth.** For a few participants, the lack of opportunities to learn and grow within their careers was a source of discontent. For instance, P20 stated, “I was not
satisfied in terms of the research and study, and the performance advice. Because, we didn’t have the environment… not enough encouragement or power to pursue the research study that we were working on.” When discussing what he disliked about his work, P5 stated, “This was a pretty routine job… Everything was almost the same. Nothing was really challenging, because you had to be responsible for the regular trading day.”

Reasons for Immigration

All of the participants were asked to describe what led to their decision to immigrate to Canada. Their answers reflected five main themes. The participants decided to immigrate to Canada in order to improve their quality of life, improve their work-life, escape the poor economic and political environment from their home country, gain life experience, and pursue higher education.

Improve Quality of Life

Most of the participants shared reasons for immigration that reflected their desire to improve their overall quality of life for themselves and their family. P18 succinctly summarized this theme in her statement: “I just wanted to change my environment, to find a better place to live, especially for my family, for my kids.” P10 believed that immigrating to Canada would provide her with prosperity. In addition to providing a good education and quality of life for their children, a few participants stated that they immigrated to spend more time with their spouse. For example, P6 said, “We moved to spend time together and then I had kids and I wanted them to have a good education and quality of life.”

Improve Work-life

Some participants spoke about a desire to improve their work-life environment and further their career development as reasons for their decision to immigrate. In terms of improving job environment, the participants spoke about their desire to escape the busy work-life
in their home countries. P12 was concerned about the impact of his large amount of work on his health.

A few participants reported a desire to escape their busy work-life as well as the competitive and unfair work environment. For example, P17 said, “We felt the competition in China and the unfairness. So we thought maybe we could try to change the pace… So that combination made us give it [migration] a try.”

Other participants stated that they decided to immigrate to Canada to escape the ageism, sexism, and nepotism in the job market back in their home country. P16 stated, “There is no good future in China because we have so many people and so many young guys. So, we moved to Canada, where there is at least no age discrimination.” P17 lamented about the nepotism in the workplace in her home country: “We call that nepotism. They get better payment. The competition opportunity can be different for people because of who you are, because of your family background.” According to P15, she left her home country partly to escape the sexism at the workplace: “That’s part of my reason for immigrating to Canada, because I was a female teacher. So compared to my coworkers, who were male teachers, I didn’t get the same thing as them from my employer.”

A desire to further develop their career was also reported by many participants as a reason for their decision to migrate. P1 echoes the same sentiment shared by a few other participants in his comment: “I was told that if I go to Canada, I can make more [money] and I can improve my life. The country of opportunities.” A couple of participants also spoke about their intention to further develop their career within their original field of work. For instance, P13 stated, “I thought it would be good to experience the same setting of work outside of my country of origin.”
Escape Poor Economic and Political Environment

Closely related to the themes of improving their quality of life and work-life, a few participants reported to have decided to migrate in order to escape from the economic and political situation in their country of origin. The participants spoke about safety issues as well as financial and quality of life issues caused by the economic and political unrest in their home countries. They decided to move to Canada to escape those dangers and barriers to provide themselves and their families a better and safer future. For example, P2 shared:

It was a very rough period in my country, economically, security-wise, as well as politically very insecure for the people and the families. At that point I had my older daughter and I was thinking about what might happen in the future while my children are alive and can this country offer my child a better living because the salary for educated people and specifically for physicians does not give a good standard [of living]. (P2)

P19, who immigrated from Peru to Canada, provided another example of migrating to escape the political situation in her home country, “In that time, we were facing a kind of dictatorship – our government – so, as a worker there, I didn’t feel safe…. Part of the government was already listening to my conversations.”

Pursue Higher Education

Interestingly, only a few participants reported their desire to gain a higher degree in order to further their career development as one of the reasons that they decided to immigrate to Canada. P11 wanted to pursue a master’s in her field of study: “I wanted to get a higher degree in my field, and I came here to do my masters.” P7 took tuition into consideration when making her decision to immigrate to Canada: “I always wanted to further my career, like go ahead with my Ph.D., and Canada was a good option to do a Ph.D. as opposed to the states where it would have cost me a lot.” For P10, further education and career development went hand in hand: “For prosperity and growth in my education, culture, and career, I always wanted to leave.”
Gain Life Experience

A desire to gain experience in a western culture or live in another country and an interest in English were reasons that some participants reported to have contributed to their decisions to move to Canada. For example, P13 explained, “It was basically my decision to go out of the country after finishing my education, to get more experience in another country.” Individuals like P15, who taught English in China, wanted to gain some experience speaking English with Westerners: “My major back in university was English literature, but honestly, I never got the chance to speak to real Western people, to see the real English.” P20 expressed a desire for exploration in his reason behind his immigration: “I just wanted to come and experience it myself because I don’t believe it if I don’t experience it.”

Career Transition Expectations

The participants shared the attitudes and expectations that they held regarding their career transition prior to their migration. Themes of confidence regarding their career transition as well as expectations of career transition difficulties emerged from their responses.

Confident in Career Transition

Many of the participants reported feeling quite confident about being able to succeed in their career transition and career development in Canada. The source of their confidence stemmed from their previous education and work experience, support from other people, and their own motivation to work hard towards their career goals.

Previous education and work experience. Almost half of the participants reported that they felt quite confident about their career prospects in Canada because of the education and work experience obtained prior to moving to Canada. Akin to the responses given by some of the other participants, P2 stated, “I really didn’t think that I would not get a job right away. With all my knowledge, education, experience, [I thought] that it would be easy anywhere to work.” This
confidence was echoed by P14: “After I landed, I still felt confident, because I had 4 to 5 years of working experience before I came.”

Help from others. Several participants shared that they felt confident about their career transition because they expected help from others in Canada or they expected their pre-Canada connections to be helpful in their job search. P8 had expected his pre-Canada professional connections to result in a job: “I was a little over confident about my employment since my CFO at [pre-Canada workplace] was from Canada, so I thought it would not be difficult to get into [the same organization] here.” P5 was counting on the help of services in Canada: “I knew that there are some experts and organizations who can help make my decision. I was pretty optimistic, I would say” and P19 expected there to be on-the-job training: “What I was expecting was at least [that the Canadian employers] would be a little bit more open to retraining us to go into the labour force.”

Work hard towards the goal. A few participants reported that they were confident in their career transition because of their willingness to work hard towards their career goal. Responses from P17 and P18 reflected a sense of confidence stemming from their hard working nature:

At first, I was very confident…. We expected some difficulties because it was a totally new environment for us, but we think that we are hard workers. When there is any trouble or difficulties, we can face that, and always get over to that. (P17)

P18 similarly said, “I was confident because I thought if I focus on my work, I think I can do it.” P3 reported being prepared to worked hard in her retraining to succeed in her career transition: “I thought, okay, I’m going to study hard to get some position like that ultrasound technologist [position].”

Expected Career Transition Difficulties

Half of the participants shared some of the difficulties that they expected in their career transition in Canada. The participants reported expecting difficulties landing employment, re-
entering their field of work, having to be flexible in the field of work they take, and language barriers.

*Difficulty finding employment.* Some of the participants expected to experience a difficult time gaining employment. For example, P12 and P14 had expected this difficulty but reported to have still been hopeful and had the desire to give it a try. When asked about how confident she was about finding work in her profession in Canada, P12 stated, “Not very confident, but I still had hope, a wish to try” and P14 echoed, “I expected some kind of difficulty, or some kind of struggles, but I still had some fantasy that I might get a job easily.” P17 and P4 expressed concern about their chances of landing employment due to Canada being a new environment. P17 said, “We expected some difficulties because it was a totally new environment for us.” P4 similarly stated:

> I was not too confident but I knew there was a lot of difference between the way it is back home or in Australia or anywhere else. I knew it wouldn’t be so easy to get work here. I had expected that I would have the initial problems that anybody would face. (P4)

*Language barriers.* A few of the participants expected language barriers to contribute to their career transition difficulties. When asked whether he was expecting any job search barriers, P13 stated, “I was anticipating the language barrier.” P5 similarly stated, “My English is my third language and I [had] to improve this first… That’s why I didn’t expect a lot especially for the first year.” P18 echoed, “Before I came here, just for language I think is not good because I never used English in my work in China… so language was almost zero. So you can imagine how difficult.” P18 thought that he might have to return to university or take entry level jobs due to the language barrier: “Maybe I needed to return to university and maybe I needed to do the entry level jobs. That is true, but I just expected I had to do this kind of change.”

*Difficulty re-entering original field of work.* Some of the participants stated that they had expected to experience difficulty obtaining employment in their original field of work. The
participants anticipated a lengthy and arduous process involved in re-entering their original professions. P15, for example, had been informed of this difficulty through her social connections who previously immigrated to Canada. P15 said:

Before I came here, I heard a lot from the pioneers who came here much earlier than me. I heard that you have to take whatever jobs you are offered, in the factory, or drive a taxi. So I didn’t expect that much before I came…. My husband came here earlier than me. He couldn’t get his professional job. He tried sales, and all kinds of small jobs. (P15)

As a skilled worker who previously worked as a medical doctor prior to her immigration, P3 knew that it would take many years to re-enter her profession and decided to change her profession to an ultrasound technologist: “I actually knew that it would be a very difficult, long, and not a secure path to become an MD and you can waste 4, 5, or 6 years preparing for exams.” P13 expected to have to take any job at first in order to gain Canadian experience. When asked whether he thought that he would have control over his career in Canada, P13 stated, “No, for the first job, you have to grab whatever you can get, so there’s not much choice, but after you have the first job, and Canadian experience, it’s easier and easier to get more jobs.”

*Flexibility in type of work taken.* Related to their expectation for difficulty re-entering their original field of work, a few participants reported an expectation to have to be flexible in the type of work they held. For instance, P10 said, “I was prepared to shovel snow to start up”, with P15 similarly stating, “Any job that can offer me money so I can pay for my daughter’s daycare, I don’t mind anything.” Other participants, such as P17, reflected a sense of flexibility and adaptability in her response: “I expected some kind of difficulty, but I can do a lot of things in the business field, so it doesn’t have to be exactly the same work. I’m adaptable. I can do a lot of things.”

*Retraining Expectations*

About half of the participants expected to receive some form of retraining in Canada, anything from a diploma course to a university degree, while the other half did not expect any
retraining to be necessary. The participants who expected to have to undergo retraining shared their rationale for this expectation. A few of them provided expectations that they had for the retraining experience prior to their migration.

Did Not Expect Retraining

Previous degree and work experience. Half of the participants did not expect to have to regain any retraining in order to land employment. Some participants reported to have expected that their previously obtained degree and pre-Canada work experience would be sufficient to land them employment in Canada. For example, when asked if they expected to have to obtain retraining, P16 stated, “No. I thought, I have so many years of experience and expertise that I can find a job in my field.” P17 echoed, “I was involved with this international business… There’s a lot of opportunity for that kind of job, so I didn’t expect too much trouble to get an international business job at first.” P10 thought that retraining would have been more of a choice rather than necessity: “I thought I might have to continue, and that is not because Canada needed it, but because I had to continue my accountancy and finish and get the designation.”

Expected to Obtain Work in Original Field. Related to their confidence in their pre-Canada education and work experience, some participants expected to be able to obtain work in their original field of work easily and therefore did not expect to have to retrain. P19, for instance, did not expect retraining as she was informed by the immigration embassy that her field of work was high in demand:

Before I came? No, because I thought “okay, language, it’s fine”, because when you go to the Embassy, they say “oh, you are perfect, good candidate, we need more professionals, they have very high demand”, and I thought, okay, I have a good score in my papers, everything. (P19)

P7 similarly did not expect retraining as she felt confident in her previous education and field of training:
I was pretty confident. I had graduated in biotechnology and that was an up-and-coming field at that time. You don’t see a lot of biotechnologists around and at that time I noticed. I felt confident coming here that I would be able to find a job if not at a private company, at least at a university doing research. (P7)

P8 thought that his connections from his pre-Canada job would provide him with employment in Canada: “I was a little over confident about my employment since my CFO at [pre-Canada workplace] was from Canada, so I thought it would not be difficult to get into [the same organization] here.”

Expected Retraining

Half of the participants expected to have to obtain retraining in order to land employment or re-enter their original field of work. Only P3 and P5 expected to retrain in order to enter a new field of work. P3, who worked as a medical doctor prior to her migration, expected the process required for re-entering her medical profession to be too arduous and had anticipated obtaining retraining as an ultrasound technologist. P5, on the other hand, had lost interest in his pre-Canada profession in engineering and had wanted to change his field of work to a profession in which he could work with people rather than computers and machines.

To obtain employment. Some participants expected to have to retrain in order to land employment in Canada. A few participants knew that employers would require Canadian training from their employees. For instance, P3 explained, “I was aware that I needed some Canadian training and some kind of diploma to apply. I didn’t think someone was going to take me for a job just because I was a doctor in the past.” For, P12 and P18, retraining was a back-up plan if they were unable to land employment in Canada. P12 stated, “Yes, that’s my second option, if I don’t have direct opportunity to work or to find a proper workplace, maybe retraining will become a second option.”

To re-enter field. Some participants expected to have to gain retraining in order to re-enter their pre-Canada field of work. For example, P13 stated, “Because I did my research and I
knew that if you want to be an architect in Canada you need a Canadian degree. I had to get a Master’s degree in Canada.” P7 similarly said, “I was planning to come here to study and then work. I was expecting something better and more satisfying...to continue with my research life, if not the same research, [then] the same kind of job or work.” When asked about their rational behind expecting retraining, other participants expressed a desire to further their knowledge within their pre-Canada field of work. For example, P20 stated, “Just updating my skills and knowledge about my field. That’s about it.”

To learn Canadian laws and regulations. A few participants had planned on obtaining retraining in Canada in order to learn about the Canadian laws and regulations within their field of work. For example, P4 stated, “Yeah, I did plan [on taking retraining]. Obviously, any country you go to, you need to upgrade yourself according to that country’s regulations and requirements.”

Positive Retraining Expectations

A few of the participants expected the retraining experience to be positive. P20 shared his enthusiasm for learning. P20 stated, “This [education and training] is a lifetime thing for me. You always train yourself on something.” Although P3 did not know what to expect, she thought that the retraining in Canada would be easier due to the preparation she had done for her English skills. P11 was expecting better facilities: “Yeah, I was expecting better facilities, better equipment, and better environment.”

Expectations of Retraining Difficulties

A few participants expected that they would experience some difficulties in having to adapt to the new culture and language during retraining. P12 stated, “I was not very confident [in my ability to] fully understand what they are saying, and some things, maybe you think that’s very popular or common, but for me, that’s the first time to hear it.” P13 similarly said, “I
thought it was going to be difficult. I would have to transfer some of the experience and knowledge into another setting, another culture, another language, so I didn’t expect it to be easy.”
Chapter 6 Results

Initial Experience in Canada

This chapter discusses the transition and job seeking difficulties that the immigrant skilled workers experienced during their initial post-migration period. Presented are also the experienced impact of the barriers, actions taken in the face of the difficulties, and their initial employment experience. Table 2 presents an overview of the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 2

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Initial Employment

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Positive Initial Work Experience
(n = 10)

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Negative Initial Work Experience
(n = 12)

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Transition Difficulties

Most of the participants reported experiencing transition difficulties during the initial phase of their immigration to Canada. The most commonly reported difficulties were a sense of isolation, cross-cultural differences, language barrier, settlement factors, and financial difficulties.

Isolation

Many participants reported experiencing a lack of social support, feeling like an outsider, and feelings of loneliness. Some participants reported experiencing a lack of the support of their family and friends as one of their transition difficulties. For instance, P7 stated, “I had no family apart from my brother over here and no friends. That was very difficult.” A few participants also
reported a lack of financial support due to not having family and friends in Canada. For instance, P4 stated:

I don’t have any family and I don’t have any friends here, so obviously, I had to depend on myself for my survival. It’s not like I have somebody who is working and giving me [money]… I had to take care of myself and a job was very important for me. (P4)

Several participants also reported feeling lonely and like an outsider. For example, P19 stated, “Initially when I came to Canada, again, I felt very lost. Lack of your social environment. You feel isolated, lonely. Nobody knows who you are. You are just one more piece of this puzzle. I felt really strange.” P4 spoke to the feeling of being an outsider:

I did find myself placed outside. I felt people were very cold and not as friendly…. Here I felt that they didn't want to be friends to anybody and just wanted to take care of themselves. They were not being warm-hearted or open. (P4)

Cultural Differences

Several participants mentioned that they had to adjust to the cultural differences such as differences in communication and social customs. The participants shared that they experienced culture shock and having to adapt to the individualistic cultural norms, the communication/language related cultural differences, and Canadian business decorum and ethics. P20 succinctly summed up his experience of culture shock in his response: “I was shocked, of course. Culture shock. Doesn’t matter if your English is good or bad because it’s a different country. Different approach. Different work environment. Different. Everything. Culture wise.” P8 also reported having to adjust to the difference in collectivistic and individualistic ways of working in teams. He stated, “On any assignment or task that is given here, the teams would divide the responsibility and start working on a particular subject or topic in that task. Whereas the culture I come from, we would brainstorm collectively.” P12 also spoke about the differences in social customs between Canada and China: “Initially I didn't know that for the
escalator, if you’re not in a rush, you can stay at the right side. Left side is for people [who are] in a hurry.”

A few other participants reported experiencing having to adapt to the cultural difference in the use of language. They described having to adjust to the indirect way of communicating and the Canadian cultural-specific use of the English vocabulary. For example, P8 stated:

The cultural that I come from, we are very poor at reading between the lines. We are more straightforward there. Sometimes you don’t understand what is in between. You never understand what is in between and what they mean exactly, which is a big difference. (P8)

P10 similarly noted the cultural difference in use of English vocabulary: “Even now, I find it difficult to say ‘lineup’. I say ‘queue’, so people sometimes don’t understand. Or, even we say ‘trousers’, they say ‘pants’.”

Language Barrier

Several participants reported experiencing language barriers. They described experiencing difficulties understanding and being understood by English-speakers in Canada. For example, P2 stated:

The first experience and the hardest part was my English because I had some very basic knowledge in the language and obviously if you are not speaking the language every day, that language is like a passive knowledge and it was at first. (P2)

P12 noted her difficulty understanding others due to her language barrier:

A little bit difficult, I think, because when I came here… I was not very confident to fully understand what they are saying, and some things, maybe you think that’s very popular or common, but for me, that’s the first time to hear it. (P12)

P8 described feeling self-conscious as well as being misunderstood as a result of his language barriers. He stated, “It [language barrier] really affected my first three or four years because I was always self-conscious that I was not being successful because of my English language.”
Settlement Factors

Settlement factors were mentioned by several participants as transition issues that they needed to adapt to during their initial post-immigration period. Some of these settlement factors included Canadian weather, navigating the city, finding housing, and setting up their banking. They also had to adjust to the difference in the social and political system between Canada and their country of origin. P13 provided an example of a response that indicated that he had to adapt to Canada’s cold winters. P13 stated, “Most significant change was the temperature, and as I said, the weather was very difficult to deal with when I first came here.”

A few participants had to adjust to the public transportation system in Canada. For example, P20 stated:

Transportation is a real problem here. This is my difficulty.... There’s nothing good about it, I don’t think. It’s very dirty. Nasty. Hygiene and all. On buses or trains. I’ve been to Germany. I know how good transportation could be. I experienced that. My brother worked in China. He had been in Japan and Korea. And, he knows how good transportation could be. (P20)

P12 reported having difficulty navigating the subway system: “Subway was over there, I needed to take the TTC train so I should go over there as per the arrow direction, and you can see I definitely did not get to my destination.”

Other participants such as P14 reported difficulty adjusting to new living conditions: “I didn’t expect to live in the basement, because we didn’t have basements before... [I had] difficulty getting used to that environment.” While participants, such as P13, reported their housing search to be a challenge.

Financial Difficulties

Several participants mentioned having experienced financial difficulties during the initial stage of their immigration. Some of the issues reported included having spent all of their money
on the immigration application, having to work long hours as a result of the financial constraints, experiencing a lowered standard of living, and being unable to save money due to the high taxes.

For example, P15 spent all of her money on immigration and stated, “Honestly, I spent all the money for immigration, because, at that time, I didn’t know I could do it by myself. I spent all my savings, but that lawyer just cheated me.” P1 described the emotional impact of the financial stress he experienced:

First three months, we were happy because we had some money…because when you immigrate you have to bring a certain amount of money otherwise they will not let you in the country…. Then after about three or four months, everything started changing. The money was gone. Pressure. No job. My wife started asking questions, so we had to go and apply for social assistance. I think after one year or something in Canada or maybe six months, we went to social assistance and it was very embarrassing because I remember almost crying. (P1)

P9 described the work stress from the long hours that she worked in order to support her family:

I worked the night shift at a factory, so it started around 12 o’clock and finished at 7 in the morning. It was kind of terrible. But I have to, because I have to support my family. I did bring some money in, but when you see the money in your account reduce, going down, and you don’t have money to put in, everyone will be terrified. So that’s the feeling I had at that time. (P9)

**Job Seeking Barriers**

Many of the participants reported applying for jobs either online or through networking. Nearly all of the participants reported experiencing difficulties landing employment. The job search barriers the participants were confronted with included their credentials being unrecognized by employers, employers requiring Canadian work experience, the cultural differences in the job search process, language barrier, discrimination, and a lack of social support and connections.

**Non-Canadian Credentials and Work Experience Unrecognized**

Many participants reported that their qualifications and work experience that was gained outside of Canada did not help them land employment. Several reported that employers only
accepted Canadian work experience and Canadian training. The participants expressed feeling
disgruntled by the lack of recognition of their pre-Canada training and qualifications. They
shared that even though they received high quality and post-graduate level education, these
trainings were not recognized or deemed sufficient by the Canadian system and employers. P4
shared her frustration of experiencing her credentials being devalued: “You know everything, but
they try to devalue whatever knowledge you have. They don’t give respect to what you know.
They assume what others know is useless.” P19 shared her frustration of being asked to return to
high school:

When I went to get information on how to get my credentials recognized here, you know
what they said to me? They said, “You should go back to high school.” I said, “I have a
university degree. University. You’re sending me back to high school?” (P19)

P8 shared that even though he obtained his degree equivalency, employers did not recognize his
credentials:

None of the employers look for equivalent qualifications except for hardcore engineering
jobs where they find it difficult to get engineers, then they go with foreign engineering
education and they’re okay with that…. Equivalency is not required. Nowhere. Nobody
asks for it. They don’t care. (P8)

The participants also reported that employers did not recognize their pre-Canada work
experience. For instance, P14 stated, “Even if you have the certificate to prove that you worked
outside Canada, they didn’t really look at it, or they might just get it and say, ‘oh, we’ll think
about it’.”

According to the participants, employers asked for Canadian training and Canadian work
experience. P4, for example, stated, “If you don’t have a Canadian qualification, the only thing
that employers point to is, ‘Oh, you don’t have a Canadian qualification,’ or, ‘You don’t have
Canadian experience.’ That’s the first thing that they point out.”
**Cultural Difference in Job Search Process**

Some of the participants reported to have experienced cross-cultural differences in the job search and application process. For some participants, they did not have to undergo any job search process in their country of origin because their colleges or universities landed them employment after they completed their degrees. For example, P1 stated:

Coming from Russia, I didn't understand why I had to write a resume, because in the past, as soon as you graduate from the college in Russia, they give you a job. So, you don’t have to write a resume. (P1)

P15 echoed, “My job in China was offered right after my graduation. I didn’t need a job search. If you were a really good student from your school, you were selected easily.” On a related note, P2 indicated that she had to learn how to improve her resume writing skills and interviewing skills:

I think that my resume was my major issue to improve before I got my first job. I spent a lot of time doing some training to prepare myself for interviews, for attending the job, and also to make my resume more professional because in my country [we have] very different policies for applying for a job. (P2)

Participants also had to adjust to the self-promoting nature of job search in Canada versus their humble cultural values learned from their countries of origin. For example, P10 said, “Here, you have to sell yourself. Back home, we can’t talk too much about ourselves, even in the interview.” Another cross-cultural difference in the job seeking process as reported by P16 was the way in which jobs are described in job postings:

It’s quite different the way people describe their job here versus in our country. Sometimes we find that there’s nothing match…. The funny thing is, I submitted my resume in a co-op school, they have some mock interviews, and my description of my job in China is a Senior Engineer’s job, but the consultant said, “Oh, that’s an entry level job”…. So that’s different. The way we describe our skills is quite different. (P16)

**Language Barrier**

Language difficulties, such as an inability to understand what was being said by others, low English speaking fluency, and a non-North American accent were mentioned by several
participants to be job search barriers. For example, P14 shared that his level of English speaking abilities worked against him during job interviews:

Normally we might have some other thoughts in mind, but in your own language, but when you describe it in English, you might get it wrong. You might not get it quite clear to the employer and then they might think you’re not a good candidate. (P14)

Other participants shared that their inability to completely comprehend verbal English acted as a job search barrier. For example, P18 stated, “The teacher sometimes, taught us that in Canada we just do cold call to companies. But at the beginning, how can I call them? After three questions, I couldn’t understand what they were saying. So, language was a problem.” As a result of her language barrier, participants such as P9 felt that they were unable to pursue work in their original field. P9 shared, “When I started, because my language wasn’t good. I think language is the most important thing. It’s kind of a barrier for me. I cannot overcome that. That’s the reason I never think about work in the education field.”

**Discrimination**

Some participants experienced discrimination during their job search. They experienced employers as preferring to hire local Canadian workers over hiring immigrant skilled workers. The Canadian experience requirement was experienced by these participants as being a form of discrimination against non-Canadian individuals. For example, when asked whether gaining Canadian experience was one of the factors he had to consider while looking for employment, P1 stated:

I think this [Canadian experience requirement] was artificially created to keep people away from jobs…. It is my honest opinion, because some immigrants come here from different cultures and they have international experience. For example, people from Philippines, they speak English, or people form England, they speak English, but they have to get into the company through some Canadian experience. (P1)

P19 indicated that she believes that the source of discrimination is the fear that immigrant skilled workers will take away jobs from Canadian-born workers:
Culturally, we are different from each other. A lot of discrimination. You can find even some managers are bullies…. As a new Canadian, like I mentioned before, you get big challenges… You compete with the Canadian-born, and sometimes you feel like the competition is cultural. I have a different background. They don’t like it. I’m a new Canadian. I’m competing for the same job with another person born in Canada, and from there comes the impact. “Oh you’re here because you are taking over my position, or you want to get more money than me”. Those are the challenges that you face. (P19)

A lack of Social Supports and Connections

Many participants reported that the lack of social supports and connections acted as barriers to their job search. The supports and connections that they experienced as lacking included systemic, social, and professional supports.

Some participants reflected on how there were no supports put in place by the government to help immigrant skilled workers find employment. They also mentioned the lack of job search information and guidance to re-enter their original profession as a barrier. For example, P4 shared, “To be very frank there are no government programs that give people an idea or hope [or tell them] that this is what is going to happen here. Some people get in such financial stress.” P7 shared that she experienced a lack of guidance for job seeking specifically within her original field of work:

Not having a mentor or someone who could guide me on what to do and how to do it. My brother was in a different field, so I did not know anyone from a particular field who could guide me in anyway. So that was a bit difficult. (P7)

As a result of having no social support network in Canada, participants reported having experienced difficulty balancing job hunting and childcare as they did not have family to help with child care. P19, for instance, shared, “Right away you cannot find a job. At that time, my kids were very small, 2 and 6 years old, so no daycare, no babysitter, no support from the family, no anybody.”

A lack of professional network was also mentioned as a job search barrier. For example, P9 stated:
Here, it’s called ‘people connecting’, but back in China, the same thing. So we got a lot of people connecting, so that was the reason I could have a good job in government, or in a bank, whatever it was [in China]. But here, I don’t have any person. I don’t know anyone. I think starting from the beginning is very hard. (P9)

Impact of Job Seeking Barriers

Given the barriers that the participants faced during the initial post-migration transition, many participants reported experiencing a negative impact on their emotional well-being and on their family life.

Poor Emotional Well-being

Many participants reported having experienced a negative impact on their mental health as a result of their initial transition experience. Negative impacts included a reduced sense of self-confidence, low mood, anxiety, frustration, and a sense of isolation.

Guilt and reduced confidence. Many participants shared that they lost confidence in themselves and reflected a feeling of shame as a result of the job search barriers. Some participants experienced financial stressors due to the job search barriers and as a result suffered from reduced sense of confidence. For example, P1 stated, “I think after one year or something in Canada or maybe six months, we went to social assistance and it was very embarrassing because I remember almost crying.” P2 shared the impact that having to search for lower level work had on her self-confidence:

If you don’t have a job, you are very unhappy. You lose your self-esteem. I found that feeling in my self. It was very hard for me. After 16 very successful years of experience, to come here and spend so many years looking to get any kind of job. I was also thinking, how is it possible that nobody wants or needs my knowledge or my skills. (P2)

P2 also expressed feeling a sense of guilt for bringing her family to Canada to experience these difficulties. She said, “I was worried about my children and I was feeling a little guilty for the situation because my husband didn't really want to come here.”
Low mood and anxiety. When asked about how the job search barriers and the period of unemployment impacted them, the participants reported that they experienced anxiety. For example, P14 stated, “It made me nervous. Very nervous, because I didn’t get paid, I didn’t get money to support the living.” Participants reported feelings of sadness and some experienced a negative impact on their physical well-being as a result of the barriers and resulting stress. P17, for instance, stated:

It affected me physically, actually. I remember when I was so eager to get a job. I thought that hard work was a way to solve everything at first, but it turned out to be wrong…. So, I was so worried about our future, about the wellbeing of our family, worried about the future of my daughter. So I fell sick…. Physically. I remember I vomited from the beginning of the day until the evening. So, we had to call an ambulance and send me to emergency. (P17)

P7 similarly experienced depression and a physical manifestation of her stress:

I was depressed for the first 2 or 3 years when I was here. Physically, of course it affected me. I remember I put on a lot of weight when I came here because I was just eating anything and everything. (P7)

Resentment and frustration. A few participants also reported feeling hurt by the employers and resentment because their credentials and experience were not recognized. They were also frustrated by the job search barriers. P10 and P6, for example, described feeling hurt and resentment because their credentials and experience were not recognized:

It hurt me a lot because, I came from an English educated background. It hurt me. It put my motivations down and sometimes when I see those people, when I want to speak up, I kind of stop myself, refrain myself from speaking up. But, yeah, originally the hurt feeling was there. (P10)

You [the company] didn’t even know me. You don’t even check my credentials. If you checked my courses, okay, if you ask me to do these two courses, that’s understandable. You just plainly not even an authority. She was not even a professor. She was just a receptionist or something like that. That really hurt me. (P6)

Other participants, such as P14 reported feeling frustrated by the barriers. P14 stated, “I have a few years experience but it seems it didn’t match the requirement. It’s frustrating,” and P18
echoed, “I just think about, ‘Why they can’t accept me’. I just always think about this question. One side is frustrated, and another side I guess is thinking about the reason.”

*Isolation.* A few participants experienced a sense of isolation as a result of the job search barriers. P15 stated, “I needed to make some money and I didn’t have anybody to talk to.” P6 described being really well respected by her students back in India but stated, “Here nobody knows me. When I was walking at 10 pm after I closed up my store and walked all the way alone, walking in the snow and crying, and nobody was listening to me.” P7 was unemployed as a result of the job search barriers and expressed feeling withdrawn as a result. She said, “It was terrible, as I told you. I was not out, I was always in.”

*Negative impact on family*

As a result of the hardships that the participants experienced during the early period of their immigration transition, some participants experienced a negative impact on their family life and family members’ well-being. For example, P1 and P15’s marital relations were negatively affected as a result of the stressors they experienced. P1 divorced after 15 years of marriage and witnessed the negative impact that the divorce had on his children. P15’s martial relationship similarly took a toll. She stated, “At that time, we fought, me and my husband. We almost fought every day, because [there was] no stability anymore.”

Other participants, such as P17 and P18, witnessed the negative impact that the stressors had on their spouse. P17 recalled:

> I pushed my husband to do some labour job. He didn’t want to do that, but I forced him to do that. It was very hard at the very beginning. He’d do some part-time job, for only 1 week or 2, and he felt very sad. He was very upset by that kind of job. (P17)

P18 similarly said, “My wife maybe had some problems because she always worry about, ‘Okay, you cannot find a job. How can we live there?’.”
Coping Actions

The participants were asked to share how they were able to cope with the changes and difficulties that they experienced. They also described the actions they had taken to search for employment. Themes of acceptance of the difficulties, making choices, intentions behind their actions, perseverance, and flexibility/openness were reflected in their responses. They also described specific job-searching actions that they had taken.

Acceptance of Difficulties

Half of the participants reported coming to a state of acceptance of the changes and difficulties that they had faced in Canada. Some participants shared that they felt that they were unable to return home and therefore they had to accept their new reality. For example, P12 stated, “I have no choice. I quit my previous job in China. I cannot go back, so the only direction I have to go is forward. Go forward, do not go back.” P8 also experienced a lack of choice in that he would feel too ashamed to return home:

There is a big reason for immigrants to stick around and not go back. When we come from our countries, we are well-off. When we immigrate to Canada, people in our society back home expect that we will do better here. And if we don’t do better here, we are so shy of going back to our society and being accepted as a failure. That’s the reason why I find a lot of very talented immigrants doing odd jobs. (P8)

P15 described accepting responsibility for her own decision to immigrate to Canada and accepting the challenging circumstances of her career development in Canada. Others, such as P7, accepted the difficult reality by keeping in mind the temporary nature of the difficulties:

I always knew in my mind that I was going somewhere else. That was one thing. This is not the end of my life or career. This is temporary. So, that kind of helped me settle down at these jobs way better. (P7)

Freedom to Choose

While describing how they coped with the barriers during the initial post-migration stage, some participants reflected the theme of taking responsibility for making their own decisions...
regarding plans of actions in the face of the challenges. P8, for example, shared that he chose to hire a psychologist to learn about cross-cultural differences in behaviours and customs. He stated, “Either, I understand those differences and try to mitigate those, or I live like most immigrants.” Another example provided by P17, reflects the choice that she had to make between continuing her job search or to return to school to gain retraining:

She [one of P7’s friends] got an offer after one year in [a Canadian university], and we both did the job hunting and we didn’t get any result. So when I saw her go back to school, I thought maybe there’s some opportunity for me as well, and I faced a choice – whether to continue the job hunting, or to go back to school to get retrained. So I chose the latter. (P17)

Other participants, such as P18, described taking control over what job they chose. When recounting the different jobs that he held, he stated that he enjoyed all of them as a result of his own control or choices.

*Intentions of Actions*

For some of the participants, focusing on the goal or the reason for their actions, such as job seeking and taking lower paying jobs, helped them cope with the challenging circumstances. Some of the intentions shared by the participants included advancing in their career transition or development, obtaining financial income to support their family, and making their family members proud. For example, P7 reported feeling glad about taking a job that she did not enjoy as her intention was to obtain a better job after acquiring work experience. P7 stated, “I was elated that I had that job because I knew next year I won’t be doing this. I’ll be going somewhere.” P15 and P5 shared that their intentions were to support and honour their families. P15 said, “I’m a mom. I told myself that I have to be a role model for my daughter. If I want her to get better future here, I have to show her what I can do,” and “I have family in China. I have to make sure that whatever I’m doing here, I can honour them.” P5 shared that he was focused on
trying to obtain employment in order to support his brother and his brother’s family, who had moved to Canada subsequent to P5’s migration.

*Perseverance*

Many participants shared that they took action in attempt to improve their career transition and development despite of the multiple barriers that they experienced in Canada. Perseverance was experienced by some participants as being one of the most helpful coping strategies. The responses provided by the participants reflected a sense of patience, taking one step at a time, self-determination, and persistence. For example, when asked how they coped with the difficulties and what they found most helpful for coping with the changes, participants such as P19 stated, “Being self-determined.” P2 shared:

> I was very persistent in applying for a job. All of my time, all day, 24 hours, I was on the computer researching the websites for a job opening in every hospital in the whole Ontario [area] and after that I applied out of Ontario…. I was spending all of my time, all day to apply. (P2)

When speaking about what was most helpful in coping with the challenges, P3 echoed, “Probably because I was really persistent.” P17 answered, “Being patient.” The participants also shared that they persevered through the difficulties by trying different strategies to improve their situation. For example, P17 stated:

> I discovered that I have to change, too, instead of complaining that I cannot get the job as I did at the beginning. I thought I needed to change as well. The change can be specifically, the resume, the interview excuse, and even the way I talk with people and deal with people. (P17)

*Flexibility and Openness*

Through their narratives that the participants provided information about how they coped with the career barriers and the actions that they took in the face of the difficulties, the theme of flexibility and openness emerged. Their responses demonstrated the need for them to keep an open mind, and be flexible in the employment held, their goals, job-search strategies, career
development journey, and openness to adjusting to their circumstances. For instance, P16 shared that the career barriers in Canada resulted in the need to be flexible in the type and level of work that he took. He stated, “In this situation, right now, there is a very limited chance that you will have the opportunity to choose. You just get whatever you’ve got.” P18 also recalled the need for him to be open to taking lower level jobs at first: “The first step is to get entry-level work because I had to work in Canada. For me, if I want to get the professional engineer license at the very beginning, maybe it is a little too hard for me.”

Other participants reported having to be flexible in changing their field of work to cope with the career development barriers. For example, P19, who worked as a midwife prior to her migration, was flexible in changing the field of her profession. She had considered obtaining training for nursing and subsequently decided to pursue a career in social services in order to increase her chances of obtaining employment. P7 provided example of flexibility in changing her goals of pursuing a Ph.D. to taking a job, depending on the opportunities that became available to her. P18 described being open to approaching different resources for help in his job search. He approached co-op programs, community organizations, and sought out an engineering mentor.

Specific Job Search Actions

The participants took different actions and used many strategies in attempt to land employment and further develop their careers in Canada. The main actions taken by the participants in this study were seeking help from resource centres and professionals, networking, improving their English skills, revising their resume, and volunteering to gain Canadian work experience. Of note, information gathered from the agencies or centres, social connections, the Internet, and educational organizations were found by many participants to be very helpful in their job search.
Seek centres and professional resources. Most participants shared that they had sought help from community centres, cultural associations, employment services, immigration centres, job agencies, and other professionals. For example, P1 attended multiple job agencies:

I was going from one job centre to the other and walking. [I had] no money, so I had to walk. I was trying to get a job there, so I went through interview skills. As I mentioned, I went through everything, and then the last thing was I spoke to the job developer. (P1)

Some participants attended community and immigrant centres for help with their job search. For example, P6 found it helpful to attend community and newcomer centres to obtain support from individuals who underwent similar circumstances. P12 found it helpful to attend a Chinese cultural centre for information. In order to adjust to the cross-cultural differences, P8 sought professional help from a psychologist “to understand the cultural difference between me and the local workforce.”

Networking and developing connections. Many participants reported networking and developing social supports to be quite helpful in coping with the barriers. Networking was reported to help the participants come into contact with professional individuals who were able to help them land employment or at least provide them with useful information. For example, P5 stated, “I tried to make some connections and talk to some supervisors, even in the banks.” P2 networked with those within the field of her original profession. She spoke with her daughter’s schoolteachers in order to make some connections with individuals who were in he workplace. She also received job search advice from the teachers. P20 similarly found networking to be important during his job seeking. Specifically, he shared that he had met an individual at an art reception who informed him that job searching through the Internet would the least effective method to acquire employment.

Some participants also reported having developed social connections in order to gain emotional support as well as to help them acculturate. For example, P7 and P2 said:
I started volunteering and I made more friends over there. I think that once I got a friend circle that I talked to, even acquaintances sharing similar experiences, and they said, ‘okay, in a couple of years, you’ll be fine after that,’ I saw some positive experiences. (P7)

I tried to make more connections with people in the area where I was living and also to better understand the work environment here. To better understand the system here, like the political economic system, and maybe to find which profession I can get a job faster because it was also my goal. (P2)

*Improve English communication skills.* Several participants also reported to have taken action to improve their English communication skills. They attempted to improve their accent, familiarize themselves with jargon, as well as improve their writing skills. For example, P12 reported to have visited the library to use the resources available to improve his English communication skills. He stated, “I still remember I borrowed a book and a tape, which included how to answer a phone. I practiced regularly during my weekend, and gradually, I felt confident.” Participants, such as P16 and P2 attended ESL classes to improve their English. P8 shared that he attended workshops in attempt to improve his knowledge of lingo, accent, and writing skills:

Three things with the English language. One was the accent. I attended three to four of the 16 workshops to understand how different my accent is…. The second, I tried to find programs that would help me with the English lingo…. The third was that I joined some comprehension and writing skill programs. (P8)

P9, who was herself a Chinese immigrant, shared that she tried to interact more so with local English-speakers rather than Chinese immigrants in order to improve her English skills.

*Revise resume.* Some participants revised their resumes in attempt to improve their chances of landing employment. P2’s response reflected the importance of revising her resume due to the cross-cultural differences in the job search process:

I think that my resume was my major issue that I had to improve before I got my first job. I spent a lot of time doing some training to prepare myself for interviews, for attending a job, and also to make my resume more professional. (P2)
Some participants, such as P7, attended workshops to improve her resume, “I used to go to the YMCA to work on my resume. In the second week, I did resume making workshops.” P17 also sought help rewriting her resume, although she did not find the consultant to be helpful as she found the rewrite was simply a translation of her original resume from Chinese to English. She ended up rewriting her resume by herself. P16 found that he had to adjust his resume and withhold information in order to land employment. He stated, “There’s nothing we can do about our age. Sometimes we just don’t write down when we graduated from college and when we graduated from university.”

*Gain volunteering experience.* Some participants sought out volunteering experience in order to help them acculturate to the Canadian workplace environment, familiarize with the city, gain knowledge, develop social supports, maintain their skills, and attempt to re-enter their original field of work. P8, for instance, held a volunteer position teaching and mentoring students in financial account management, which helped him acculturate with Canadian culture. P17 and P19 volunteered to familiarize themselves with the city and the workplace. P17 said, “I volunteer in a few community centres, I just try to quickly get to know what Canada is, what Toronto is” and P19 stated, “The volunteering was one way that I became familiar with the system that they use here at [the hospital].” P6’s volunteer position subsequently resulted in a paid position as a supply teacher, which was similar to her previous profession as a lecturer.

*Initial Employment*

The participants were invited to discuss their initial work experience. Specifically, this study focused on the emergent themes related to their meaning-making or the reason they held their initial employment, the aspects of the jobs that they enjoyed, and the aspects that they disliked. Many of the participants reported to have had to hold lower level work such as entry-level jobs or survival jobs.
Meaning-Making regarding Initial Employment

Meaning-making themes emerged when the participants were asked about the importance of finding employment and the factors that they had to consider. The meaning-making themes described their reasoning behind holding the jobs that they did during the early period of their career transition in Canada. The themes included working for financial survival, gaining Canadian work experience, re-entering their original field of work, adjusting to the Canadian work environment, and saving money for retraining.

Financial survival. Most of the participants reported that the reason they had to hold their initial employment was so that they could survive financially and support their families. For example, P19 stated, “Even though I never held a general labour job, I knew that I had nobody here. I have family to feed. I have expenses to cover.” Many of the participants also reported having to support their families as well. Even though they brought savings with them, they could not rely on their savings to survive. For example, P17 stated, “It’s very important for us to get a job. We need to survive. We cannot always live off our savings. It’s a very limited savings. For this one reason, we need a job.”

P4 also shed light on the fact that many participants did not have social connections or support in Canada at the time and therefore had to rely on themselves for financial survival:

I don’t have any family and I don’t have any friends here. So, obviously I had to depend on myself for my survival. It’s not like I have somebody who is working and giving me [money]… I had to take care of myself and a job was very important for me. (P4)

Canadian work experience. Some participants reported that one of the main reasons for seeking employment initially was to gain Canadian work experience. P10, for instance, recognized that it would be very difficult to develop her career in Canada without having first gained Canadian work experience. She stated, “One thing is wherever you go they may say you don’t have Canadian experience.”
Re-enter original professional field. A few participants stated that they had intended to either find employment that was related to their field or gain Canadian work experience in order to re-enter their original field of work. P18, for instance, stated, “Before I can get the license, I needed 1 year of Canadian experience.”

Adjust to Canadian work environment. A few participants mentioned the intention to familiarize themselves with the Canadian work environment by holding lower level jobs to begin their career development. For example, when asked about the factors that he considered while searching for employment, P20 responded, “I just wanted to see what is Canadian work culture and what the differences are [between the work culture in Canada and P20’s country of origin].” P17 echoed:

I remember my first job was a part-time one. I worked at a front desk in a community centre. My friend recommend that kind of job to me, and it was only a few hours every week. But I got to know the working place in Canada and that I need to be with people. So, it’s very helpful. (P17)

Save money for retraining. A few participants stated that it was important for them to gain employment during the early stages of their immigration transition because they wanted to save money in order to gain retraining. For example, P15 stated, “Actually, I wanted to continue my training right after my landing, but at that time, it was financially impossible. So, after I worked for 2 years and got enough money to support myself, I joined education right away.” When asked about the factors that she had to consider when she was job searching, P19 similarly stated, “Financial, because I was planning to go back to school and pay my [tuition].”

Positive Initial Work Experience

Just under half the participants provided some factors that they enjoyed about their initial employment in Canada. The factors that they liked included the job being in the same or similar field to their original field of work, the work responsibilities, the chance to learn, and the social connections that they gained at their place of work.
Original or similar field. Several participants reported that they enjoyed their initial employment experience in Canada due to the work being the same or similar to their original profession. P10, for example, stated that she was able to return to her original field of work after a short period of working survival jobs in Canada. She stated:

Immediately after that [survival job] I got this job. I entered as a Senior Accountant in the insurance company. So, that was interesting and exciting, because it’s in my field. Although accountants can work in any industry, earlier, my industry was manufacturing, imports, sales, and divisions, but this is insurance company. But finance and insurance was my passion even back home… I was so happy that I got into the finance industry. (P10)

P15 shared that she was glad that she was able to land a job that was related to her previous job:

It’s [initial employment] related to my previous experience back in China. Although I was not a university teacher anymore here, but as a facilitator, I still worked in that kind of classroom setting and taught people who are adults…. I mean, the teaching content is a little bit different, but I enjoyed it very much. (P15)

P4, who worked as a pharmacist prior to her migration, shared that because her initial job in Canada was still within the medical field, she found the job quite easy. She stated, “The job was very easy, because obviously you know everything and you know something that is more than what is required.”

Enjoyment of the work. A few participants reported that they actually enjoyed the work that they had to do within their initial jobs. Participants reported enjoying the novelty and challenging nature of their initial employment. When asked to describe the jobs she held during the early phase of her immigration, P10, who worked in manufacturing and in post mail sorting, stated that she enjoyed the novelty of the jobs. She said, “It’s interesting because it’s something new.” P4 stated that she enjoyed the challenging nature of the job:

One thing I liked was that it’s more project based, and every project is different, so it’s challenging. There’s no routine work involved. That’s something that I like because I’m not a person who is a routine nine to five kind of a person. For me, everyday should be a different challenge and everyday a different thing. (P4)
Interestingly, although P15’s initial employment was in a completely different field and was unfamiliar to her prior to her migration, she enjoyed the new field:

My first job in Canada was in the community. In China, community was kind of a non-concept. Over there, we don’t have such kind of vibrant place to offer to help. I never [heard] that kind of word, “community.” I thought, “What is community?” until I got here, which is great. I like all kinds of free services to help people who are in need. (P15)

*Chance to learn.* A few participants expressed that they enjoyed the learning opportunities that they gained through their initial work experiences. For instance, P6 appreciated the training opportunities at her place of work:

The airport that hired me, they used to give training and license… We did not have to pay money for the licensing. Even if there was some money, they take it from the first paycheck. It’s not like we have to give them money. That was one positive thing. (P6)

P8 similarly felt that he had the opportunity to learn through his first job. He stated, “My first job was the warehouse job for 15 months. What can I tell you about that experience? Basically, the basic skill I learned there was teamwork.”

*Gain social supports.* A few participants enjoyed their initial jobs for the opportunities to acquire social connections and supports. For example, P17, who worked at a front desk in a community centre, stated, “I know a lot of people there and I get to stay close with people instead of locking myself at home. That will basically affect me mentally or physically.” P7 echoed, “I was just glad to be out and talking with people.” P6 shared that she gained a social connection with a coworker at a survival job that she initially held:

So, I went to one of the Subways and the guy was really nice and I told him that we just moved and I needed work… He was so nice, he said, “Okay, come to me and I’ll train you.” He was really good and he trained me. I never knew how to make bread and he taught me how to make bread… he had a car so sometimes he would drop me at home. (P6)

*Negative Initial Work Experience*

When describing their initial work experience, the responses of many of the participants provided factors that they disliked about the jobs. Some of the most commonly reported factors
included work being too physically demanding, low salary, discrimination, being overqualified for the job, and the job being in a different field.

*Too physically demanding.* Several participants ended up taking survival jobs during the early stages of their career transition in Canada. They experienced the jobs as taking a physical toll. P1, for example, shared that he had worked at a bakery:

I worked eight hours without going to the washroom or without getting any food because people didn’t show up and the supervisor forgot to change with me. So, I was hungry…. It was always hot. Outside was 35 degrees plus and the oven was very hot. (P1)

P6 and P14, for instance, both held labour intensive jobs and had negative experiences. P6 stated, “Off and on I did a few factory jobs. So, we tried but my body couldn’t cope with it so I had to quit.” P14 echoed, “I did some part-time labour work as well. I had to unload the entire container, like 40-inch or whatever in the winter… it was tough.”

*Overqualified.* Related to the theme of the survival jobs being too physically demanding, a few participants voiced that they felt that they were overqualified for their initial employment. For example, P5, who was a financial manager prior to his migration, stated:

I was a little bit frustrated because when I tried to start from the scratch in a bank or in the finance field, I was told that I have to start from scratch. I didn’t mind, but I felt pretty overqualified to start from a teller position. (P5)

When asked about his most significant changes and difficulties, P8, previously a program manager said, “Having had 12 years of experience, I was working in a warehouse lifting 500 boxes of 50 lbs. for 8 hours a day. That for 15 months, it was not a short duration…”

*Low salary.* Several participants expressed having been displeased by the low wages that they were given for the employment they held initially. For instance, P7 became aware that she was being unfairly paid a lower salary than other staff members. She stated, “It was petty, because when I got into the hospital environment I was making $6.75 an hour and the person taking the food upstairs was making $20 an hour.” P16 similarly felt that he was being underpaid
for the work that he was asked to do and stated, “They want us to figure out how to do that [the work] by ourselves, but just to pay us at very limited pay.” P14 recalled having to hold multiple jobs in order to remain financially viable due to the low salary. He said, “Because the pay was not that high, I had to get more jobs when I had the chance and the opportunity.”

Discrimination. Some participants experienced discrimination in the workplace of their initial employment. P10, for example, felt that she was denied promotions for being an immigrant:

When they see immigrants, they pick on them, especially when they are coming high in the career level. We are technically doing well, [but] they try to pick communication as a thing for promotions. I come across that thing, quoting communication as an issue. (P10)

P6 experienced discrimination in the form of being fired by an employer who subsequently hired another non-immigrant worker. P19 similarly experienced discrimination from her employer who fired her:

What really hurt me was my manager, being a woman, knowing that we were new immigrants, knowing that you come with dreams. I believe maybe she felt jealous that I decided to go back to school. I said, “I chose to come to this country not to be a salesperson. I have a degree, I want to go back to school…” and she put that I quit. (P19)

Different field of work. A few participants shared negative feelings about their initial employment not being in their original profession. When describing her first job as a gift store cashier, P7 succinctly stated, “And that’s not even my field. I had given up [getting a job] in my field. This was just any job. Oh my god.” P16, previously an engineer in his home country, worked as a general labourer. Not only did he have to change his field of work, he experienced a lack of direction or instruction at work. He stated, “Different culture, different environment. I took a survival job for almost 1 year, and that made me very sick.” He further noted:

We were just going there, working as a general labourer, and they expect us to do something that we don’t know how to do. We asked our supervisor, who said, “I don’t know either. Do whatever you can”… Stressful. And when things screwed up in that company, everybody said, “Just forget it. Pretend that did not happen”. (P16)
Chapter 7 Results

Retraining Planning and Experience

The following chapter presents the themes that emerged from the participants’
descriptions about their retraining planning process and retraining experience. Within the
retraining planning section, their reasons for seeking retraining, influences for retraining
decision-making, and the actions taken to make retraining happen are presented. With regards to
their retraining experience, their positive and negative experiences, actions taken to cope with retraining, and the social supports that they experienced are discussed. Table 3 provides an overview of the themes presented in this chapter.

Table 3

Themes of Retraining Planning and Experience

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Reasons for Seeking Retraining

The participants were invited to discuss their reasons for deciding to pursue retraining. Although, many of the participants reported that they wanted to gain more knowledge and skills through retraining, their answers reflected a focus on long-term career goals. The emergent themes reflected that they ultimately pursued retraining in the hopes of gaining employment, re-entering their pre-Canada professional field, improving their finances, maintaining their current jobs, and acculturating to the Canadian work environment.

Gain Employment

Nearly all of the participants shared that they had decided to gain retraining in order to obtain employment. More specifically, they intended to enhance their career development in Canada, improve their job prospects, increase their chances of landing secure gainful employment, and avoid having to hold survival jobs. For example, P6 described the need to increase her competitive edge in order to gain employment:

I see other teachers and they have so many additional qualifications and I have to compete with them. So naturally, the competition is there so I have to have more and more courses so that I can compete with them. So my only motivation is to get a full time job. (P6)

P16 obtained retraining in the hopes of transitioning out of working labour jobs: “Because I wanted to change the field that I was working in. Like I said before, I don't want to continue to work in any kind of manufacturing job, because the industry might despair after several years.” When asked what she hoped her retraining would lead to, P3 similarly stated, “It is very difficult when you are educated and you have to drive a cab or something. It is really depreciating. Really demoralizing. So, I hoped for something in the middle.”

Some participants shared that they pursued retraining in the hopes of obtaining their employment of interest. P20 stated, “The main reason, of course, is that I just wanted to upgrade my skills because my ultimate plan was to be a security specialist. I wanted to upgrade my skills
to get there.” P16 stated that he pursued retraining to help him obtain job security. Specifically, he was pursuing a secure government job.

Re-enter Original Field of Work

Several participants reported to have pursued retraining with the specific intention of aiding their return to their original field of work. For example, P4 succinctly stated, “I knew I had to redo it [training] because I wanted to get back to the industry that I wanted to work in.” P18 similarly wanted to re-enter his professional field as a chemical engineer and sought to retrain in order to obtain his re-accreditation. He stated, “We need a license, because for engineers, if we don’t have a license, even in an engineering job, we can’t take responsibility.” P11 had planned on obtaining retraining immediately after landing in Canada in order to conduct research in her original field of work in chemical engineering.

Even the participants who did not plan on re-entering the exact profession reported pursuing retraining in order to enter a field that was similar to their original profession. For instance, P14, who worked as a software developer prior to his migration, stated:

Go back to school. That’s the main way, because when I picked the program, I picked the one that I was familiar with. But the thing is, I learned pretty old stuff before, and when I came here, I had to look for some new technology, that’s why I picked that program. It’s still related to computer programming. So, that’s the major reason why I picked to learn and then spend the rest of my studies in those fields. (P14)

Salary

Several participants pursued retraining as a means to gain higher paying employment. For example, when asked what she had hoped the retraining would lead to, P17 stated, “Lead me to at least a better job with a decent payment. I didn’t expect much, but at least a decent payment.” P9 similarly noted her goal to earn a salary

Why do the retraining program? I think that it’s only for the money. You have to earn money, find a job. I cannot stay home forever. So I have to find a job. That’s the reason I went for retraining. (P9)
Participants, such as P19, reported that their intentions behind earning an income were to support their families and provide them with an improved quality of life. When asked what she had hoped the retraining would lead to, P19 stated, “To have a better life with a future for the family.”

*Maintain Current Job*

For some participants, gaining retraining was intended to aid their performance at work and help maintain their current jobs. For instance, when asked what she had hoped retraining would lead to, P10 stated, “Improve my communication skills and leadership skills, so that I can successfully remain in those positions or employment.” P15 shared in greater detail how she intended on improving her job-specific skills. She said, “I want to get training to improve my capability for doing my first job. Because, at that time, I never thought I had enough knowledge to teach other newcomers, as I was a newcomer myself.” P20 similarly wanted to improve his job-specific knowledge, which he believed would help improve his confidence. When discussing his rationale for retraining, P20 stated, “To lead to better knowledge and to feel more content or confident. It’s [retraining] going to give you confidence in your job and field, and you will feel better because you know the latest and greatest technological stuff.”

*Acculturation*

Several participants reported pursuing retraining in order to gain knowledge about the relevant Canadian work culture in order to acculturate into the Canadian society and the Canadian workplace environment. P1, for instance, sought out retraining in Canadian law in order to acculturate:

The first one [retraining program], as I mentioned, was because I needed to know the culture and the system. So, this gave me the opportunity to learn Canadian law. For example, you can’t enter someone’s property because it’s private property. I had to learn this to adjust. (P1)
P10 and P12, for example, shared their intention of learning the Canadian business language and process. P10 stated, “I picked these 2 courses in business communication immediately to survive successfully within the business environment. I wanted to know the business language.” P20 echoed, “I wanted a short-term education that could provide me a local education and introduce some local methods to process business, such as the NAFTA degree. That’s North American Free Trade Agreement.”

Influences of Retraining Decision-Making

In this section, the themes regarding factors that influenced the participants’ decision to obtain retraining as well as the influences of the type of retraining that they pursued are discussed.

Influences for Taking Retraining

Aside from their own decision-making as described under their reasons for seeking retraining, many participants also reported having experienced external social influences for their decision-making regarding retraining. Such influences included family members, and their social and professional networks.

Family. A few participants reported that their family members impacted their decision to pursue retraining. Family members that influenced the participants’ retraining decision-making included spouses, children, parents, and other family members back in their country of origin. P11, for example, immigrated to Canada with her husband and she reported to have made her decision to retrain with him prior to moving to Canada. They had both decided to pursue higher qualifications, specifically a master’s degree in their original field of work and education. For P15, her decision to retrain was impacted by her family, as she had to care for her 2-year-old daughter at the time. Nevertheless, she decided to pursue retraining with the support of her husband. She recalled:
I said, “Wow, that’s [retraining program] for me”, but I told my husband that if he didn’t agree, I wouldn’t go because my daughter was young. When I came here my daughter was only two.... I don’t have any relatives here, no close friends, so, I said for my family, I can wait a bit. But my husband was super supportive. He said, “Don’t miss the chance. It’s the first year. If you can join it, it would be wonderful.” (P15)

P20 shared that he consulted with his mother regarding his decision to gain retraining. He said, “My mom, I can say, has an impact on my decisions. I listen to her, always.”

Social network. Many participants were influenced by their friends’ encouragement to retrain. The participants also used information shared by their friends or other immigrant individuals about their retraining experience to decide whether or not to retrain. For example, P12 stated, “It was strongly recommended by my friends, so I didn’t have to do any additional research.” P8 shared that he networked with immigrant individuals to seek information, which led to his decision to seek out retraining:

I was networking well and connecting with people, trying to understand what they went through. So, the one message that I got from talking to various people was that none of the immigrants that I met were successful in their career life after immigrating here, and I must have met over 100. None of these were at the level that they were in their own country. So, that’s the message I learned very fast. And one of the reasons I went for the MBA. (P8)

Professional network. For a few participants, their decision to pursue retraining, was influenced by those within their professional network, such as their employers, job coach, and retraining program staff. They reported to have received recommendations or support from these professional networks to pursue retraining. For example, during a performance review, P10’s employer recommended retraining to help P10 improve his communication abilities. P18’s employer was reported to be quite supportive of P18’s decision to retrain:

It was my own decision, and in the company, my manager was very good to me, and after I worked for about 1 year, he began to encourage me. He told me, “Okay, why not go to PEO [Professional Engineers Ontario] and get the license, and then we can give you more money!” (P18)
In addition to his employer’s support, P18 was also encouraged by his job coach to pursue retraining. He subsequently decided to obtain retraining to improve his chances of acquiring employment sooner. P17 spoke with the retraining program staff to gain information that helped her decide to pursue retraining. She recalled, “I asked an orientation staff in Seneca College, and she said that based on the data of their graduated students, this program will allow us to get a job easily… so that’s why I picked it.”

**Decision Factors for Type of Retraining**

The participants were invited to discuss their decision-making process with regards to the type of retraining that they pursued. About a third of the participants pursued retraining within their original professional field of education or work, another third obtained retraining within a field that was similar to their original educational background or work experience, and the remaining third of the participants retrained in a field that was different from their original professional field. From the participants’ responses, the common factors that influenced the type of retraining they decided to pursue include pre-Canada work experience and qualifications, job prospects, program duration, suggestions from friends, field of interest, family, and barriers including language fluency and financial constraints.

**Pre-Canada work experience and qualifications.** Most of the participants’ responses reflected the important role that their previous professional field of work and education played in their decisions regarding the type of retraining pursued. The participants who retrained in their original professional field shared that they wanted to be able to use their pre-Canada knowledge and skills. They foresaw that having the opportunity to use their pre-Canada knowledge and skills would help them maintain self-confidence and bypass the need to learn a completely new subject matter. P6, who worked as a college lecturer in India, reflected a desire to maintain her
confidence by pursuing retraining in a field in which she is able to use her pre-Canada knowledge:

First of all, if you are in your same field, then you know this field and you have strong points. You know what you are doing. When you are switching from another field you have to start from zero or from scratch. At least I know the basic principles in my field. Teaching is teaching whether you teach a small kid or 20-year-old or 60. (P6)

When asked why she remained in her original field, P3 similarly expressed a desire to use her previous knowledge, but also reflected that she did not want to retrain in an unfamiliar field:

I think it would be so much more difficult if I did something like accounting or social work, or something that I don’t have any basic knowledge in. It will be from scratch.... I really studied hard a long long time ago at university. So, I thought it would be much easier if I do something and use my knowledge. I didn’t even think about retraining in a different area. (P3)

For some participants, retraining in a field that was similar to or the same as their original field of profession was important to their sense of career identity. For example, when providing her explanation for remaining in a similar field, P12 stated, “I think that it is in my nature to be in this field.”

Although, P17 and P2 did not retrain in the exact same field as their pre-Canada professional field, they chose to retrain in a similar field for the same reasons. P17, who worked as a business analyst, decided to pursue a post-graduate certificate in global logistics and supply chain management. P17 shared, “I felt that this one [retraining program] suited me better and that I wouldn’t have to change a lot. I could still transfer my previous experience to this one easily.” P2, who was previously a pediatrician, decided to obtain a diploma in clinical trial monitoring and research site coordination. She had done some clinical trial work while working as a physician in her country of origin and therefore she was very familiar with the type of work. P2 chose to retrain in a similar field because she believed that she would enjoy the field and be able to use her previously gained knowledge.
Although P16 decided to obtain retraining in a different field from his previous profession and education, he similarly based his program selection on his desire to use knowledge that he had gained prior to his migration. P16 had worked as a senior engineer prior to his migration and decided to pursue a diploma in fire protection engineering. He explained, “In China, I learned about the material science. In that program we learned laws about how to control the fires, so it was much easier for me to choose fire protection.”

*Job prospects.* About half of the participants also reported that their decision regarding retraining programs and field depended on the probability of obtaining work within that field. The participants described taking the job market into consideration when making retraining program decisions. For example, P16 stated, “We compared which programs had the most job postings. That’s how we decided which direction.” P18 echoed, “Which courses I needed to take, what kind of retraining I needed, and after the training, after I got the license, what kind of job potentials were waiting for me. I thought about everything.” P3 shared that she decided not to pursue retraining in her original field in medicine but instead to pursue a similar field in clinical research because she was aware of the difficulty of re-entering that field of work as an immigrant. She was aware of the difficulty in obtaining a medical residency and that it would have been a long road if she decided to retrain in medicine.

P15 and P16 added that they chose their field of retraining based on their goal of obtaining secure employment. P16 stated, “I think it’s about job security, because fire protection is a secure job.” P15 decided to pursue a master’s degree in immigration and settlement study instead of pursuing her original profession as an English professor in order to land a secure and stable job to be able to support her family.

*Duration of program.* Several participants considered the length of the program and their age as factors when determining which retraining program to pursue. P12 and P14, for example,
did not want to spend too much time retraining. P12, who had a bachelor’s degree in international business and worked as an economic analyst, opted to retrain in a similar field. He decided to pursue a certificate in import and export business:

She [P12’s friend] graduated from that [retraining program] and she said for me, she didn’t think it would be a very ideal or a very smart choice if I went back to university to spend another 4 years to obtain a degree…. I don’t want to spend 3 or 4 years, so I wanted a short-term education that could provide me with a local education and introduce some local method to process business. (P12)

P14 had a bachelor’s degree in computer technology and decided to obtain an advanced diploma in computer programming and analysis:

I compared a couple colleges, because I didn’t want to take a master’s program. I actually wanted to get a job with a co-op opportunity, but didn’t want to spend a lot of time on it. So, that’s why it’s kind of like a balance. I have to pick a course that’s not that long, but still have the co-op opportunity, because the final goal for me is get a job. (P14)

For some participants, age was a factor that impacted their choice of retraining program. P16, for instance, felt that he was too old to enter the Information Technology industry and that lengthy university programs would be too stressful for someone his age. P17 chose to retrain in a similar field and she explained, “I just feel that, given my age, I shouldn’t change by much. So, lets keep the focus on my own area.”

*Friend’s suggestion.* Some participants recalled that their retraining program choices were influenced by their friends who had recommended retraining programs to them. P2, for instance, shared that her friend, who was originally also a physician prior to her migration, recommended a clinical research coordinator program. Her friend was working as a clinical research coordinator after having completed the retraining program. Therefore, P2 decided to pursue the same retraining program. P5, who worked as a financial manager prior to his migration, decided to pursue retraining to obtain a diploma in addictions and community service work on the recommendation of a friend as well:
I think nothing comes by accident and I got a call from a friend of mine, a mother of four. She said that she decided to go to school. I said, “You’re kidding me.” She said, “Yeah, well I had to do something, and by the way, you have to talk to the representative and maybe there is one interesting program,” and she mentioned this [the retraining program]. That time I said, “That’s exactly what I’m interested in.” (P5)

Field of interest. Some participants reported that they picked the retraining program based on their field of interest, even for participants who did not retrain in the field of their original education or profession. Participants who obtained retraining in their original field explained that their affinity for their field of work played a role in their decision-making with regards to which retraining program to pursue. When asked why he chose to retrain in their original field, P13 stated, “Because I liked it from the beginning, that’s how I started the field. So I wanted to continue in the same field.” P14 similarly said, “I feel more confidence doing something I have done before, and another one is maybe my interests. I guess I like programming, to populate a website. I feel happy when people use it.” Participants, such as P12, who retrained in a similar field also expressed interest in the field of study: “For starters, because I like this.” P5, who worked as a financial manager prior to his migration, also decided to retrain in a completely different field in addictions and community service work. He shared:

I wasn’t interested in the commercial sector, but [I was interested in] non-profit organizations, doing something for people. Because I’ve done this journey. My life experience and my local experience could be pretty useful. I wasn’t thinking about money. (P5)

Family. A few participants shared that family played a role in their decisions regarding retraining program choice. They indicated that their responsibilities as parents impacted their choice of retraining programs. As a result of their desire to support their family and children, the participants decided to pursue short retraining options. For example, P18, who was an engineer prior to his migration, decided to take technical professional engineering courses instead of pursuing a master’s degree because he had to support his family and did not have time to pursue a lengthy retraining program. Similarly, P2 stated:
It was very tough because at that moment. I had a very young second daughter. She was less than one year old, and I didn’t have any help from other family other than from my husband to take care of her…. I decided to get this program because it was not so long…. There were very few requirements and very few courses that you really needed to attend in person. That made it easy to decide to take this program. (P2)

P11 and P13, who were married and pursuing further education, both shared that they attempted to gain admissions into programs in the same city in order to remain together. P11 stated, “My husband got his admission first. So, in that city, the only university I wanted to go to was this one.” P13 echoed, “There was my wife as well, so we were searching for schools that are in the same city. I found different architectural schools, but we had to take into account that there had to be an engineering school for my wife to go as well.”

**Barriers**

Half of the participants reported that their decision-making process was impacted by language barriers and financial constraints.

*Language fluency.* A few participants reported that their lack of English fluency influenced the choice of retraining program. P15, who previously worked as an English professor in her country of origin, stated that she did not feel confident enough to retrain in the English field and chose to retrain in a more practical field instead. She stated, “Because back then in China, my major was English. [When] I came to Canada, I didn’t think that English could be my major again, so I needed to learn something really practical.” P17 similarly reported that her choice of retraining programs was limited by her language barrier: “I would have to pass the language test, like TOEFL, in order to get into university. But for the community college, it was much easier.” P3 echoed:

I would have definitely enrolled in a college for the ultrasound program, but my English knowledge was not that good when I came. So, I had to really invest time and study. That was the reason I enrolled in something that didn’t require TOEFL. (P3)
Financial constraints. For several participants, their retraining planning was impacted by their financial constraints. For instance, P4 and P15 had to delay their pursuit of retraining due to limited funding. P15 stated, “I want to continue my training right after my landing, but at that time, it was financially not possible. So, after I worked for 2 years, and got enough money to support myself, I pursued education right away.” Similarly, P4 recalled:

I wanted to go back to study to upgrade according to the Canadian standards, but because I was working full time I was not able to. If I left my full time position and went straight into studies, I had to pay the whole fee. I was not applicable for any kind of government aid or anything like that. I had to wait until I was actually kicked out of my job. (P4)

P19 shared that she, too, was unable to pursue retraining in her original professional field due to financial constraints:

My wish was to go back into a midwifery program right here in Canada, but at the same time, I was working. When I paid the money, I realized economically it was going to be very expensive for me, and I wouldn’t be able to get support from social assistance, and even the books were very expensive. (P19)

Planning Actions

Through describing their retraining planning process and the actions that they had to take to set up their retraining, themes of acceptance, initiative, and flexibility emerged. Themes of concrete actions including researching programs and fulfilling program prerequisites were also reflected in their responses.

Acceptance of Barriers

Several of the participants’ responses reflected a sense of acceptance of their circumstances and the barriers that they experienced. P16 reported accepting the fact that he had to let go of his pre-Canada professional title as a senior engineer:

Your past experience and glories – you have to move on. You move to a new country, and everything is changed. Your experience and education background is not recognized. You have to do something about that. Just abandon all those things and start at the beginning. (P16)
When asked how he came to decide to pursue retraining, P5’s response reflected that he had learned to accept the necessity of retraining and returning to an earlier stage of career development: “I knew it myself. But my brother’s experience, my friend’s experience – everybody told me that I have to start from scratch and just keep studying and working and studying. This is what I have to learn in my life.” P17 shared that she had applied to the universities that offered her program of interest and had come to terms with accepting any outcome of her program application.

Participants also demonstrated an acceptance of their responsibility for taking action to plan their retraining. When asked how important their own actions were in setting up and completing their retraining, P7, for example, stated, “It was very important, because it is your decision. It is you. If you don’t do anything than no one else will.” P11 echoed, “I had to do it. I just had encouragement from some people, but I had to do everything by myself.”

*Importance of Self-Initiative*

Most of the participants’ responses reflected the importance of taking self-initiated action, a sense of urgency, and the need to make quick decisions during the planning to obtain retraining. For instance, P18 noted the importance of his own actions in his retraining planning: “I have the plan for my career and then I know what I need. Then I just research and take action. Everything depends on myself.” Other participants, such as P13 and P18, described a sense of urgency in taking action to obtain Canadian retraining. P13 shared that he was conscious of the finite nature of the funds that he had brought to Canada and made a concerted effort to finish his retraining as efficiently as possible. P18 shared that he considered many career relevant factors during his retraining planning:

> Which courses I needed to take, what kind of retraining I needed, and after the training, after I get the license, what kind of job potentials are waiting for me. I think about everything! ... I didn’t want to waste my time. (P18)
Similarly, P17 noted the need to make fast decisions regarding retraining. When asked about how much choice she had in her retraining program selection, P17 stated, “That was kind of a quick choice. I get it down. I made up my mind within 1 week or 2.”

**Acknowledge Freedom to Choose**

Most of the participants reported that they acknowledged their own freedom to make the decision to pursue retraining and to choose the type of retraining program. For example, P13 shared that he decided to retrain in order to further his career within his original professional field. P11 and P18 shared that the decision to retrain was their own. P11 stated, “Well, for me, I didn’t have to do this training. I applied for it. I wanted it. I wanted it from the beginning.” P18 echoed, “This kind of training actually depends on myself. If I don’t want to do it, I don’t need to do it.”

Participants shared that they had complete control over their decision regarding the field of retraining they pursued. For example, P8 experienced a great deal of control over the planning process of his retraining and said, “No one forced me…. I think one good thing about the Canadian education system is that you are in control of your own destiny. If you focus and pick an area of interest, nobody can stop you.” P10 shared that she experienced a sense of control over choosing to retrain in a field that was similar to her original field of work: “Leadership and management training is something I always adored... so I would say it was not forced onto me.” P7 added that she chose the location of her retraining program: “First of all, I didn’t want to move out of Toronto. It’s not that I was going to apply anywhere else. I had control over what I applied to.”

**Flexibility**

The theme of flexibility emerged from the responses of some participants when they described the process that they had to undergo to set up their retraining. They demonstrated
flexibility in viewing retraining as a positive opportunity and flexibility in the field of retraining. For example, when P16 was asked whether he felt negatively about having to retrain, he stated, “Not so much. It’s just to change the career. Got a chance to change directions.” P7 also demonstrated flexibility in reframing the need to retrain as a positive opportunity instead of a career setback:

    Probably by the second year or by the second month here everyone thinks that they have to retrain. Once you settle with that fact, you’re not happy that you have to. But, for me, I was just looking forward to a new chapter of my life. (P7)

The participants also exhibited flexibility in the field of retraining. P15 stated, “Teaching is my whole life passion, and I just want to be a teacher,” but indicated that she realized it was not a good option for her after having gone to many information sessions. She demonstrated an openness to retrain in a different field in immigration and settlement studies. P3 similarly appeared to have been flexible in taking the opportunity to retrain in a new professional field. She recalled:

    I planned on taking some courses, but I didn’t know that it will be in the cardiology field and after that in clinical research because it simply came my way. Because in life you can plan some things [but] sometimes, something happens suddenly, you get another [piece of] information and you think, “It’s not bad. Maybe I can make a career in that field.” (P3)

Research Programs and Courses

Most of the participants reported having to research information on retraining programs and courses in Canada. They contacted college or university resources and staff, searched for information on the Internet, spoke to friends, and attended resources centres. P5, for instance, spoke with individuals at the college to obtain information about programs and attended info sessions, workshops, presentations, employment centres, and consulted with people at some schools to help him decide what type of retraining to pursue. P20 similarly spoke to professors to help him decide which program to take. He noted, “Of course, you make that search. What are
the parts of that program? Are there any internships or co-ops? … I just spoke to the instructors or professors. I was quite impressed.” P15 added that in addition to attending information sessions, she sought information through friends and professors. Some participants relied heavily on online research to obtain information on retraining programs. For instance, P2 researched the retraining institute after hearing about a program from a colleague and was able to obtain ample information about what to expect from the program. She subsequently chose to pursue retraining from the recommended retraining program.

_Fulfill Prerequisites for Admissions_

A few participants took action to obtain the necessary prerequisites in preparation for their retraining. For instance, P19 had to complete some requirements for her chosen program and English courses prior to her retraining. Similarly, P5 took some preparation courses for his admissions tests as well as English classes. He said, “I knew that to go to school I had to successfully pass two pretty hectic tests. That’s why I took my private tutor classes.” After having been declined admissions into a master’s program, P7 had to take courses in order to be re-considered for the master’s program:

They called me and they said we can’t take you, but if you do these 2 courses and show that you are doing well in these courses, we will consider you for a conditional admission. I went and did those courses. (P7)

_Positive Retraining Experience_

Through sharing their experiences of their retraining programs, nearly all of the participants provided responses that offered examples of aspects that they enjoyed or liked about their retraining. Some of the most prominent examples of positive retraining experiences included gaining knowledge and experience, a chance to use their pre-Canada knowledge, gaining confidence, enjoying the subject matter, enjoying the teaching and learning style, the positive learning environment, and the chance to develop social connections.
Gain Knowledge and Experience

Many participants reported to have gained useful knowledge and experience through their retraining. They experienced an enjoyment gained from being able to learn something new, gaining practical skills, gaining a different perspective on a familiar subject matter, learning about the Western culture, and having the chance to improve their English skills. P2, for example, expressed the enjoyment that she experienced from learning something new: “I really enjoy and grasp all that is new.” Participants, such as P16 and P9, experienced their Canadian retraining as being more practical than their original pre-Canada education, which they felt to be more theoretical. P9 stated, “It’s very practical, and whatever I learned, I could use in my workplace. It was very good.” P16, who retrained in fire protection engineering technology, reflected the same sentiment:

They teach us all the knowledge just for the job. It’s also helpful in our lives. It’s kind of hard to survival in the fire. How to plan an emergency, plan for the buildings, for your families? How to use the building safety? All those kind of things. (P16)

P4, who obtained retraining in her original professional field, also enjoyed learning a new perspective on the subject matter. P4 shared, “You know something, but the way that person is teaching you the same topic might be interesting. It gives you a different outlook on the same view that you had.” The participants also shared that the retraining offered acculturation benefits. P17, for example, said, “I learned about the culture in the western world, so that part I liked the best.” Other participants also mentioned enjoying the opportunity to improve their English skills through the retraining process. For instance, when describing the necessity of her retraining for her competency in her profession in Canada, P14, stated:

Even though you learn that technology before, it was in your own language, and in the new country you have to explain everything, communicate with other people with the new language. You know it, but you have to explain it, describe it, in new language. (P14)
Use Pre-Canada Acquired Knowledge

Some of the participants expressed that they enjoyed being able to use their knowledge and experience gained from their pre-Canada education and employment. For example, P14 and P17 shared that they found their retraining experience to be easy due to retraining in a similar field as their original profession and because of their pre-Canada acquired knowledge. When invited to talk about his qualifications and training from his home country, P14 stated, “It is helpful [for] the courses here, because I knew the basic idea, the basic technology before I came.” Regarding her retraining experience and how it compared to her original training back home, P17 similarly said:

There were some similar areas. I felt it was very easy for me to get it done because I had such knowledge already, and I could learn more. But, I knew the basic things already. There was something new as well, but it was very related to the knowledge and experience that I gained before, so I found it kind of easy. (P17)

Gain Confidence

Related to their enjoyment of gaining new knowledge through their Canadian retraining, several participants stated that they experienced an increase in their self-confidence. P2 and P3, for instance, experienced an increase in their level of confidence as a result of gaining new knowledge through their retraining. P3 stated, “I think it helped me a lot because I gained knowledge and confidence. With knowledge comes confidence. I think in positive ways.” P2 echoed:

During the program, I had very good self-esteem and confidence because I was learning something that I wanted to learn. It was very interesting for me. I learned so many new things and that made me more [confident]. And more confident to be with the knowledge that I had and that was also valuable for me from this program. (P2)

P15 experienced a boost in confidence by being able to use her work experience in her retraining assignment and share her knowledge with her colleagues. She said, “The program by itself is
kind of an eye opener for me, and from that program, I started to build up my confidence in
Canada.” She added:

My first presentation, and they just opened their eyes because I used the media. And I
used real examples, because I came from settlement area, and they were just new
graduates from university. They didn’t have that exposure of seeing what it’s like in the
community, but that’s a major part of the program. So I gave them real knowledge. (P15)

**Enjoyment of Subject**

Several participants shared that they enjoyed the subject matter in which they were
receiving retraining, regardless of whether the retraining was in their original professional field.
P9, who worked as an account manager prior to her migration and pursued a diploma in
accounting, shared that she continued to enjoy working with numbers and therefore enjoyed her
retraining experience. She said, “I really like accounting. It’s given me a lot of ideas. Back home,
I didn’t have any ideas about accounting, but now I really like it. I like to work with numbers.”
P10 enjoyed her retraining in management because it was in a field that was similar to her
original profession as an accountant. She stated, “To compare, it was interesting, and it’s
something that’s [in] my field of study. So, that was more exciting.” P5, who worked as a
financial manager prior to his migration, received retraining in addictions and community service
work, and similarly expressed that he enjoyed learning about this new field of work.

**Teaching and Learning Style**

Half of the participants claimed they enjoyed the Canadian teaching and learning style
that they experienced as being different from that of the training in their home country. Some of
the novel Canadian teaching and learning styles that the participants enjoyed included a more
practical teaching style, having to participate in group work, and give presentations. P9, for
example, stated, “I think that the way they teach is more practical.” P12 echoed, “They focus on
more detailed cases. They sometimes teach you by case, give you examples.” P14 experienced
the retraining teaching style as being more interactive and said, “I enjoyed the flexibility to learn
here the most, because you can learn more. You can discuss with the teacher more as a friend rather than a teacher.”

The participants enjoyed the group work, which they did not previously experience in their education received in their home country. For example, P18 stated, “Many people worked together, and we shared our experiences and solved the problems together. It was good.” P17 also shared that teamwork and presentations were helpful new learning experiences for her:

I was ashamed by the old learning way. I had thought that I could get anything done simply by working hard, but things can be different. So I began to change. I had to work hard… but you have to present. Present to let other people know you did the work. And teamwork as well. Deal with other people, cooperate with people… (P17)

Positive Learning Environment

Many participants experienced a positive learning environment during their Canadian retraining. Specifically, they made mention of supportive teachers and staff, as well as well organized programs and availability of good learning resources. For example, when describing her retraining experience, P9 stated, “No, I think training is good because most of the teachers are very nice in the college. They are very good.” P1 similarly experienced the teachers as being supportive and said:

The teachers were great and flexible and as I mentioned, I said [to the teachers], “I’m ready to take the test” and they said, “Go ahead.” After two months, I finished all of the six-month program. And moreover, they helped me send my resume. (P1)

Some participants also found the staff from the training program to be helpful, particularly in providing information. For instance, P14 stated:

At the school, they had a pretty good coordinator. They provided all the study information, as well as job search strategy. They provided the opportunity for you to do some normal interview, not with the employer but with them, to give you some feedback on your performance. So, that was a pretty good experience. (P14)

P13 experienced the retraining program as well organized. He reported, “I enjoyed the curriculum. It was designed very well. The professors, they were on top of their game, they knew
what they were talking about, and they had the experience.” Other participants, such as P9 and P11, were happy about the facilities and learning resources available to them at their place of retraining. P9 said, “There is a lot of resources in the library. That is good.”

*Develop Social Connections*

Several participants expressed that they enjoyed the opportunity to develop social connections through their retraining programs. P13 and P20, for example, shared that they had the chance to meet individuals of their own cultural background. P13 shared, “I felt welcomed. I didn’t have a lot of problems. I found a lot of friends and I found the Iranian community.” P20 echoed, “The most enjoyment was [from] my friends. People around me. A lot of Chinese.” Some participants shared that they enjoyed making friends with their retraining colleagues. For example, P6 stated, “I enjoy meeting new people and making new friends and knowing about their experiences and learning from them. That was enjoyable.” P13 enjoyed having had the opportunity to connect with professionals in his field through his retraining. He said, “I started feeling like I was blending with the community, professional community, and that I was building relationships.”

*Negative Retraining Experience*

Despite the many positive experiences that were reported by the participants, many of them also shared a number of negative experiences during their Canadian retraining. Some of these negative factors included their career development being thwarted by having to pursue retraining and gaining little learning value. The participants also experienced financial stress during retraining. Some of those who continued to work while retraining reported having difficulty balancing retraining and work. Other negative experiences most commonly reported included finding the retraining difficult, disliking the teaching style, discrimination, and isolation.
*Thwarted Career Development*

Several participants experienced retraining as a setback to their career development. The participants expressed feeling as though they were not where they should have been in their career development. For example, P7 stated, “It was sad. The way I felt in front of them [family] was still that I could have gotten settled earlier if I had found a job in my own field.” Others, such as P20, reported feeling too old to be returning to school. When P20 was asked how he felt about having to take retraining, he shared:

> Of course, after some age, it’s not that easy. After your 40s, it is not that easy. I felt okay. I’m not saying that I feel old for this program. But, still, sometimes you’re thinking, “what am I doing here? I am 46. People my age, my friends, [they] are all running their own businesses. They are managers. They are doing something else.” (P20)

Some participants experienced a drop in social status from attending a college as someone who had previously obtained a university degree. For example, P17 shared that her confidence level had dropped: “I feel that my position, or I should say, the social status, is lowered.”

Retraining in a different field was reported by some participants as being experienced as a setback to their careers. For example, P2, who was a pediatrician prior to her migration and retrained in clinical trial monitoring and research coordination as well as program management, said:

> It’s very hard, because I compromise on the level of my previous profession because I really found myself to be a physician and always will be. I really like that profession and as I already explained, I was very successful. Not only [was I] successful, I really loved being a physician and I compromised myself in that way because I chose another field close to this profession. (P2)

*Did Not Learn Much*

Some participants did not feel that they learned from their Canadian retraining. For example, P4 and P16 shared that they did not gain much from the Canadian college level retraining because they were already university educated from their country of origin. P16 stated, “I think the college level is kind of easy for us, because we already had the experience in the
university. It’s quite difficult in university” and P4 echoed, “[My] original training was a bachelor’s degree. Obviously, a four-year course is very different, whereas this was just a diploma, which is in addition to your bachelors. For many of the subjects I already knew everything involved.” Some participants, on the other hand, shared that they experienced the retraining as not being practical enough. P6, for instance, shared:

In the beginning I did a junior basic course. If you keep on teaching us theory, do you think I’m going to learn anything if you don’t even take me to learn [in a] real classroom [where] I really learn to interact with the real thing…. If you are teaching theoretical things and you are not teaching or taking me to a real classroom, how good can the teaching be? So, I didn’t learn anything. (P6)

Financial Stress

Several participants shared that they experienced financial stress while pursuing retraining in Canada. They experienced difficulties having to pay for tuition and their living costs. P5, for instance, had to take side jobs as well as donate blood to earn money to survive while he underwent retraining. He experienced this financial stress as having impacted his retraining performance. P5 said, “My student loan covered my tuition only. That’s why I was desperately struggling to make ends meet. Even while I was at school I was concerned about my financial struggles. It was holding me back a little.”

Some participants shared that they did not have to pay for their education in their country of origin and that paying tuition was a new concept. For example, P1 stated that he struggled to pay for rent and purchase necessities:

I had to fight with my brain to teach myself to be more relaxed and not to think about money or money pressure. Because from the culture I came from and I grew up in, Soviet Union people did not think about money. Everything was given to you for free. Dental care – free. School – free. If you go to college or university, they pay you to be a student. (P1)
Other participants reported having to sacrifice job opportunities to retrain and passed on the chance to earn money. For example, P17 claimed, “I sacrificed the job opportunity.” P6 noted that she was unable to take jobs as a supply teacher while she was retraining:

“I’m a supply teacher so my home runs only on the money I own. So if I have to go for education then I am losing money on the education plus I am losing money when I am not going to work. On that part I am losing.” (P6)

**Difficulty Balancing Retraining and Work**

About half of the participants who continued to work while pursuing retraining experienced difficulty doing both. Participants, such as P19 and P6, experienced the physical toll from balancing both work and school. P19 recalled, “It makes you tired, but it was my responsibility to make a living. So I got up very early to do my homework, to study, to do things. You cannot imagine sometimes how we do it.” P6 similarly shared:

“I was sleepy. Once I went to school and I slept on the couch and the class was there. I was so sleepy. When you are working all night…. Before I was doing a night job and a day job. I was working the whole night and I got up to go to school. My job was not paying me much, but still I wanted to keep my job because there is nothing at school in the summers.” (P6)

The participants also experienced a negative impact on their social life and family life as a result of holding both a job and pursuing retraining. For example, P15 noted the negative impact doing both retraining and working had on her family and social life:

“I had to give up my family life for my study. And for those 2 years, I did not have any personal life. I had a full-time job. After my job, I took TTC to [the university] which was in downtown, but my job was in Scarborough, so I left my home early morning. When I got back home, it was already 10 or 11 pm. So, I remember my daughter wrote a kind of article in school. Then the teacher called me and said, “You have to read this writing. Your daughter, who is in grade 3, wrote this one, and made all the teachers cry”. My daughter said “I love my mom so much, I really dream to spend some time with her, even to play my simple puzzle games, but she never has time. I can barely see her every day, but I love her”. (P15)

Some participants noted that both working and retraining negatively impacted either their retraining performance or their work performance. P5, for example, shared that he experienced
difficulty meeting the deadlines for his schoolwork. P15 shared the negative impact on her job performance:

I had a hard time with my previous employer. I had to give up some work time, too. I had to take days to do my research to interview people. At that time, I thought that what I did really benefited the work there, but they never thought so. (P15)

**Difficult Learning Process**

Several participants found the retraining process to be difficult due to such factors as high volume of work, and cross-cultural and language barriers. For instance, P10 described her retraining as having “a lot of assignments and a lot of reading.” P14 shared that there were many tests for which he had to study. Participants, such as P15, experienced language and cultural barriers during their retraining process. She had difficulty understanding the textbooks for her master’s program in immigration and settlement study. The concepts of racism and discrimination were new to P15 and therefore she had to learn about these concepts.

**Disliked Teaching Style**

Several participants shared that they did not enjoy the style in which they were taught in their Canadian retraining. One such dislike as the self-teaching aspect of retraining. For instance, P13 experienced his retraining as lacking in explicit directions and instructions of what he was expected to do by his instructors:

Back home, when they wanted a design from us, they would give us a program of a building, and we would design based on that. But here, when we started, they were giving us a building to design, without a program, and we were to develop that program ourselves as well. So, it made it a bit difficult to start thinking of the solution for a problem that is not defined very well. (P13)

Participants, such as P17, shared that the professor did not put any effort in teaching the class:

“Some professors didn’t make an effort at all, they just mark the student easily, make everybody happy… They just try to make their own work easier, keep their job.” P3 expressed a dislike in the exam format that was foreign to her: “I definitely changed my learning style. Because back
home, in Europe, it is completely different than North America because we don’t have those kinds of multiple choice questions and intentional misleading. It was really new and difficult.”

**Discrimination**

A few participants reported experiencing discrimination during their retraining. They reported experiencing preferential treatment for non-immigrant students by the teachers. For example, P15 stated, “Some of the teachers, I can’t say they are racist, but they are discriminating. They have certain biases for certain students.” P18 shared the same sentiment and believed that the tests were developed to be more difficult for immigrant students. P7 shared that she experienced discrimination from her professor as well. The professor had reportedly expressed a disbelief that she could do well in the test:

> I got high [marks] on those [assignments] A+’s and getting perfect marks. I did not dress the way I do now, and I did not present myself the way I do now to people. I was this underdog. I remember one day, I wanted to see my paper to see what I got… She [professor] looked at the grade, she looked at the number, she said, “What’s your number again?”… They couldn’t place one another together for some reason, but oh well.” That’s called discrimination in some sense. I see that now. (P7)

**Isolation**

Almost half of the participants expressed having experienced a sense of isolation or a lack of social supports during their retraining. The isolation stemmed from different factors such as not having enough time to be with family members due to retraining, a lack of understanding or emotional support from family members, and a lack of time to develop social connections.

P7 and P18, for instance, shared that they spent all their time working on their retraining and did not have any time to spend with their families. P18 stated, ‘That is because everything has a price. You have to sacrifice… for example, I told you I don’t have time to have fun. I don’t even have time to go shopping with my wife and my kids. P7 echoed:

> I was still in isolation when I would leave for school at 7 in the morning and come back at 11:30 at night. I would spend the rest of the time at the library. How do you think I got the A+’s? (P7)
P8 shared that his family did not support his decision to return to school for Canadian retraining:

My family in India or in the United States knew that I was doing so well in India. I had MBA from top-notch school there. They could not comprehend why I am going back to the school here…. So, I don’t think I had support from my family. (P8)

During his retraining experience, P12 experienced little opportunity to develop strong social connections. He stated, “The connection between classmates are not as strong as my previous experience [in China], because we just go [to class] and share the 45 minutes and then go back home. There’s no more.”

Coping Actions

When describing their negative retraining experiences, the participants also shared the actions that they had taken to cope with the barriers and difficulties as well as the negative feelings that they might have experienced about returning to school. The main themes that emerged from their responses included being goal oriented, being flexible and open, accepting their circumstances, making the connection between their previous profession and their Canadian retraining, seeking social supports, and taking on self-care activities.

Goal Oriented

Many participants reported that they focused on their long-term and short-term goals and intentions for pursuing retraining as well as focused on their own choice to gain retraining. P14 offered an example of focusing on his short-term goal to perform well in his retraining: “I think that kind of thing, because I am a person [who] always wants to [be] the number one, those kind of things. That’s why sometimes I push myself to learn more, to get better marks.” P2 shared that she focused on finishing her retraining quickly. P18, on the other hand, focused on performing well at work rather than focusing on his retraining performance. P2 said, “My goal was to finish [retraining] as soon as possible but the time frame was 1.5 [years] and I finished on that time.” P18 stated:
My work performance is very important. I can’t allow the retraining to affect my work, so that was the first rule. And if I found that the retraining was affecting my work, I would just plan [to complete] the retraining [in] a longer period. (P18)

P19 described a mindful approach of focusing on the task at hand, whether it was retraining or work:

I’m a very responsible person. When I say, “At this time, at this time, I’ll do it,” it doesn’t matter what. I learn to do the responsibilities. When I’m in one place, I’ll do the best possible result and have that work done. When I’m in the other place, I say, “Okay, I have to do this, this, and this.” I’m very focused. (P19)

Focusing on long-term goals was also reported by the participants to be a way of coping with their negative retraining experiences. Specifically, the participants focused on their goal to obtain a job. For example, when describing her retraining experience, P14 shared, “Not that hard, as long as you think you’ll get a job soon” and “keep thinking of that and then you can finish the study.” Participants, such as P4, also focused on their own volition to pursue retraining as a motivating factor during their retraining experience. When asked whether she had to make any compromises to pursue retraining, P4 recalled, “There was no compromise, because I knew I wanted to go through the retraining. So it was with that mindset that I went through.”

Openness and Flexibility

Most participants reflected a sense of openness and flexibility as being helpful during their retraining experience. Openness and flexibility manifested in many forms. One such form, as reported by the participants, was being open to reframing their retraining as a positive opportunity. P14, for example, framed his retraining as an opportunity to learn:

I would say it’s a new opportunity. Actually some of the stuff I already knew before I did the retraining, but I looked at this kind of thing like a new thing. Because [even though] I learned it before, it was in Chinese language, but now I learn this stuff in English. So that’s kind of like a new thing to me. (P14)

P5 succinctly reflected a positive view of his retraining by stating, “New opportunity and new interest and I was very open to just learn something new.”
P14 reflected flexibility in viewing his experience of balancing work and retraining in a positive way and stated:

Doing different work was like a good rest because if you keep doing the same thing, you feel tired. So, it means if you work for 7 hours and then you study, it’s a different thing [for you] to take a rest. (P14)

Another main form of openness and flexibility reflected in the participants’ responses included openness to a teaching and learning style that was different from that of their home country. P15, for instance, experienced teamwork as a new learning style that she adapted to:

I realized that, if you want to gain your Canadian experience here, education is a major part. You have to know the school system. You have to know the teacher system. You have to know teamwork. Not like before. So, I learned that from this brand new program, and I know when you should open your mouth to tell people what you know and what you need to know. (P15)

P12 spoke about being open to learning how to give a presentation:

Presentation. I’d never met this kind of format in the past education, even though I have two bachelor’s degrees from China. We didn’t have to do presentations. Initially, I felt weird. Why they have to do this? And gradually I think maybe that’s for the student to organize what he learned and also practice his spoken English. (P12)

P10 shared that she was flexible in adapting to a different evaluation method than she was used to and that she found this new learning experience to be “very exciting.”

Open-book tests. It was a little different. Those kinds of things, open-book tests, is something that was new to me. And assignments, and group sessions – different…. Subject-wise, content-wise, not too much, but the methodology is different. (P10)

Participants, such as P16, shared that they were flexible in pursuing retraining as a revised job search strategy to their original job hunting. P16 recalled, “I’m searching for a new direction to change. First I considered entering the Seneca College to learn about chemicals and pharmaceuticals.”

Acceptance of Retraining

Half of the participants reported coming to a place of acceptance regarding the necessity of pursuing retraining due to the job search barriers that they experienced during the initial stages
of their immigration to Canada. P2, for example, shared that she came to accept that it would be too difficult for her to try to return to her original profession of being a pediatrician and therefore decided to retrain in a similar field:

> It’s not possible for me to be a physician here and I have to accept that because I am living here and that’s the reality on this situation. You can find yourself in other way or other field or leave to [go] back home and work as [an option]. These were the only two options for me and I chose to retrain myself and find a similar field to what I did. (P2)

P6 similarly reflected a sense of acceptance that she had to gain retraining in order to increase her chances of being hired for her desired job as a teacher: “I felt upset, but I had no choice because the principals hire [those that] they see as having more courses.” Participants, such as P7, shared that they accepted the fact that they were solely responsible for completing their retraining. When asked how important her own actions were in completing retraining, P7 stated, “It was very important, because it is your decision. It is you. If you don’t do anything then no one else will.”

Previous Work Experience and Education

Several participants stated that they held on to their previous career identities by relating their new retraining to their previous professions. Some also shared that they maintained their sense of self-confidence by reminding themselves of their pre-Canada education and work experience. For instance, P6 retrained in a field different from her previous education and profession (from a professor of botany to retraining in special education, guidance and counselling), yet she focused on the aspects of the retraining that were similar to her original profession. P6 stated, “All of these courses are related to teaching. Business leadership and management is something to build your confidence if you get a management position. [I chose] Clinical research associate because my field is [in] biology.” P18, who retrained in his original field to obtain his professional engineer license in Canada, stated that his pre-Canada education
and work experience provided him with an advantage over the other students during his retraining:

I took two courses: hydronics and the geotechnic. For the geotechnic, and that year was 2007, they changed the exams there. Before that and after that, some questions are totally different so it was a surprise…. So many people complained after the exam. Then some of my friends asked me, “How can you finish the question? We never hear about it”. And then I just tell them, “Yeah, it’s nothing in the book, but in my previous work I did this kind of work – practical work.” So I just tell them what I know. (P18)

P8, who retrained in a similar field as his pre-Canada profession, also shared that he relied on his previous education to provide him with confidence during his retraining:

It was not difficult, actually. The reason it was not difficult was [because] I was not taking the MBA for the degree. I was taking education for getting a better job, which I already got. Plus whatever [was] being taught there, I sort of had the basics. It was not difficult, at least for me. (P8)

Seek Social Supports

Some participants shared that they actively sought help from their social network when they experienced difficulties. For example, P15 stated, “You ask for help. Never hurts to ask.” P18 similarly said, “Make everything under control, and if I can’t find a solution, I can work with others.”

Other participants, such as P17 and P6, shared that they spent time with their family and friends as a way of coping with difficult experiences or stressors. P17 shared, “I had some time to go swimming with my daughter on the weekends. I was relaxed at that time, so we could do that every weekend.” P6 similarly stated, “My daughters and I went volunteering there. From there, we joined a few courses and hobbies.”

Self-care Activities

Many participants shared that they engaged in interests and hobbies in order to cope with their retraining experiences. Participants, such as P14 and P18, shared that they took up sports
and exercising as a means to cope. P14 stated, “I’m a sporty man actually. I played badminton, because I knew some of the friends in school and they played badminton as well.” P18 shared:

Every day I spend maybe more than 1 hour doing exercises. Sometimes it’s running. I like to run in the park, because my home is beside a small creek. So, it helps me relax and then in the night it helps me to sleep well. That is very important. Don’t ignore this kind of detail because if you always want to work, work, work, and then you find you can’t work. (P18)

P14 and P13, for instance, stated that socializing was a good way of coping with the stress of retraining. P14 noted, “Have a good relationship with those friends. Maybe go to BBQ sometimes.” P13 echoed, “I didn’t have any family here, so sometimes my wife’s friends, sometimes my friends welcomed us to the parties and activities outdoors.”

Some participants listed their retraining activities and subjects as their hobbies. For example, P8 stated, “I think two things which I cultivated as a hobby were writing skills and, as I mentioned, I would try to take any assignments as live assignments.” P10 echoed, “As I mentioned, career and leadership are my hobby, too, so that helped. My passion to that subject matter helped me, too.”

**Social Supports**

Most participants noted social supports as being helpful in coping with the difficulties and stressors that they experienced during their retraining. Some of the most commonly noted sources of social support included friends, family members, the retraining organization and staff, their employer, and government financial aid.

**Friends**

Many participants shared that they received emotional and financial support from their friends. When describing some of their sources of support, P11, for example, described her friends as providing emotional supports during their retraining: “My friends were encouraging me to do this [retraining] and they were very helpful,” and she added, “They were there so if I
had any questions, I could go to them and get the answers.” P14 shared that his friend provided competition and motivation to do well in his retraining. He said, “I had a good friend. We went to school together and then we got a job together, but he went to a BMO [bank]. Because we had competition for studying, he got A and I got A.”

Participants, such as P4 and P1, shared that their friends helped them financially during their retraining period. P4 stated, “I had a friend who was helping me out financially.” P1 similarly shared:

I played hockey and I played for some team in city of Vaughn. The gentleman from my team said, “I see you struggling. You’re going through a hard time…. so while you are going through this hard time you can come to my house to live with me for some time free of charge. No rent.” And I thought okay, so I stayed with the gentleman for three months in Brampton. I did not pay rent. (P1)

Others, such as P20, also indicated that their friends were helpful in providing them with useful information. P20 recalled, “They helped me to get some resources from the Internet. They sent it to me. Those kinds of things. It’s nice.”

*Family*

Many participants shared that their family members, such as their spouse, parents, and siblings, provided them with emotional and financial support. P11 shared that she received support from her family from her home country regarding her retraining. She recalled, “Well, my family was very supportive, they wanted me to go outside of the country and get a degree” and added, “My family was telling me that I have to do this and that it’s good. They are supportive.” Participants, such as P13 and P8, also shared that they received emotional support from their spouse and family. P13 stated, “My wife, my family from Iran, they supported me a lot emotionally.” P8 echoed, “My wife was supporting me because she understood what was happening here.”
Other participants shared that their family provided them with financial support during retraining. For example, P7 noted, “Because I had a brother who was paying my bills, all I had to do was to go to school and study. No barriers whatsoever.”

Retraining Organizations and Staff

Several participants suggested that the organization, at which they received retraining, and the staff members provided supports including emotional support, information, and helping them obtain financial aid. P15 expressed feeling emotionally supported by her professor: “I was lucky. I met one of the professors there, now she’s the director for this program. She even offered me a free ride everyday after class.” The staff from the college that P1 attended reportedly helped him with his job application. P11 recalled, “The college staff, they knew that I finished everything and they were so helpful. They were trying to help me find a resume to send.” Other participants, such as P11 and P8, experienced financial supports from their retraining institutes. P11 shared, “It was okay because I had my supervisor who was paying me R.A. [research assistantship] and T.A. [teacher’s assistantship], so I started working right away.” P8 also noted, “$75,000 is not a small amount for a first year immigrant with not much career history. Nothing. They [university staff] said, ‘Don’t worry about it. We will get you the finance’ and they got it.”

Employer

Some participants felt supported by their employer during their retraining process. Some of the participants’ employers were reported to have been supportive of the participants’ pursuit of retraining and others provided financial support. P10 and P14, for example shared that their employers were supportive of their retraining pursuits and were flexible in letting them take time from work for retraining. P14 recalled, “The manager said that if you have some urgent
assignment, you can do it in your work hour.” P10 similarly noted, “The company help me by giving me study leaves and days off for a full-day program. I was given paid time off.”

P10 as well as P12 also noted that their employers provided financial supports during their retraining. P10 said, “I also talked to our training managers. So, that’s how I got the funding arranged. The payment was arranged through the company.” P12 also noted the emotional and financial supports offered by his employer. P12 stated, “I had to tell my company about my program. They said, ‘Okay, that’s good, why not?’ and they also grant me some part of the tuition.”

**Government Financial Aid**

A few participants reported that they received financial supports from government funding. P1 reported that he paid for his retraining with government funded employment insurance:

> The employment insurance made me go through a number of colleges and bring [a list of] different colleges to them. Then, I had to pick one out of a number of colleges because it’s a requirement. They have to compare them, because they pay money and stamped it. (P1)

P3 and P4 shared that they received provincially funded student loans to pay for their retraining. P3 recalled, “I actually got OSAP [Ontario Student Assistance Program] for the first training.” P4 echoed, “The only support financially was from OSAP and also I had a friend who was helping me out financially.”
Chapter 8 Results

Retraining Outcome and Post-Retraining Employment Experience

This chapter presents the emergent themes related to the participants’ hindsight meaning-making of the necessity of retraining, the positive gains that they experienced as a result of the retraining, and the negative outcomes of retraining. Also presented are the actions that the participants took after having completed their retraining and the circumstances that led to their current employment. Lastly, the themes related to the participants’ experiences of their current employment are discussed. Please refer to Table 4 for an overview of the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 4

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Positive Retraining Gains & Hindsight Meaning-Making

All of the participants, whether they were retraining in a field that was the same, similar, or different from their original professional field, reported having experienced some positive gains as a result of their retraining. Some of these gains included advancing their career development, obtaining employment, increasing their self-confidence, acculturation gains, and obtaining a social network.

Aided Career Development

Nearly all of the participants reported that their retraining had a positive impacted on their career development. Such positive outcomes reported by the participants included retraining leading to job offers, gaining employment, improved career opportunities, higher level work positions, increased salary, either re-entering or further developing their careers within their original professional field, and feeling more encouraged about their career development in Canada. For example, P17 and P8 shared that they were offered jobs through networking during
their retraining. P17 stated, “But in the middle of the program, I got an offer from a transportation and shipping, international business company.” P8 echoed:

It is so difficult to get access to the right network. If I had not gone to [university of retraining], I don’t think I would have been able to build a network…. I was taking this program and there was a CEO of a company from the energy field. He was a CEO for [energy company]. He used to sit next to me and I used to sit next to him. I was networking. I used to keep on asking him whether he can get me connected with folks he knows…. After six months, he saw me performing in the class, talking to professors and getting good grades. He got me connected with three people and from all the three places I got a job. (P8)

Nearly all of the participants shared that they obtained employment as a result of completing Canadian retraining. P2 shared that Canadian retraining was a necessary step to take in order to obtain employment: “I recognized that there is no any way to get any job if you are not educated or retrained here.” P10 shared that her retraining helped to improve her career opportunities in Canada. When she was asked how important and useful her Canadian retraining experience was to her employment opportunities in Canada, P10 stated, “It’s very helpful to put it on my resume. People really pay attention to that and it shows that I’m interested in continued education. So, it is, I would say, extremely helpful.” P16, for instance, shared that Canadian retraining improved his chances of obtaining employment, because retraining facilitated trust from the employers: “Almost every employer wants people who have some local education background. If we just graduate from some kind of retraining program, I think that [employers] probably feel easier or feel safe.”

P13 and P18 experienced their retraining as helpful in providing them with higher level jobs and increased salary. P13 shared that his Canadian retraining prevents him from having to take survival jobs: “I didn’t really imagine myself working without that training. So, if I wanted to work without that training, I would have started with a lower position than what I expected.” P18 similarly reported, “Actually, after this kind of training and obtaining the license, everything changed. The position is different, and the salary is much higher by maybe 3 or 4 times.”
Several participants, who obtained retraining in the same or similar field as their original profession, reported that their Canadian retraining helped them to re-enter and further develop in their original professional field of work. For example, when asked whether she experienced her retraining as necessary for her to be competent in her profession after arriving in Canada, P11 stated, “Yeah, because the job that I’m doing is because I did my Masters there. So, I had to do it [retraining] to get that job.” When discussing what advice he would provide newcomers, P18 similarly shared, “Just think about it, get back to the position you’re holding in China. They have to have the license. And how can they get the license? The training is necessary.” On a similar note, most of the participants shared that their Canadian retraining provided them with more encouragement to pursue their desired career. P10 and P14, for example, shared:

I feel changes in me. I feel a sense of confidence that keeps increasing. So, it makes me more encouraged and it gets me more encouraged to tell myself, “Do your accountancy and finish it.” So, when I finish that, it will have a different identity to my career. (P10)

I think I feel more confidence and then you feel your skills set. It’s what the job market needs. So, that’s the kind of thing, you have a higher feeling to step into the job market, and more confident that I can get a job, back into the IT field. It’s more confidence, basically. Just more confident for what I have learned and what I was looking for. (P14)

**Gained Knowledge**

Most of the participants shared that they experienced an increase in knowledge through their retraining. The knowledge that they gained included knowledge about the subject of retraining, Canada-specific information pertaining to their field of profession, and knowledge about the Canadian workplace environment. P2, for example, shared that she gained new skills and information about the Canadian work environment through her retraining experience. When asked how she felt about her skills and abilities after the retraining, she stated:

I think that they are improved significantly, because in any retraining or any courses that you are taking or program, you are learning new skills, new things, and you are getting better and better…. I learned what you need to expect from the work environment here, how you need to be, how the relationships in work environment are because… I think
Canada, as compared to my country, has a very different style than any other parts of the world. (P2)

P13 and P18, who were obtaining retraining within their original field of work shared that they had gained useful knowledge through their retraining. P13 noted, “I felt it helped me. It gave me more experience.” P18 further noted that the retraining courses taught him the difference between his original training and Canadian training within the same field. He found the difference in approach added to his understanding of his field of work. He recalled, “You have different technical codes from China. So this retraining helps me to understand.” He further noted:

In my previous job, I know how to do it and maybe in just four sequences, I did it. But this retraining helped me to understand this technology: why we have to do that and what is the technical background. That helps me think about how to improve it. (P18)

Other participants such as P5, who retrained in a field different from his original profession, also shared that he gained knowledge and understanding about his new field of retraining. He noted, “I think I gained a lot of knowledge, new people, new meaning, and new understanding.”

*Gained Confidence*

Most of the participants shared that their Canadian retraining helped them improve their self-confidence. The participants reported recognizing their own strengths through undergoing the retraining process and gained confidence in their own knowledge base through learning and realizing that their knowledge was transferable to the Canadian workplace. P5 and P15, for instance, shared that their retraining experiences helped them to recognize their full potential and ability to learn:

I never felt before that I could do this. I knew that I could start from scratch, learn something new, but it was pretty interesting. Again this is another side of my character I would say and another attitude. (P5)

I’ll just say that my chances of choosing my career kind of broadened after my retraining. Because I thought that I can never do this kind of stuff. But after training, I know I can offer more. I fully use my potential. (P15)
P12 and P13, for instance, gained confidence through recognizing their flexibility and adaptability during their retraining. When asked what they had discovered about themselves through the retraining, P12 recalled, “Flexibility. The roles – flexibility. We can do a certain specific job in China and also we can do another one in Canada. It makes me flexible” and P13 echoed, “It was a new environment and I discovered that I could adapt easily and quickly to the new environment.”

Other participants, such as P15 and P8, shared that they gained self-confidence through external acknowledgement. P15 reported making her daughter proud and stated, “When you’re happy, when you’re confident, you just feel like you can do everything. Even my daughter, she’s very proud to have a ‘master mom’.” P8 gained confidence after his assignment was praised by his retraining instructor:

“Basically, I put a decent effort on that assignment and all of my class was against what I was proposing. I went ahead with what I thought was right and submitted that assignment. I scored A+, the highest grade in the class. My professor announced my name and I was honoured for what I suggested and that was something they thought was out of the norm. The company for which we were doing this project, they adopted my strategy. For this, I got so much confidence. (P8)

P13 gained self-worth and self-confidence through a sense of being able to contribute in the workplace. He noted, “It [retraining] helped me evolve into a person that has the ability to work. Instead of just being a newcomer, I could accept a role in the community” and he added, “I would say that I felt more confident and self-worthy…. I could help the community. I could give back.” P18 experienced an increase in self-confidence after realizing that his field of work from his country of origin was similar in Canada:

“The first thing, of course, this kind of training gives you confidence. It gives me a chance to compare the technology between Canada and China and US. So that way, it gave me confidence – [I learned that] okay, the technology is not that difficult and the difference is not that big. (P18)
Acculturation

Many of the participants shared that they made acculturation gains through their retraining experience. Specifically, the participants gained information about cross-cultural differences both in social and workplace environments as well as culturally appropriate communication skills. P15 discussed the positive impact that her retraining experience had on her ability to adapt to life in Canada:

Canadian experience is really necessary for helping you to better adapt to a new life here. And when some new immigrants complain, “Why they always ask Canadian experience?”, I always have a kind of good argument for that. I say, “Without Canadian experience, you can survive here, but not in the good way.” (P15)

P14 and P9, were a few of the participants who discussed the important role of their retraining experience on improving their communication skills and culturally appropriate social skills. When asked about his understanding of why it became necessary for him to pursue retraining in Canada, P14 stated:

I think the major thing is that I couldn’t get a job before going back to retraining. That’s an [opportunity to] give myself spare time to adapt to the country here, adapt to the communication here, adapt to the people here. (P14)

When asked how her retraining impacted her experience as a new worker in Canada, P9 echoed, “Give me more knowledge. Teach me how to deal with the people, the culture here. So, that is most important.”

Participants, such as P17 and P2, indicated that their retraining provided them with the opportunity to adapt to the Canadian workplace. When asked how her retraining impacted her experience as a new worker in Canada, P17 stated, “With the training and with the time spent on training, I wouldn’t find myself too new in a work place.” P2 similarly echoed:

All these programs are not only providing knowledge in this specific field. I learned what you need to expect from work environment here, how you need to be, how the relation in work environment is. Because I think Canada, [compared] to my country, has a very different style than in any other parts of the world. You need to know… you better adapt yourself in new environment. (P2)
P2 added that her retraining provided information regarding Canadian regulations within her field of retraining. When she was asked about the main lessons that she learned from her retraining experience in Canada, P2 stated, “The regulation. I found that all the clinical tests should be conducted with some regulation.”

_Gained Social Network_

Some participants reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to make friends and gain social supports through their retraining programs. P7 and P14, for instance, shared that they developed friendships through their retraining programs. P7 recalled, “What I enjoyed the most was making more friends, meeting other people.” When he was asked about what he felt he gained or lost through his retraining, P14 echoed:

> I gained friendship…. Not only with the students, but with the teachers as well. Those teachers, I still contact them sometimes. Because I worked at school as well, that’s why… They still have the programming that I wrote for them. Sometimes they might have some questions and have some contact [with me]. (P14)

When asked whether she experienced any unexpected benefits throughout her retraining, P19 shared that she gained social supports:

> The good thing is that along the road you meet people. You meet good people who you don’t expect. Sometimes we don’t expect a person is going to support you. You meet good, good people, like my counsellor when I started looking for a job. (P19)

_Negative Retraining Outcomes_

When discussing the outcome and impact of their retraining on their career development in Canada, many participants shared that the retraining was not helpful. The most common negative themes that emerged were that the Canadian retraining did not lead to the desired employment, the lack of bridging between their retraining and employment, learning unhelpful information, and the sacrifices that they had to make in order to obtain retraining.
Did Not Lead to Desired Job

Several participants shared that their retraining did not help them obtain their desired employment. Specifically, they reported that their retraining led to employment that was not stable or full-time, did not lead to a job of their interest, and did not facilitate their career development in Canada. P4, for example, found that even with her Canadian retraining, she was unable to enter the industrial pharmaceutical field of work:

I want to work in the industrial side of the pharmaceutical [field]. But nobody is willing to hire a new person and train them. There are so many out there who are still looking for work, but the companies are not willing to hire them. (P4)

P4 was only able to find unstable work in a different industry:

Working in a different industry that is entirely different. It’s more like getting project-wise timing or part-time casual timing. There’s not a fixed time set. You don’t know when you are going to lose your job or when you are working. (P4)

Similarly, P1 and P6 did not find their retraining helpful in landing secure employment. P1 shared that he held a survival job as a newspaper deliveryman and P6 held general labour work as a stocker. P1 recalled, “After I graduated I couldn’t find a job so I started looking everywhere. At some point I moved to Niagara Falls for seven months and I worked at the Niagara newspaper.” P6 echoed:

I’m still doing light jobs. Can you imagine a PhD doing shelving and re-shelving and I have to [lift] those heavy shelves. Go to Wal-Mart you see the shelves, we have to take those shelves and they are all rusted…. We have to clean their stuff. We have to take out the shelves. This is what I am doing and because of that I am allergic to all those things. (P6)

As a result of the lack of success in obtaining their desired jobs, P4 and P6 felt discouraged about their career development. When asked how her Canadian retraining impacted her experience as a new worker in Canada, P4 shared, “Negative way, because in spite of doing the training according to their requirements and according to their standards and everything, you’re not accepted” and she stated that she felt “more discouraged” to pursue her desired career.
P6 noted that although her self-confidence remains intact, she has given up on her career development as a result of the lack of positive outcomes from her retraining. She noted, “I gained [retraining] because of the degree, my certification. I got my license but it’s still not helping me.”

*Lack of Bridging between Retraining and Employment*

Related to the previous theme of their lack of success in landing desired employment, several participants shared that they experienced a lack of connection or bridging between their retraining programs and employment. P1 noted:

> It [retraining] was important, but again as I mentioned earlier, the link is broken after you graduate from college. [It’s] not just me, I have friends who have the same problem. They graduated from colleges and they can’t find a job because the link is broken. (P1)

P4 similarly shared that it would have been helpful if the retraining programs were connected with employers in order to facilitate job seeking for the students. Participants, such as P6, experienced a lack of job search information provided by the retraining program that she attended. When she was asked whether she experienced any unexpected events during her retraining, she explained:

> I did that clinical research associate course. They told me that they will have possible jobs and [that] there are so many jobs coming in Toronto with this American company. When I finished my course, they didn’t even talk to me because I paid so much money…. They said they would help me with [my] resume because that’s my new field. They said they would help me design my resume and they didn’t help with anything. (P6)

*Learning Unhelpful*

A few participants indicated that they did not find the learning experience useful. They reported that the learning experience did not provide them with more skills than they already possessed and that the retraining was not practical enough. P4 did not find that they learned anything new. P4 stated, “Skill wise, or anything like that, it was not much of a gain, because I knew all this before.” P6, for instance, shared that she gained more practical training through her volunteering position than through her retraining:
If you want training I can volunteer. There, I get training. I learned more from volunteering in the school than from doing different courses. When you deal with kids with disability do you think I am going to learn more if they teach me theory? It’s stupid. (P6)

*Sacrifices*

Several participants shared that they had to make certain sacrifices, such as finances, self-care, original career development level, and time. For example, P4 shared that she sacrificed her finances due to the retraining tuition fees:

All the rules, all the regulations, or all the programs are made for people who already have money. They’re not made for people who are trying to come up in life. If you already have, say, $100,000 in your bank account, you can make more out of that. If you only have $10,000 and you are trying to make $100,000, you can’t do it because there is nothing there to help you do that. (P4)

P6 felt that her retraining was a waste of her money and time. She expressed, “I just wasted money and time. Besides learning, as far as my educational field is concerned, I didn’t go anywhere and these courses didn’t help me [get] anywhere in my field.” She further added, “As I told you, I had to take [time] off from my work, so I lost time. Money and time.” P1 also described sacrificing time in order to pursue retraining: “Maybe time…. Your best years, when you are young you want to live, but you suffer. You are suffering.” P3 felt that by returning to school to gain retraining, she sacrificed her career development. She stated, “Maybe I lost that level of position [I had] back home, but it is the price that you pay when you decide to leave your home.” P20 shared that he sacrificed his self-care to retrain, and when asked what he lost through his retraining, he stated, “I gained weight.”

*Post-Retaining Actions and Circumstance that led to Current Employment*

The participants were invited to discuss their courses of action after completing retraining and the factors that led them to acquire their most recent employment. The themes generated under this category shed light on the actions that the participants took to obtain employment after the completion of their retraining. The main themes that emerged included acceptance of
barriers, perseverance, flexibility and openness to change, job searching, gaining work experience, and pursuing additional retraining.

Acceptance of Difficulties

The responses of several participants reflected the theme of acceptance of difficulties experienced during the post-retraining phase. For instance, P16 shared a sense of acceptance of the poor job market and having to be flexible in the job that he held:

There’s not so much we can do because the job market is quite different from the previous years. So, we just grab what we got. I didn’t want to work in the insurance industry, but there’s no chance. It’s the only change we got. (P16)

P17, who had the misfortune of working under an unprofessional manager, accepted that there were aspects of her situation that she could not change. She stated, “But we cannot change the whole organization, the whole system. You’ve got to change a little bit within the department, that’s good change, but I didn’t expect too much.” P9 shared that she also had to come to terms with the negative work environment:

Every office has its own drama, but I did have a lot of difficulty. I did have some people to deal with [that were] very difficult. But this is just a minor thing. The main thing is that I did learn a lot of stuff and I’m confident with my work experience. (P9)

P19’s response indicated that she had accepted her reality of having to balance her work and family. When asked how her work-life affected her personal and family life in Canada, she noted, “Juggling. Yeah, because I worked at two jobs. The family, my kids, these days they need more care. You have to keep sacrificing.”

Perseverance

When the participants discussed their post-retraining actions and the circumstances that led to their employment, the theme of perseverance emerged from most of the participants’ narratives. Several participants claimed to have focused on the positive in order to continue pursuing their career development. For example, when P1 was asked what he had to do in order
to enter into the his field of work after his Canadian retraining, he replied, “I had to work hard. I had to stay positive. I had to do my job really well.” P3 shared that she focused on her enjoyment of her job rather than on the lower level of the position that she obtained after her retraining:

Aside from that knowledge that I got through training, I learned how to be more satisfied with the things that you have and that there are things that you cannot change. You should be smart enough to enjoy what you have and to somehow make it work for your benefit. So, maybe I was lucky to find the type of job that I really, really like. So that is the thing, to be happy with smaller things, because it is very, very difficult to get the same level in a new country. (P3)

Some participants shared that they continued to take action to improve their career development in Canada despite the barriers. P10, for instance, continued to pursue her re-designation despite the career barriers. P10 indicated, “I am still struggling. I had been trying to get and finish my designation. That is one of the hurdles.” P2 and P5 continued to search for employment despite the reluctance of employers to hire immigrant professionals in a suffering economy:

I experienced some period of time when it was very hard to find a job, but I didn’t all the time. I believed in this program that somebody would recognize that it would be good enough to hire me and that made me more persistent to search for a job. (P2)

It [retraining] was helpful, but because the current economic situation and recession, some people are losing their jobs…. I understand that I have an entry level [training] only and that they don’t expect much. Maybe 21 hour a week would be a huge achievement for me. My friend just all of a sudden sent me a link last night. Maybe I can submit for it. I hope it leads to employment. (P5)

Participants, such as P19 and P1, reflected a sense of determination to pursue their career development in Canada in the face of the barriers. When P19 was asked what helped her to succeed in her career development in Canada, she shared, “Self-determination and do not lose faith.” When P1 was asked whether his retraining led him to be more encouraged or discouraged to pursue his desired career, he stated, “More encouraged” and explained, “Because I want to be strong. I’d like to see myself as a stronger person and actually in Canada [there are] a lot of good strong people. You can learn from them.”
Flexibility and Openness to Change

Half of the participants shared narratives that reflected a sense of flexibility and openness to change in the face of career development difficulties in Canada. Some of the changes that the participants were open to included openness to a new career path and flexibility in seeing both the positive and negative aspects of their circumstances. P16, for instance, shared that he had to let go of his pre-Canada career successes and be open to a new start:

Your past experience and glories, you have to move on. You move to a new country and everything is changed. Your experience and education background are not recognized. You have to do something about that. Just abandon all those things and start at the beginning. (P16)

When asked what he did to build his career in Canada, P16 shared that he was flexible in taking any work: “There’s not so much we can do because the job market is quite different from the previous years. So, we just grab what we got.” P5 reflected a general sense of openness to many career-related factors:

We have to be open for local business ethic and new technologies. We have to be on the cutting edge and always be open for new events, for new job opportunities, to new skills, and that’s how the life goes. (P5)

P2 shared a sense of openness to a change in her professional style:

I think that I change my style and also my professional style to more than it was in my country. Obviously because you are living in different country and everything is different in every different way and now I can probably recognize why it has changed my professional style or lifestyle. (P2)

P17’s response reflected a sense of flexibility in viewing her situations as both negative and positive. Even though she experienced discrimination, she still saw the positive impact that she gained from her retraining. Specifically, she shared that she felt her retraining provided her a sense of career identity.
**Job Search**

Nearly all of the participants took action to obtain employment after they completed their retraining. The participants shared that they applied for work, engaged in networking, sought out resources, and researched information pertaining to their job hunt. P13 tried to obtain a job related to his previous vocational background. He explained, “I sent resumes and I did research to find companies. I sent resumes, I emailed, and went door to door.” P11 applied for a job where she had completed her co-op. She recalled, “I was in a co-op in the Summer and then I got a job in that company later” and added, “I didn’t apply outside, it was just there. There was an opening and they got me.”

Like some other participants, P10 used her connections to obtain her current job. When explaining how she found her job, she stated, “Through connections. One of my staff referred the job posting and he referred me to the boss. I was interviewed for 2 interviews and I got selected.” P4 shared that she networked specifically within her cultural community:

I found that people tried to refer only if you are from the same community. It sounds very racial, but I’ve noticed that that’s what people do. If there’s an employment agency and the recruiter is Chinese, they tend to hire more Chinese. (P4)

Other participants, such as P4 and P17, shared that they sought resources to help them search for employment. P4 stated, “I went through employment agencies and everything.” P17 similarly recalled:

After graduating from this program, I spent some time hunting for another job, and I got help from the job consultant at [the retraining college]. That helped me a lot. They have a workshop to help us do this interview, to get some interview skills, and I got my first job at a very good organization. (P17)

The participants also searched the Internet to find employment opportunities and other relevant information. For example, P5 noted, “I think about everything that’s going on in the market right now. I signed up for some kind of subscription for some Internet websites and agencies, and some events. I was doing some research.”
Gain Canadian Work Experience

Some participants sought opportunities to gain Canadian work experience after they had completed their retraining. P9, for example, searched for work after her Canadian retraining to gain work experience from her employment:

Looking for a job and learning from each job work experience, and gaining knowledge. Whatever I learned [from retraining], that’s only the start. The start, the beginning, and continue in the workplace. There were a lot of things I had to learn. Retraining was only the beginning of the career. It’s not the final of the career. (P9)

P13 also felt the need to obtain Canadian work experience after his retraining and stated:

I had to gain experience, so that was a major role. I didn’t care much for the salary, because I wasn’t in the position to choose. It was the first job – you have to grab whatever you can find. So, I found my first job and I started right away. (P13)

P17 obtained an internship placement, which she found to be useful in helpful her obtain Canadian work experience. She stated, “That internship helped me a lot. I can tell them [employers] that I have Canadian experience now.”

Additional Retraining

Nearly half of the participants opted to pursue additional retraining in order to improve their knowledge and skills, their career options, learn more about their field of interest, and improve their ability to utilize their skills at their workplace. P2, for instance felt that her first retraining program was not helpful and so she pursued another retraining program to improve her knowledge:

In this training specifically, I didn’t learn a lot about workplaces. It was very brief. The major program was focused on your professional skills to educate you to do this job in a professional way. But I did my other course specifically to better understand the system for being an employee here. (P2)

P3 obtained additional retraining in order to improve her chances of obtaining a job where she could better utilize her skills:
After that, I worked in that field and took another training in clinical research because I thought I might better utilize those skills because it [the job] involved strength and you had to stand up the whole day. It is the part that I didn’t like and I didn’t even have the strength to stand up the whole day. (P3)

P8 obtained further retraining in another field in which he developed a great deal of interest. He recalled, “After that wine assignment, I went back to school and took a full wine program. Now, I do freelance consulting on wine for the wine industry. I have done 3 projects so far.” P19, on the other hand, pursued more retraining in order to specialize in the field:

My diploma wasn’t enough. I got more [retraining] and extra workshops. I had to make myself more marketable in areas where I wanted to work. I mentioned that I was working with seniors and children. I had 4 areas where I wanted to work…. In order to have the job, you have to have an extra certificate or whatever, so that gave me the idea that I could continue training myself. I wanted to work with abused women, with single women, homeless people who need support, so I got more training. (P19)

Current Employment

The participants were invited to discuss the factors that they liked and disliked about the employment that they held at the time of the interview. Nearly all of the participants shared factors that they enjoyed about their work and most of them were also able to list factors that they disliked about their employment at the time.

Positive Employment Factors

Nearly all of the participants enjoyed some factors about the employment they held at the time of the interview. The most common factors that the participants reported to enjoy included improved confidence, utilization of their skills, enjoyment of the field of work, good work environment, financial security, and low stress level.

Increased confidence. As a result of their work experience, many participants enjoyed an increase in their self-confidence due to being able to contribute to their workplace, and having a sense of control and responsibility over their work. For instance, when P13 described his job, he stated, “I like being efficient and being useful. I feel what I do helps something to get done.” P13
also shared a sense of increased confidence from experiencing a sense of control over his work. He noted, “What I like about it [the job] is being able to be more creative and you don’t have to accept whatever you’re being told.” P7 experienced respect from others as a result of her good performance at her job and reported, “I am enjoying what I am doing right now, and I am fabulous at it. People around me realize that and give me respect.” P2 shared that her sense of self-worthiness as a Canadian improved as a result of obtaining employment:

> I think that it took a long time to see myself as a Canadian. The first time was when I finally got my first job. I started to see myself as a Canadian here because before that, I was always feeling that I am immigrant here and not recognized by the workplace. (P2)

Utilization of skills. Several participants indicated that they enjoyed being able to use their skills at their jobs. P7, for instance, shared that she enjoyed being able to use her skills from her pre-Canada education in her current job. She stated, “My masters [degree] was in microbiology. So, when I came to this department, I understood things way better than others did in this department. That held my interest and helped me to develop more interest. Other participants, such as P11, enjoyed being able to utilize the skills that they obtained through Canadian retraining at their work. She shared, “I work with a great group, and it’s a perfect match for what I have learned and what I have been trained in. I see a bright future in it.”

Enjoyment of the field of work. Half of the participants enjoyed their field of work and their day-to-day work responsibilities. P7, who ended up working in as an investigator in a different field shared that she enjoyed this new field of work. She noted, “Right now I am doing mostly case management and outbreak management. It’s very interesting.” P14, who retrained to obtain a diploma in the same field as his pre-Canada profession, also enjoyed his job. He noted, “I’m still working as the same software developer. That’s the kind of thing I like, so I don’t have anything to say [regarding] dislikes.” Participants, such as P2 and P3, who retrained and obtained work in fields that were similar to their pre-Canada professions, also shared that they enjoyed
their new professional jobs. P3 claimed, “I like that job. I really like that job. I cannot even think of what I don’t like because I like that job. Clinical part and regulatory part and colleagues.” Similarly, P2 stated:

I am very satisfied…. What I am responsible for is very interesting to me. All my workdays are very interesting from [multiple] aspects because, as I said, this part of the job gets you in contact with family and patients and this research helps to make the care of the patients better. (P2)

*Positive work environment.* Most of the participants found their workplace environment to be enjoyable. Some of the factors that they liked about their place of work included the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience, challenging work, positive social interactions, and flexible regulations. P2, who was working as a clinical research coordinator, was enjoying working with her colleagues and the opportunities to learn new skills and information about her department and new field of work. P9, who was working as a financial analyst, and P6, who was working as a supply teacher both enjoyed the opportunities to gain more experience and knowledge within their own fields. P7 noted that she enjoyed the challenges that she faced at her job: “What I like is the actual job. Every day is a new day. You never know what is going to spring up where. Every day is a new day and there is a challenge every day. That is what I like about this job.”

Having good relationships and social interactions with their colleagues and superiors were also identified by the participants to be a positive employment experience. P10, for example, said, “What I like is my team. They’re very good…. My business partners were good too, internal and external.” P12 echoed, “The boss and the co-workers, we are friendly. I can say that I don’t have any hesitant feeling when I get up in the morning, [such as] ‘oh my God, I have to work!’ No, I never have this feeling.” Other participants, such as P9 and P4, enjoyed the flexibility of their workplaces. P9 appreciated the flexibility due to her family responsibilities and she stated, “I like it because it’s very flexible. I do have time to take care of my family, to be
honest.” P14 enjoyed the flexibility of the workplace policies. He shared, “I like the flexibility for the current job because they have less people and they're not that strict with policy. With them, sometimes you can easily handle those policies. They don’t have so many policies.”

Financial security. For some of the participants, the salary they acquired through their employment was a positive aspect of their jobs. P17, for instance, emphasized the financial security that she experienced as a result of her job and noted, “We have more financial security. Financial security is a big issue.” P18 described his salary as sufficient to provide security for his family:

My career is now underway and [my] salary can match other people. So, we don’t need to worry about income. I almost don’t need to worry about my job. I’m always confident [that] I can find a job. So, my family feels much better, I think. (P18)

Low work stress. Some participants noted that they have enjoyed less work stress and a good work-life balance. P17, for example, enjoyed the slower pace of her current Canadian employment. She said, “I like it because it’s not a very fast paced job. I would say it’s not a very fast paced environment, so I can do things.” P9 shared that she was experiencing a better boundary between her work-life and personal life in Canada:

When I get home, when I leave my office, everything [is left] behind. Nobody can bother me. But back home [in China], they could call me during the weekend, at night, and I have to work until 11 or 12 o’clock without stopping. I have to meet all of the clients, and have dinner with them every night. So, it’s totally different. But here, I don’t think that they will affect your life. (P9)

P8 added to this sentiment and shared that he had the time to engage in leisure activities. He noted, “I think personal life and family life is much better here. I am into sports. That is something that I barely used to get time for when I was working for India and Asia.”

Negative Employment Factors

Most participants also shared factors about their jobs that they did not enjoy. The most common themes regarding the disliked aspects of their employment included dissatisfaction with
the job level, skills not being fully utilized, absent job security, dissatisfaction with pay, job specific stressors, bad workplace environment, and isolation.

*Job level dissatisfaction.* Some participants shared that they were dissatisfied with their jobs because the job level was too low, it was not challenging enough, they did not have enough authority, and they felt overqualified and ashamed. P9 shared that her job in her home country as an account manager was a higher-level position than her current position:

> It can’t be compared because it’s in different levels. Back home, I’m in a higher level, but now, I’m just working. Back home, I made a decision and people just go with it. So, it’s kind of a control. But here I’m working, just doing whatever I have to do, that’s it. It cannot be compared. (P9)

P15 reported that her job does not offer enough of a challenge: “The second year, especially when I was transferred to the admin unit… not that interesting, because everyday you just do routine paperwork. Although, I took my initiative to try some new stuff, but still not that challenging.” She also experienced her job position as being too low given the master’s level Canadian degree she obtained and she expressed a sense of devaluation. She stated, “Now what I’m doing is like an admin job. I don’t need a Masters for this job.” She added:

> All of my classmates, since they were born here and they finished their education here, their job level is at least two levels higher than mine. I tried very hard. My co-workers are always teasing me, saying, “You have your masters, why are you doing my job here?” But I want to try harder, but it’s hard. That paper [retraining diploma] leads me to land this job, but like I said it’s my burden now. It kind of devalues myself. (P15)

P6, who worked as a college level lecturer in India, was currently working as a supply teacher. She expressed a similar sense of shame in her Canadian employment:

> I don’t even feel like telling people what I am doing here because they [have] a good job. When I call all those people who were with me, they are making so much good money. They are with the ministries and abroad [attending] all those conferences, and I am just struggling for day to day money. How I can I tell them what I am doing here? (P6)
P17 shared that, as a purchaser, she does not have enough power or control. She noted, “I can identify the problem immediately, but I’m not in the position to make decisions to make a difference. So, sometimes I want to get the work done in a professional way, but I can’t.”

*Insufficient utilization of skills.* Several participants experienced their jobs as offering little opportunity to fully utilize their skills. P6, for example, shared that she was dissatisfied with her job because she felt that her skills were underutilized:

> I can do more. I want to bring changes. I think my skills are under utilized and are not being utilized to my full potential. That’s why I say, if they don’t hire me, they lose me because I know I can do more than that. So, I don’t have any identity. My skills are not utilized properly. (P6)

P4 and P14 both reported that their soft skills are not being utilized:

> For example, leadership [skills] from my previous work experience and whatever work I did. I have noticed that I’m more able to do [work] on a management level, higher management level. However, I’m still not able to put myself into that level. (P4)

> I think some of the leadership [skills] hasn’t been applied, because it depends on the role. Right now, I am still like a developer, and some of the leadership [skills] I had before is still not being used. But I’m targeting that direction. (P14)

P15 noted that her previous work experience and knowledge were not being used in her current job. She said, “My international working experience is not fully used here. Like my language, because, in my current job, we’re not allowed to speak Chinese. And my theoretical study, my presentation skills – my current job doesn’t need these.”

*Lack job security and dissatisfactory salary.* Several participants were dissatisfied with the lack of job stability and security, and the low salary. P5 and P6 shared their discontent regarding their job instability:

> It’s instability, because sometimes I can work two or three days a week and all of a sudden nowhere. It’s not very consistent. Sometimes I can work three, four, five, or six days a week, sometimes two or three. That’s why I have to always think of planning my budget. (P5)
I feel more confident that I can teach better and share my knowledge. But I am restricted because I don’t have a full time job even with all the qualification and retraining…. This is my seventh year. Still I cannot get a full time job. (P6)

P17 noted that she is not satisfied with the salary that she is making and P20 is discontent with not being paid for overtime work. P17 stated, “Another thing I can share with you is that after I got my current job, I still kept looking because my current job is not good paying either.” P20 shared, “I am not paid overtime here, but I was paid overtime in Greece. Unfortunately.”

Job specific stressors or responsibilities. Several participants experienced their jobs as being stressful due to long hours, high level job responsibilities, and difficult work. P5 and P11, for example, reported having to work for long hours. P11 shared, “Well, I work long hours, because we have deadlines and we have to meet the deadlines” and P5 echoed:

It’s physically exhausting but because I am still single and I can do this. But, technically, of course, I have to find something with reasonable hours…. I have to leave some time for myself, my family, activities, and be more well balanced. (P5)

Participants, such as P13 and P19, noted the stress that they experienced from their work responsibilities. P13 said, “What I don’t like about it is the responsibility. You are more under the pressure.” P19 similarly stated:

I’m exposed to crisis. If somebody passes out, you know, call 911, or just somebody has some thoughts that they want to kill themselves. Those things I don’t like, but I have to do it, because I understand that person is in danger. (P19)

Poor workplace environment. Some participants described experiencing a negative workplace environment due to factors such as discrimination, narrow-minded colleagues, workplace politics, and unprofessionalism. P17 shared that she experienced discrimination at her workplace: “When I just started this job, I didn’t feel much respect from the co-workers, even the general labourers, they judged me. I had a feeling that they judged me by my appearance.” She also disliked the unprofessionalism that she observed from her superiors and reported, “I felt [that it was] very hard in the first 2 years, because the manager, and even the director, were not
very professional.” P20 experienced his co-workers as being narrow-minded and ridged in their way of doing their work. He noted, “People’s attitudes and stuff. I expected more open-minded approaches here in Canada. Here, they think they are open minded but they are not.” P10 shared that she disliked the work politics present at her workplace: “I sometimes disliked the corporate politics that’s everywhere. Especially when you get to a certain level, you have to be part of it also. You can’t just fly below the radar.”

Isolation. A few of the participants shared that they disliked the sense of isolation that their employment facilitated. P13 and P6 felt that they had no time to spend with their families due to having too much work to do. P13 stated, “I’m always thinking of my work, even on the weekends. Sometimes I work on the weekends. It does affect my personal life.” P6 similarly shared:

It [work] affects my personal and family life because you don’t feel that confident. You always feel depressed and you don’t have time for the family, because I spend all the time taking jobs on the computer. So, more of my focus is on my job even if my daughter is saying something. I am not listening to her, because I have to have my priorities and pick the job for tomorrow. (P6)

P14, on the other hand, experienced a lack of social network from his workplace that he used to experience at his workplace in his country of origin. He noted, “I think it’s a cultural thing as well, because for Canadians, they’re more focused on the family” and he added, “everybody [is] just focused on their own families and they seldom still have some contact [with work colleagues].”
Chapter 9 Results

Future Career Concerns and Lessons Learned

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives regarding their future career goals, concerns about barriers for their future career success, attitude about their future prospects, and strategies to improve their career development. Finally, presented are the common themes that emerged regarding the lessons that they learned through their career transition about factors for success and their advice for immigrant newcomers. Table 5 provides an overview of the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 5

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**Future Career Goals**

The participants were invited to share their future career goals and what that they would like to have improved in their careers. The most common themes included obtaining a higher level job position, acquiring job and financial security, remaining in their current job, continuing to develop within their original field of work, landing more meaningful employment, and starting their own business.

**Obtain a Higher-Level Position**

Many participants shared that they were hoping to be able to land a higher-level position than the one that they were currently holding in order to obtain a higher sense of responsibility, control, and prestige in their work. P13, for instance, shared that he would like to obtain a higher-level position within his current field of work. When speaking about his future career concerns, P13 said, “Maybe start gaining more confidence in my field to be an associate in the company that I’m working in or maybe a partner in the future.” P14 shared that he wanted to work in a bigger company that offers a clearer job role and more responsibilities: “I would still like to work in a big company here [in Canada] to have those [business] strategies, a more clear role, and responsibility.”

Participants, such as P10 and P7, expressed a desire to be promoted to a managerial or leadership position to have more responsibilities and control, and to offer mentorship. P10 stated,
“I want to have a good leadership role with a challenging process. Interesting, not monitored, not too automated.” P7 also reported:

I wanted to go into leadership. I was encouraged by other leaders around me, within my field and outside my field, that I should be pursuing something like this. That encouraged me. And, again, the challenge. I wanted to do something different. I’m tired of taking direction. (P7)

P7 added, “At my level, I’m affecting a small amount of people. At a higher level, I’m going to affect more people.”

Job and Financial Security

Several of the participants mentioned job stability and financial security to be a major concern. Participants, such as P4 and P14, noted the financial aspect of their employment as important. P4 shared, “The main concern is obviously the financial concern. That’s the main concern, apart from that, nothing else.” P14 shared that he desired a higher salary:

Still you want to get higher pay. Those kinds of thing you always look forward to, because people are strange. You expect this pay before you have this pay. Once you have this pay, or once you have something that you expected before, you expect more things. (P14)

P18 and P19, for instance, shared that they wanted job security. When speaking about main concerns and needs for his future work-life, P18 said:

I think the most important is job security. I need to have jobs. It not only makes me feel un-useful if I have nothing to do, it is a big [financial] problem. So, the job security I think is the first one. (P18)

When P19 was asked to anticipate her vocational direction 5 years from now, she stated, “Nothing is certain these days. Today we have a job, maybe tomorrow we don’t. Maybe we have to switch or change careers again.” Similarly, P6, who was working as a supply teacher, shared that her main concern was to obtain a stable full-time job:

Either I get a full time job in research, like my research, because I am a PhD so I was into biotechnology. I could get a job in that. Or I get a full time job in teaching because whenever I work I am going to bring research projects into the schools. So, I am going to bring change…. If I don’t know which school I am going to, which school am I going to
tomorrow, how can I bring [about] change there? How can I interact with the students every day? (P6)

Maintain Current Job

Some participants shared that they enjoyed their current employment and that their goal was to remain in their positions. P9, for instance, indicated that she was satisfied with her job and did not want her work-life to change: “I don’t think that there’s a lot I need to change or intend to improve. Just keep the life here, keep [it] the way it is. That’s good.” Others, such as P12 and P18, aimed to remain in their place of work and to continue their career development within the same organization. P12 said, “Maybe remain the same, but become more veteran.” P18 echoed, “In 5 years, I think I will try to hold my current job. [Remaining] in one position for 5 years is reasonable, and then maybe I will move. But hopefully, I just move internally in the same company.” P2 similarly shared that she was enjoying her work and that she would like to stay at the same place of work as clinical research project coordinator:

I think that every day during my work I am trying to do the best in my job. The results are coming to all of our team and I am getting to be recognized as very professional in my job and they respect me very well. I will continue with this, to arm myself with knowledge that I need for doing the job the better way and making the practice better. (P2)

Continue to Develop within Original Field

A few participants shared that their future career goals include continuing to develop within or re-enter their pre-Canada field of work. P13, for example, shared that he would like to continue gaining more experience as an architect:

Well, I plan to gain more experience in my field, do different types of projects. That’s my plan. So, maybe start gaining more confidence in my field to be an associate in the company I’m working in, or maybe a partner in the future. (P13)

P1 shared that he would like to obtain a job in his original field in international business. When asked what field of work he would like to be in 5 years from now, P1 stated, “International
business. I was trained in international business and I have experience in different countries.

Now, actually, I am learning. I go to a school and I take Spanish, French, and Italian lessons.”

*Find more Meaningful Work*

A few participants shared that they would like to seek employment that can offer them more meaning. For example, P1, who was unemployed at the time, wanted a job helping other people. When he was asked to anticipate his vocational direction 5 years from now, he stated, “I hope I will be helping people, working to the best of my abilities, and changing the world and making Canada better.” P15 shared a similar sentiment but more specifically identified that she would like to help immigrant individuals adapt to the cross-cultural barriers in Canada:

My passion is to be a cultural messenger…. I wanted to be a bridge person between the cultures because whenever I talk with my co-workers here, who are Canadian, China, in their mind, is totally different than the real China. Also, before I came here, Canada is completely different in my imagination. So, I want to [develop] a kind of program, if I can. (P15)

*Entrepreneurship*

A few participants shared that they would like to start their own business in the future. For example, P8, who was working as a VP in energy and utilities stated, “I feel more confident. My next objective is to start something of my own in 3 to 5 years time.” P10, who was working as a financial analyst, echoed, “I wanted to go in the direction of self-business too. So, the corporate level priority changed. But if you ask me, I will still be the leader if I start anything on my own. (P10)” P15, who was working as an immigrant counsellor assistant, wanted to start her own company in order to fully utilize her skills. She stated, “I want to start a kind of consulting firm by myself” and she further explained, “because only by doing that can I fully use whatever I learned, or my background [pre-Canada skills].”
Barriers for Future Success

The participants were also invited to share any concerns regarding foreseeable barriers to the success of their career development in Canada. Most of the participants mentioned certain concerns about their future career prospects. Some of these barriers included the uncertainty of available employment opportunities, acculturation difficulties, a lack of supports, requirement of higher Canadian qualifications and Canadian work experience, and financial constraints.

Uncertainty of Availability of Opportunities

Many participants shared concerns regarding whether there will be career opportunities available to them in the future. Specifically, the job market, discrimination, and a glass ceiling are some of the barriers that the participants foresee preventing them from further developing their careers. P3 and P16, for example, shared that they were pessimistic about their future career prospects due to the poor job market and high competition. P3 said, “Another factor that may be there was a number of postings at that time in 2006. Actually in 2005 and the beginning of 2006, [there were] a lot of opportunities compared to today.” She further discussed the bad condition of the current job market in general:

It’s very, very difficult. Even if you find [a job], it is temporary or part time. Extremely difficult today. Many educated people complete clinical research in 2 years or in 1 year-and-a-half in [a Canadian college], which is a very good program, or [a Canadian University], also very good, and they don’t have jobs. It’s so, so difficult now. (P3)

P16 echoed this sentiment when describing why he was not hopeful about the insurance industry, his current field of work:

The competition in this field is very [high] here, and lots of the insurance companies just canceled their own department. They are outsourcing this kind of job to the little companies. We got less in the last year, but the boss of our company said that there are some companies that have more competitive prices than us. (P16)

Other participants, such as P7 and P17, were concerned about discrimination from employers as a barrier to their career development. When describing her concerns about her future career, P7
shared, “The concern is that if my goals are set too high and I cannot meeting them, not because of my abilities but because of the color of my skin and my background. That would be one concern.” P17 similarly stated:

I feel that she [the manager] doesn’t want to give me any opportunities. She just wants me to do the basic job. Sometimes she pretends she doesn’t understand me because of my accent, because of the way I speak English. She even asked me to do some filing. That’s not a professional job. We have a filing girl, and she let her go and dumped her work on me. (P17)

P12, on the other hand, shared that the company that he was working at was too small for him to further develop his career. He noted, “Because our company is very limited in scale, only 25 persons, the promotion opportunity is very limited. So, for me, if I can get a salary increase, that would be a good thing.”

**Acculturation Difficulties**

Some of the participants shared concerns about acculturation issues, such as cross-cultural differences and language barriers, when describing foreseeable career barriers. P8 and P16, for example, stated that the culture gap was a barrier to their future career success. When asked whether any factors challenged his beliefs that he could succeed in his career, P8 responded, “I think the lack of understanding of the local culture is the biggest challenge.” P16 shared a similar sentiment in his explanation:

In the fire protection [field], we can get law enforcement jobs. It’s much better. But they don’t like the immigrants to do that job. I think, not only [because of] the language, but also because of the culture. Sometimes you need to stand in court to sue somebody, and if you don’t know this society very well, you can’t stand in there to survive the cross-examination. (P16)

P10 was one of the participants who shared her concern about her language barrier hindering her career development in Canada. When she was asked whether any factors have challenged her beliefs that she could succeed in her career, she said, “Some barriers are noticeable, but some barriers are kind of invisible, like you’re not a native English speaker.” Participants, such as P17,
shared a concern for both the cultural gap and language barrier. P17 noted, “I don’t really think, at this moment, that I can be very successful in my career” and she explained, “It’s because of the culture barrier and language barrier. It’s very hard for me to get a professional position.”

**Insufficient Supports**

Some participants noted that their lack of social supports, systemic supports, and professional network acted as potential barriers to their future career success. P15, for instance, shared that she felt that not being born in Canada was one of the barriers for her career development because she lacked social and professional connections. She explained, “I don’t have a lot of network” and “I don’t have my relatives and my friends. So all of the people that I know, like myself, are new immigrants.” When he spoke about barriers to his career development in Canada, P5 discussed his lack of social supports and connections. He reflected a sense of demotivation towards his Canadian career development due to this lack of supports. He shared, “Unfortunately, we are not accepted in our motherlands, which means that sometimes we can be great enemies to ourselves. The relatives are the last people who can understand you.” P4 was one of the participants who pointed to the lack of systemic supports provided to immigrant skilled workers to aid in their career development in Canada. When she was asked what needed to change for her skills to be better utilized in the Canadian workplace, P4 stated:

> A few more programs that are more for newcomers. They do have programs, but … if you are between the age of 32 to 34, what are you going to do for the in between ones who are from 35 to 40 or 35 to 45 years. You need to do something for them. They should have some kind of programs that are more for the in between age groups. (P4)

**Requirement of Higher Qualifications and Canadian Work Experience**

A few participants reported the requirement for higher Canadian qualifications and Canadian work experience as barriers to their future career success. P9, for example, shared that not having a higher qualification in accounting acted as a barrier to her obtaining higher job positions, “A lot of people, when they’re looking for an accounting job, they have higher
qualifications like CGA…. For a lot of higher positions, they [employers] ask people for that certificate, but I don’t have it.”

P9 added:

That’s the only concern. Maybe in the future, 10 years later, when I’m looking for a job, maybe I cannot find it, because people’s qualifications are getting higher, and higher. If I cannot keep up to date, that means I’m out. (P9)

P4 indicated that employers do not hire immigrant skilled workers who do not have Canadian work experience:

If you don't have a Canadian qualification, the only thing that employers point to is, “Oh, you don’t have a Canadian qualification,” or, “You don’t have Canadian experience.” That’s the first thing that they point out. But in spite of getting Canadian qualification, now they say, “You know what? You don’t have Canadian work experience in that particular qualification.” (P4)

Financial Constraints

A few participants noted financial constraints as a barrier to their future career development. When P4 was asked whether there were any factors that challenged her belief that she could succeed in her career, she indicated that her financial stress led to her decreased confidence in pursuing her career development:

It’s just this financial thing. If it is not there, if I know that I have some kind of a back up financially, say I put in this much money and I know if I work hard I am going to get something out of it, that would give me more confidence to do more work. (P4)

P6, who was working as a supply teacher, shared that going to job interviews took away from time that she could keep accepting supply-teaching jobs, which led to a reduced income. She described no longer having the motivation to apply for jobs to further her career in Canada:

I don’t want [to apply for a job]…. If they call me for interview, they call just to fill their five people because they need [to interview] five people and I don’t go to my school, I lose my money from the school. If I have to go for interview, I lose my job, my one day because I am paid by the day. I am not applying because if I go to apply, then I am one of those five, but I am not one who is being hired. (P6)
Attitude about Future Prospects and Strategies to Improve Career Development

When the participants discussed their future career prospects, some common themes emerged that reflected their attitudes and perspectives. The most common themes that emerged included confidence about their future career development, perseverance, and flexibility and openness. Some participants were considering additional retraining or were currently undergoing retraining in order to improve their career prospects.

Confident about Future Career

Many participants shared that they were confident that they would do well in their careers in the future. This confidence appeared to stem from perceived past career transition success, satisfaction with their current employment, and their belief that there were good career opportunities ahead of them. Participants, such as P10 and P11, shared that they experienced success in their career transition in Canada and thus felt confident about their future career prospects. When P10 was asked why she felt confident about her career development prospects, she explained, “My successful experience, my soft skills, and my attitude. I always believe and I say, ‘They hire you for your technical skill, fire for your soft skill’.” P11 similarly shared, “I work with a great group and it’s a perfect match for what I have learned and what I have been trained in. I see a bright future in it.” P18, who also experienced a positive career development thus far as well as financial stability, felt confident about his future career prospects. He shared, “Because my career now is underway and my salary can match to other people, so we don’t need to worry about income. And I almost don’t need to worry about my job. I am always confident that I can find a job.”

Participants, such as P14 and P7, expressed that they were hopeful about future career opportunities. P14, who was working as a software developer, shared, “I think it [future career] would be hopeful. I still think there’s a bright future.” P14 explained, “Because you can feel the
job market. I also look at the job market, because I have to keep an open eye on it. So, it’s still growing, not rapidly, but there is still good opportunity everywhere.”

Perseverance

The theme of perseverance and self-determination emerged in most of the narratives provided by the participants when they were speaking about their future career concerns. They described a determination to continue improving and further developing their careers through different plans of action. Participants, such as P1 and P17, reflected a sense of self-determination to keep hoping and trying despite the barriers and lack of success that they had experienced. When P17 was asked how she felt about her future career development prospects, she stated, “I didn’t keep as much hope for that as I used to, but even so, I’m still looking for work.” P1 similarly demonstrated a sense of resilience in his response: “My previous experience tells me that I have to push myself. I have to work hard. Also, the stars are changing. You read your horoscope today and tomorrow maybe the stars put something in the right place.”

Many participants stated that they were considering or planning to obtain additional Canadian retraining in the future in the hopes of improving their work-life in Canada. For example, P19 shared that she was planning to pursue additional retraining in order to remain competitive in the job market. She said, “I believe that I have to continue taking more training. That’s the only way.” She explained, “Because it’s more competitive. Every time, when we apply for jobs, more people have more qualifications, more high education. So, if I don’t upgrade myself, they’re going to say, ‘Okay, you are not qualified for this’.” P2 was considering the option of pursuing additional retraining in order to acquire a higher-level job position. She stated, “I am very open or I like to get retraining any time or to educate myself for any future position. I would like to do it.” She elaborated:

I think that I need to discuss school programs with my manager – What needs to be done for that level of [job] position, and what I will be looking for. I think that there are so
many programs. Specifically, I explained that my goal is to be a clinical project manager and my plan is for now to first of all discuss this program with my manager. (P2)

P5 stated that he was considering obtaining more retraining in order to further his knowledge within his field of interest. He noted, “I just touched the entry level only. I understand the degree is important and the level of education as well.” P12, on the other hand, shared that he was planning on undergoing additional retraining in inventory control in order to improve his performance at work and said, “I try to do my best to apply my previous analysis skill to this new environment. I try to save money for this company.”

P10 shared her desire to continue to pursue her designation in order to further develop her career within her field. She said, “Now, to grow in the field, I still have to have the designation, which is accounting designation.” P8’s strategy was to keep his skills and network updated to continue to develop his career:

I still feel the same way as I felt when I came here many years back. I think it’s still not easy to get a job. I have to be up to speed in all the areas and always approach job markets as a new immigrant, which is like a fight. I cannot be complacent [and say], “Oh now I know everything.” That is not the case. I have to keep refreshing my network and skills. (P8)

Other participants, such as P17, shared that they plan on continuing to search for employment opportunities to improve their work-life. P17 noted, “I’m still trying. I’m still looking for work, looking for opportunities. I’m still working hard to prepare my resume and interview skills, and talking with my friends. So, I’m still working hard towards finding another job.” P5 shared that he is focusing on his goals as well as his own strength and he added:

I know myself much better. I have some aptitudes and strengths, and I don’t see any encounters telling me not to do this anymore, because it is not about laziness. There were maybe some difficulties or my personal kind of barriers, but now I know I have to move forward. (P5)
Flexibility and Openness

Some of the participants held a flexible and open attitude towards their future careers. For example, P4 and P19 reflected a sense of flexibility in changing their goals and attitude to cope with the situation. When P4 was asked what she thinks her career will be like in 5 years, she stated, “To be very frank, I never think so much ahead. I’m a person who lives in this time. When any problem occurs at that time, I just take care of it at that time.” P19 echoed, “Nothing is certain these days. Today we have a job, maybe tomorrow, we don’t. Maybe we have to switch or change careers again” and “I’m very open-minded person. If the situation goes bad, we have to find something to make us busy.” P5 and P20’s responses showed openness in holding a different type of job depending on the situation. P5 shared, “I like to work with people, so if not a company, then just my self-employed business. It’s okay, but as I said, I have to be well prepared to do the job.” P20 stated, “Maybe I prioritize to do something else. My priorities are going to change and I don’t think that I will be in security anymore. Maybe security is not as important as we thought before.” He further noted, “I don’t know what technology is going to come.” When asked what field he will work in, P20 responded, “Maybe still in IT but I don’t know” and “I am very open-minded. You should be. Must be, actually, not should be. Must be.”

Advice for Immigrants, Lessons, and Factors for Success

The participants were all asked to reflect on and share the lessons that they had learned through their career journeys, the factors they learned to be pivotal for career success in Canada as an immigrant professional, and share any advice that they would like to provide to future newcomers. The participants were very gracious in offering many words of wisdom and in their reflections. The following themes emerged: acceptance of barriers, self-determination and perseverance; making their own decisions and choices; the importance of taking action; openness and flexibility; obtaining Canadian retraining; obtaining Canadian work experience;
acculturation; the importance of connections and networking; social supports; and the usefulness of their pre-Canada education and work experience.

Acceptance of Barriers

The reflections of some of the participants contained the theme of acceptance of the difficulties and barriers that they faced during their Canadian career development. This theme of acceptance appeared to be the precursor of some of the other themes that emerged regarding the important factors that facilitate a successful career development in Canada, such as self-determination and perseverance, and openness and flexibility.

Participants, such as P7 and P11, noted the importance of acceptance of difficulties, being patient, and continuing to pursue their career development. Specifically, P7 shared that it is more helpful to accept the existence of racism and sexism, and to continue working towards her career goals. She shared, “Take it [racism and sexism] up as a challenge. Do your best. I talk about racism, but if I keep thinking about it, I’ll never get anywhere in life.” P11 similarly learned that it would be more helpful to accept the barriers and be patient:

I think I just have to be patient. At the beginning, maybe I wasn’t very patient. I was just waiting. I just wanted everything to happen fast. But I have to be patient and wait for just decisions. But that’s the only thing. I don’t think I would change anything. (P11)

P5 advised newcomers to accept their circumstances in Canada and let go of their pre-Canada achievements in order to pursue their career development:

Try to take everything, the best from your past experience, and maybe forget about past achievements…. Bring some of the best things from your culture, from your personal experience, and try to take the best of everything from your circle of friends and local culture to make your future better and better. (P5)

Self-Determination and Perseverance

In most of the participants’ reported career transition lessons and advice to newcomers, the theme of self-determination and perseverance emerged. For instance, when P19 was asked
what factors have been the most influential in helping her to succeed in her career development within Canada, she succinctly stated, “Self-determination.”

The participants also noted the importance of focusing on working hard towards the goal and not giving up. P9, for instance, noted that her honest hard work was one of the most influential in helping her succeed in her career development:

I know a lot of people that are not very honest. When they started here and they really wanted to have a shortcut. A lot of people, they want a shortcut, but I don’t think life will give you a shortcut. Just work hard, do whatever you should do, go straight, and set up your goal. Then you will achieve it. (P9)

P16 and P18 similarly shared the same belief that continuous effort and not giving up were important factors that could lead to a successful work-life in Canada. P16 stated, “Stay in this field, and keep going.” P18 echoed, “Don’t listen to immigrants because our age is not so young, but don’t think, ‘We’re not so young’. We can compete with the young people, but sometimes we have to take advantage of ourselves. Don’t give up so quickly.”

Participants, such as P8 and P14, shared that having confidence in their own abilities and maintaining a positive and goal-focused attitude was important in facilitating their career development. Upon reflecting on his career transition journey in Canada, P8 noted that he learned the importance of having confidence in his own abilities. When he was asked what important career-related lessons he learned and whether there was anything that he would have done differently, he shared:

You have to have confidence in yourself and your ability. Irrespective of whether you are an immigrant or local, I think that the market treats everybody the same. Basically, you need to have self-confidence and go for it. That’s what I learned. I think I could have done something differently. I could have had the self-confidence in my first few years after coming here. (P8)

When he was asked what advice he would provide newcomers, P14 similarly commented on the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and focusing on one’s own abilities and goals:
First, don’t be frustrated after landing. Always be confident. Don’t just complain – complain about yourself, complain about the country, complain about other people. You can’t do that. The most important thing is to think about what you have and then what you’re looking for. (P14)

_Make Own Choices and Decisions_

Another theme that emerged from the reflections of most of the participants was the importance of making their own decisions and choices. The participants described the unreliability of the opinions and suggestions given by others as well as the importance of making their decisions based on their own goals and intentions.

Participants, such as P17 and P4, noted the importance of not being swayed by the opinions of others and to rely on their own decision-making. P17’s advice to newcomers included: “Be smart. Be selective” and he explained, “In terms of what job you pick, do your own research, your own homework, and don’t waste your time with the so-called job consultants. Once you sense that they’re not helpful, jump back, step back, and find other ways.” P4 similarly learned through her Canadian career transition and development experience not to base her decisions and choices on the advice or opinions of fellow immigrant individuals. She stated, “Even now, I have seen people tell me, ‘Do this, do that.’ But, ultimately, I think we should make our own decisions rather than listening to others.” She further explained:

For a lot of people, what happens, is they come down here, and obviously in Canada you have more immigrants than local Canadians, and everybody you talk to they give their own opinion…. If you are talking to 10 people, and they had a bad or negative experience, they are only going to give you a negative opinion and only two of them are going to give you a positive opinion. That in itself is going to demotivate you because you are getting bad ideas from the majority of the people whom you talk to. (P4)

When the participants were asked to speak about the role of self-made choices versus chance occurrences within their career development journey, they described the important role of making decisions based on their own goals and intentions. Although, they acknowledged the presence of chance events, they emphasized the importance of deciding whether to take the
chance or not based on their own goals. For example, when P2 described the role of choice versus chance within her career, she shared that she had made her own career-related decisions based on her career goals:

I really chose this profession as the only profession because now from this moment, I think that there is no other profession that will be good enough for me. I think that I made my decision by looking at a similar field as the one in my country and I controlled that. I found the profession that I can do here and also to help me use all my knowledge that I had from my country or university education there. (P2)

P12 shared that it was his decision to pursue retraining and that he was happy with his choice. He stated, “I can say that’s my own choice…. Unlike some young kids, there’s not any pressure from my parents, so that’s my choice” and said, “I’m happy with that.” P7 described having made decisions throughout her career development based on her long-term career goals:

I think that after I decided to change my path, it has been my choice throughout. I have never held a job that I just held for the sake of it. Even in my current position, or before, when I started my career in this particular field, I did not accept a permanent job because it was permanent. I accepted contracts because I wanted to do the work that the contract offered. (P7)

Even for participants, such as P18, who confirmed that chance had played a role in their career development in Canada, they shared that they had made an executive decision on whether they were going to take the chance opportunity based on their goals. For example, P18 described the interplay between chance events and his own decision-making:

Chance, yes. I choose because I always focus on my purpose. I don’t just watch the job I can get at that time. I just watch – over 3 years later or 5 years later, what kind of position I needed to get. So, I just prepare for this, and then the chance always comes. (P18)

Planned Self-Action

The theme of the importance of taking action based on well thought out plans emerged from responses from several participants. They noted the importance of doing the appropriate research, such as job market and retraining-related research, in order to inform their actions. P13, for instance, noted the importance of planning in succeeding in one’s career development in
Canada. He noted, “I learned that if you plan for something and you invest as much as you should, you can succeed.” Participants, such as P1 and P13, advised new immigrant individuals to do job market research to inform their plans and action taking during their Canadian career journey:

Look at the market first. Look at the job requirements in the market. For example, if you see in the market that they need people, let’s say computer technicians… and you see yourself as a computer technician, then go take this course. (P1)

Career-wise, it’s better to do the research before coming than to do the research after. So, know what you’re going to deal with before being in the middle of it. Doing trial and error always has costs, and you’re going to waste your time doing it wrong. So, learn what you want to do before coming. Do the research before. (P13)

P20 advised newcomers to speak with individuals who live in Canada to gain accurate information about job markets and Canadian education:

They [newcomers] should talk to someone who lives here and meet in person if they can. It’s not easy, but if they can find someone who lives in Canada and maybe temporarily in Turkey or Greece or wherever they are. If they have a chance they can meet and ask questions. On the Internet there are a lot of things that are written but they give you a little bit…. Experience is more important than what is on the website or what you read on the government website. Of course, all the governments, agencies, colleges, universities are going to say they are the latest and greatest. They are not going to tell you the other parts of it. (P20)

Openness and Flexibility

The theme of openness and flexibility emerged from the responses that the participants provided regarding factors that are important to facilitate successful career development. The participants talked about the need for flexibility in the field of work that they pursued, openness to retraining, and to adapt to change.

P17, for example, advised new immigrants to be flexible to change. She said, “Change is necessary. Don’t believe that you don’t have to change. Everybody has to change to adapt to the new environment.” Other participants, such as P2 and P3, more specifically discussed the importance of being flexible in the field of work that immigrants take. P2 shared, “My advice,
unfortunately, is open mindedness or thinking differently, which was what I was taught before I came here, that it is not possible to be physician here.” P3 echoed:

I think the person should be open to different opportunities and not to be overly obsessed with what one had done back home, because it differs in different part of the world. You have to be open to different career options and to have to study all over again or at least to change profession. (P3)

Participants, such as P10, noted the importance of being open to gaining Canadian retraining. When P10 was asked what factor had been most influential in helping her to succeed in her career development, she answered, “It’s my experience and my confidence and my openness to learn more. I was open to get myself trained, so that also helped me.” P7 shared that through her career development journey in Canada, she learned the importance of being flexible in taking different strategies to pursue her career development:

If something is not working out, try something different. I think you should take it as a challenge or a chance to do something that you have always wanted to do, something new that you have wanted to explore…. I encourage people to try different things. (P7)

Obtain Canadian Retraining and Canadian Work Experience

Many participants discussed the importance of obtaining Canadian retraining as a means to further their careers in Canada. The participants spoke about the need to retrain in order to obtain employment, to land the employment of their desire, to gain language skills, and to bridge the cultural gap. P11, for example, noted the necessity of gaining retraining in order to obtain a job as an immigrant professional in Canada:

I think the training that I’ve done [was an important factor for career success], because I couldn’t get this job without doing my Masters. So I’m very happy that I came here to do my Masters first and then I got the job. If I’d been here just looking for a job, I wouldn’t get it easily. (P11)

P16 further advised newcomers to take retraining in order to avoid having to hold survival jobs. He stated, “I think for the new immigrants, if they are in a good financial situation, go to college or university directly. Don’t waste time in the survival jobs, that won’t help.” Other participants
such as P18, for instance, advised immigrant skilled workers to obtain Canadian retraining in order to regain their pre-Canada professional position:

I just tell them [newcomers] that if they want to get licensed, get to know more. To get back to the position you were holding in China, you have to have the license. How can they get the license? The training is necessary. (P18)

P16 noted the acculturation value and opportunity to improve English language skills through retraining. When he was asked whether there was anything that he would have done differently if he could go back to when he first arrived in Canada, he stated, “Go to school first” and added, “Retraining. While you learn some new things, you also improve your language and learn the culture.”

A few participants also noted the usefulness of obtaining Canadian work experience in helping them obtain employment in Canada. For example, when P16 was asked what factors had been the most influential in helping him to succeed in his career development within Canada, he shared, “Work experience. You stay in this field and keep going.” P2 indicated that it was both her Canadian retraining and Canadian work experience through her volunteering position that landed her current job:

After that I was still applying for my real job, because this was a volunteer position. It so happened that this department or this employer called me for this position. I think that it was good enough [for me] to have together my retraining diploma, Canadian experience, and a very specific reference from the colleagues. (P2)

Acculturate

The theme of the importance of bridging the cultural gap emerged in the responses of several participants. They discussed the importance of learning the Canadian culture and gaining language competence in order to maximize their career development. P19, for example, learned through her career development journey in Canada that racism was present in the workplace and that it was important for her to learn about the Canadian culture:
The racism is very, very deep in the work environment…. In order to understand other people, we need to educate ourselves a little bit more, because wherever we go, racism is very huge…. Even though I have my cross-cultural competence, not enough. I need a little bit more. (P19)

P17 advised newcomers to participate in community events to bridge the cultural gap. She advised, “Make up the culture, the cultural gap” and added, “Go out. Join the events. Go out and participate in activities in the community centre, public activities, and talk with people.” Other participants, such as P3, learned the importance of obtaining a good level of English proficiency. When she was asked what some of the most important career-related lessons she learned were and whether there was anything that she would have done differently, she shared:

There is something that I would have done differently in terms of studying English back home more and more intensely…. If I have to immigrate again, I would make sure that I know and really invest time into language because I thought, “Oh English, it will be easy for me,” but it’s not easy. Maybe it’s easy for kids but for older people, it’s not easy, and it doesn’t come simply. (P3)

Professional Connections and Networking

For several participants, seeking out professional connections and networking was important in helping them with their career development in Canada. For instance, while sharing her concerns about her future career development, P4 shared the importance of having the appropriate connections. She stated, “If you have a proper network and you have proper contacts, doing something here is way easier than compared to back home.” P12 advised new immigrants to approach the appropriate professional association of their field to aid their career development. He advised, “Try to find some association in your field. Even though we have to pay some membership fee, compared to what you can gain, or you may potentially gain, that’s worth it.” P7 learned through her career development journey that it would have been an easier process if she had a mentor from her professional field:

Now I understand how important it is to have a mentor in the same field that is guiding you one way or the other…. I think that [not having a mentor] was what led to my initial
failure, and that is why I had to get retrained. If I had a mentor who had guided me properly, I probably wouldn’t have had to go through all of this. (P7)

P2 mentioned the value of having professional references during job searching:

It so happened that this department or this employer called me for this position and I think that it was good enough [for me] to have together my retraining diploma, Canadian experience and a very specific reference from the colleagues. (P2)

P2 also found it helpful to obtain career-related information from her social network:

I used any chance to speak with people about getting a job, about their experiences, what is the best way or how you can get the job? Because at the beginning I didn’t know the way for me to get hired…. My friends, neighbors, teachers, helped me find additional online sources. (P2)

Social Supports

Upon reflecting on their career development journey in Canada, some participants mentioned the importance of social supports. Specifically, they mentioned the importance of support from their spouse, family, and friends. For example, upon reflecting on the helpful factors that aided in her career development in Canada, P4 stated:

I have a very understanding partner, who understands and knows that I am not a family kind of person, and he has accepted me the way that I am. I am not in that kind of stress where I have to take care of the family or anything. I have the freedom of giving more importance to my career. (P4)

P3 and P15 shared the importance of family support. When discussing the factors that helped her in her career development, P3 noted, “My family, of course. They helped, they supported me and were always making everything good when I had to study and not bother me.” P15 echoed, “Family support. You can always trust your family. They are the people who will always support you.” P5 mentioned the support of his friends as a factor that aided his career development. He said, “I think I was maybe lucky enough to have some supportive friends and meet some interesting people who can inspire me.”
Pre-Canada Education and Work Experience

Many participants shared that they found their pre-Canada education and work experience to have been helpful in their career development journey. Specifically, they became aware of transferable skills from their previous experience and training that aided their performance in their current Canadian employment. P2, for example, noted that although her Pre-Canada education and work experience did not help her land employment, they made the Canadian job easy for her. When discussing the influence of her past work experience on her career transition, P2 said, “Not helpful for getting a job. I learned the process here on how to prepare a resume and prepare myself for interview. But my education or my work experience together makes this job very easy for me.” In fact, P18 advised future immigrant professionals to hold on to their pre-Canada work experience and to pursue their original field of work, except for doctors:

The great lesson for the new immigrants is that they need to focus on their previous experience. Don’t think about Canada as being totally different. Actually, it’s not different. Every society needs different occupations, different engineers. Doctors maybe are different. It is too hard. But for engineers, I think in Canada or China, [there’s] no difference…. If they just think of moving to another job, another career, they will find it more difficult later. (P18)

P17 also noted that her pre-Canada work experience provided her with confidence and shared, “Because I have such [work] experience and other people didn’t, they [employers] gave me something to do. It made me feel a little bit different than other people. A little bit important.”
Chapter 10 Discussion

This final chapter summarizes the results of the current study in relation to existing literature regarding immigrant retraining and career development experiences. The results will be discussed under four main sections, which correspond with the five chapters in which the results were presented. The first section discusses the key themes presented in Chapters 5 and 6, and the remaining three sections discuss the key themes presented in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, respectively. The four main sections are as follows: 1) pre-immigration and initial Canadian experience; 2) retraining planning and experience; 3) retraining outcome and post-retraining employment experience; and 4) future career concerns and lessons learned. The overarching major themes that were repeated throughout the participant narratives, including the initial employment, retraining, and post-retraining phases, are then summarized and discussed. The implications of the findings of the study for an Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development are then presented. Next, the implications of the study are provided. Finally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Summary of Present Findings

Pre-immigration and Initial Canadian Experience

Previous literature has found that immigrant professionals migrate with the intention and expectation of furthering their career development given their high qualifications, pre-migration work experiences, and having passed the immigration selection criteria as skilled workers (Chen, 2008; Grant, 2007). Consistent with the literature, the participants from the current study reported to have immigrated to Canada with the intentions to improve their work-life, escape the poor economic and political environment of their home country and improve their quality of life in general. Some participants also looked forward to pursuing higher education to further their career development and to gain more life experience in another country. Their pre-Canada work
experiences were reported to involve both positive and negative aspects, as one would expect of work experience in any country. All of the participants had at least 3 years of work experience prior to their migration and most of them experienced a positive attitude towards their work as a result of their sense of career identity within their field of interest as well as their sense of accomplishment. They also enjoyed the opportunity to learn, the satisfactory salary level, and the social networks that they developed through their employment. The negative work experience that the participants in this study shared included work stress, negative work environment, instability of the job market in their country, and the lack of opportunities for growth at their workplace. Only one participant, P5, shared that he had wanted to change his field of work to one that he found more meaningful.

Given the participants’ attitudes towards their pre-migration employment, and their veteran work experience and qualifications, it is not surprising that many of them felt confident in their Canadian career transition and development. About half of the participants had anticipated that their career transition was going to be difficult. Specifically, they expected some difficulty acquiring employment or re-entering their original field of work. In terms of expectations for retraining, the participants were split in whether they anticipated having to obtain Canadian retraining. Those participants who did not expect retraining were confident that they would be able to find work in their original profession due to their pre-Canada qualifications and work experience. The participants who anticipated retraining expected that it would be necessary to obtain employment, re-enter their professional field, and/or learn the relevant Canadian-specific regulations in the workplace. Those participants who expected retraining believed that they would enjoy the learning experience but had anticipated the need to adapt to the new culture and language.
Contrary to their expectations, immigrant professionals have been found to experience many systemic career development barriers and sociocultural barriers leading to unemployment or underemployment (Fang at al., 2013; Heilbrunn et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Consistent with the findings of previous studies, the participants in this study reported to have experienced language and acculturation barriers during their initial transition experience in Canada as well as during their job search process (Fang et al., 2013; Hakak et al., 2010; Horverak et al., 2013; Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Shan, 2013; Sinacore et al., 2009). Previous findings also showed that immigrant skilled workers experienced discrimination and a lack of recognition of their foreign credentials and work experience from the host country employers, which is also consistent with the findings in this study (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Fang et al., 2013; Horverak et al., 2013; Shan, 2009). The participants also experienced other adaptation difficulties, such as initial settlement issues (e.g. finding housing, navigating the city), and financial difficulties during their initial transition period. Isolation and a lack of social supportive network were also experienced as transition and job search difficulties, which is consistent with findings in the literature (Hakak et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009). Consistent with previous findings, the impact of these career development barriers were found to negatively impact the participants’ mental health, and lead to isolation and a negative self-concept (Aroian & Norris, 2003; Chen, 2008; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). The participants in this study also experienced a negative impact on their families and some participants became divorced as a result of the stress of the career development barriers in Canada.

In the face of these barriers, the participants in this study, consistent with previous findings, took up job search actions (Fang et al., 2013; Gardner, 2002). Specifically, they sought out resources in the community, underwent networking, worked to improve their English fluency, revised their resumes, and obtained volunteering experience in order to improve their
job search prospects. Additionally, participants were found to have coped with the barriers using similar strategies found in the literature: by taking on an attitude of mindful acceptance of these difficulties, reminding themselves of their freedom to make career decisions, focusing on their intentions behind their actions or long-term goals, persevering in the face of difficulty, and keeping an open mind or being flexible in adapting to the situation (Blustein, 2001; Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Hakak et al., 2010; Khawaja et al., 2010; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008).

Many of the participants in this study, much like immigrant skilled workers from previous studies, had negative initial work experiences (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Esses et al., 2006; Purkiss, 2006; Reitz, 2005; Schenker, 2010; Shan, 2013). They shared that they held jobs that were too physically demanding, low paying, below their level of qualifications, within a different field of work from their original professions, and that they experienced discrimination. However, several participants shared that they were able to remain in their original or similar field of work, that they enjoyed their jobs and the opportunity to learn, and that they gained social connections through their jobs. According to the participants, the meaning or intention behind taking their initial jobs included financial survival, obtaining Canadian work experience, re-entering their original professional field, adjusting to the Canadian work environment, and saving money to pursue retraining. In essence, the participants worked as a means to further develop their careers in Canada.

Retraining Planning and Experience

Previous findings in the literature have shown immigrants to obtain retraining in order to combat the non-recognition of their foreign credentials and work experience, as well as to enter the Canadian labour market, re-enter their field or profession, and continue developing their career (Grant, 2007; Shan, 2009). The same results were found in the current study – all of the participants pursued Canadian retraining and their reasons for doing so included: to obtain decent
employment, re-enter their original professional field, improve their salary, maintain their current job, and acculturate. The participants saw retraining as a means to avoid having to hold survival jobs, obtain a job of interest, gain job security, and regain their original professional job. In terms of acculturation, they believed that retraining would allow them to gain Canadian cultural knowledge, improve their English fluency, and learn Canadian-specific knowledge related to their field or workplace. Most participants shared that they experienced social influences for obtaining retraining. Specifically, their families, professional network (e.g. employers and job coaches), and social network (e.g. friends and other immigrants) had advised them to pursue retraining.

In terms of the type of retraining the participants pursued, they were split into thirds with one third having pursued retraining within their original professional field of education or work, another third retraining within a field that was similar to their original educational background or work experience, and the last third retraining in a different field. Their decision-making regarding the type or field of retraining was reported by the participants to be influenced by several factors including: their pre-Canada work experience and qualifications; job market and prospects; duration of the retraining program; suggestions from friends; their own field of interest; and their family members. Half of the participants shared that financial constraints and their limited English fluency were barriers to their retraining planning.

The participants engaged in several steps during their retraining planning. First, they again went through acceptance of the barriers, such as isolation, the need to start from scratch, etc. The participants acknowledged their freedom to make their own decisions regarding their retraining and the importance of their own action-taking and initiative. They were cognitively flexible and kept an open mind about the field of retraining and field of work as well as reframed retraining as an opportunity and positive challenge. They then took physical action in researching
retraining programs and courses by consulting with the program staff, searching on the Internet, and speaking with friends. Some participants subsequently reported having to fulfill prerequisites to obtain admissions to the retraining program.

The participants in this study recounted both positive and negative retraining experiences. Consistent with previous literature, the participants in this study reported to have enjoyed gaining knowledge and experience, the subject of retraining, and developing social connections (Beynon et al., 2004; Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007; Lerner et al., 2005). They also enjoyed the positive learning environment, Canadian teaching and learning style, being able to use their knowledge acquired from their pre-Canada education, and gaining self-confidence through the retraining experience. Similar to findings from previous studies, the participants shared that their negative experiences during their retraining included thwarted career development, financial stress, difficulty balancing retraining and work, language barriers, and discrimination (Chen, 2008; Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007; Yost & Lucas, 2002). In addition, some participants also felt that they did not learn much, disliked the teaching style, and experienced isolation.

The coping strategies that the participants reported to have used during the retraining period were consistent with the ones that they reported to have used during the initial transition period. Most participants described focusing on their career development goals, such as their long-term career goals and their shorter-term retraining goals, in order to perform well. Many participants also reported being cognitively flexible and open to change. In particular, they described reframing their retraining experience as a positive opportunity to learn, being open to a different teaching and learning styles, and being generally open to new concepts and ways of approaching their goals. Many also shared acceptance of the necessity to obtain retraining as a means to cope with the career barriers. Holding on to their pre-migration career identity, gaining
confidence from their previous work experience and education, as well as seeking social supports were reported by several participants as being helpful during their retraining. Finally, many of the participants in this study also reported to have taken up self-care activities, such as exercising, engaging in hobbies, and socializing as coping strategies. Most participants shared that their social networks and connections offered them external sources of support during their retraining. They received emotional, financial, and practical supports from several social sources including their friends, families, retraining organizations and staff, employers, and government financial aid.

Retraining Outcome and Post-Retraining Employment Experience

Findings from this present study match those of previous studies in terms of the benefits that the participants reported to have experienced as a result of their Canadian retraining (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2005; Gang & Stuart, 2000; Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Lerner et al., 2005; Shan, 2009; Zeng & Xie, 2004). All of the participants shared that they experienced some form of positive outcome from their Canadian retraining. Almost all of the participants shared that their retraining facilitated their career development in Canada. Specifically, the retraining led to job offers, employment, improved employment opportunities, promotions, increased salary, or re-entry into their original field of work. The retraining also provided participants with the opportunity to acculturate by gaining Canadian-specific knowledge related to their field of profession, learning about the Canadian workplace, the chance to improve their communication and learn culturally-appropriate social skills. These learning and acculturation opportunities as well as the chance to recognize their own strengths (e.g. their own flexibility, ability to learn, fund of knowledge, and ability to contribute to their workplace or community) through the retraining process provided the participants with increased self-confidence and sense
of self-worth. Some of the participants also experienced the benefit of developing a social network through their retraining.

Many participants in this study also shared that they experienced some negative outcomes as a result of their retraining, some of which echoed findings from previous studies. For example, some of the participants in this study also shared that they had sacrificed their finances and time (Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007). Several participants shared that their retraining did not help them obtain stable or full-time employment or jobs in the field of their interest, and that they felt discouraged about their career prospects as a result. All of the participants who shared this sentiment (P1, P4, P5, P6, P14, and P17) underwent diploma or certificate retraining programs, with the exception of P8 who obtained a second MBA degree. Several participants also experienced a lack of bridging between their retraining and employment opportunities. Some participants did not find the learning experience useful because they either already possessed the skills that they were taught in the retraining program or they did not find the teaching to be practical enough.

The participants’ narratives regarding their career development process after having completed their retraining reflected similar themes as the themes that emerged from their narratives about their coping during their initial transition phase, retraining planning, and retraining coping. Specifically, the themes that emerged during their post-retraining stage included acceptance of difficulties such as the poor job market and their poor work environment. The theme of perseverance also emerged. The participants described focusing on the positive, continuing to take action even in the face of barriers, and being determined to succeed in their Canadian career development. They described being cognitively flexible and open to change, such as being open to a new career path as well as seeing both the positive and negative aspects of their circumstances. Similar to the previous stages of their career development journey, the
participants also took physical action to improve their career prospects. Specifically, they again engaged in job searching through researching, networking, seeking out job resources, and applying for jobs. They also obtained Canadian work experience through jobs, internships, or volunteering. Nearly half of the participants pursued additional retraining to improve their knowledge, skills, and career options. Interestingly, several of the participants who underwent additional retraining were also the participants who shared that their retraining did not help them obtain their desired jobs, which again demonstrated perseverance.

At the time of the interview, most participants were employed either on a part-time or full-time basis except for P1 who was unemployed and P4 who was self-employed as a freelance pharmaceutical consultant and market researcher. When the participants described their current employment, they shared both positive and negative experiences. The positive aspects of their jobs included improved confidence through their work, utilization of their skills, interest in their field of work, good work environment, financial security, and low stress levels. Some of the negative employment factors they experienced included job level dissatisfaction, a lack of opportunity to use their skills, a lack of job security, dissatisfactory pay, job specific stressors, poor work environment, and isolation.

**Future Career Concerns and Lessons Learned**

Despite the barriers that they faced throughout their career transition and re-development, most of the participants in this study continued to strive for improvement in their career development. They shared career goals that included obtaining higher level employment, acquiring job and financial security, continuing to develop within their original professional field, obtaining more meaningful employment, and pursuing entrepreneurship. Several of the participants were content with their career situation and hoped to maintain their current employment. Interestingly, these participants (P2, P3, P9, P12, P16, and P18) obtained retraining
and employment in a field that was similar or the same as their pre-Canada profession. Therefore, being able to re-enter their professional fields, which provided them with self-identity, provided them with satisfaction in their career situation.

When the participants were invited to share their concerns regarding foreseeable career development barriers, they reported concerns that were consistent with the barriers that they experienced during the initial stage of their career transition. These barriers included uncertainty about available employment opportunities, acculturation difficulties (including cross-cultural differences and language barriers), a lack of supports (including social, systematic, and professional networks), requirement of higher Canadian qualifications and Canadian work experience, and financial constraints. These reported concerns illuminates the ubiquitous nature of the lack of supports for immigrant skilled-workers and the career development barriers that they face. A lack of systemic and structural supports leaves immigrant professionals to continue to struggle with the same career development barriers throughout their career journeys. Another possible factor contributing to these career development concerns could be that the immigrant professionals learned about these career development barriers through their previous experiences during their initial career transition period. In the terms of the SCCT model (Lent et al., 1994), the career transition barriers are some of the background factors that could influence the immigrant professionals’ outcome expectations or estimations of the probability of positive or negative career development outcomes.

In the face of these potential future career barriers, many participants were confident that they would be able to succeed in their career endeavors due to the career successes that they experienced thus far, satisfaction with their current employment, and the belief that good career opportunity lied ahead. This is consistent with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), which states that an increase in self-confidence or self-efficacy increases motivation to pursue career goals. For
immigrant individuals, obtaining credentials provide them with a sense of accomplishment, which increases their beliefs about their abilities and provides them with the motivation to further pursue their career goals (Chen, 2002). Consistent with the findings in the earlier phases of the participants’ career development, the themes of perseverance and self-determination towards improving their careers, and cognitive flexibility and openness towards new career goals emerged. In fact, many participants were considering or planning to pursue additional Canadian retraining with the intention of remaining competitive in the job market, and improving their work-life and job prospects. Some participants shared that they were open to changing their career goals to adapt to their circumstances and barriers. For example, some participants were open to starting up their own businesses or taking part-time positions.

Upon reflecting on their career development and retraining journeys, the participants shared factors that they experienced as being important in helping them succeed and cope, and offered these considerations as advice to newcomers. The participants’ lessons and advice echoed themes that had emerged throughout their narratives, from the initial transition period in Canada to retraining and post-retraining stages, when they spoke about planning and coping during each of those stages. These important themes included internal micro-level actions (psychological processes) as well as external macro-level action-taking (external behaviours within their social context).

The internal micro-level actions included: acceptance of the barriers, self-determination and perseverance, making career decisions, and openness and flexibility. The participants shared the necessity of first coming to terms with the difficulties and career development barriers. They then shared that persevering through the difficulties and being self-determined to succeed by focusing on their career goals were important factors to their Canadian career development. They learned the importance of taking their career decisions into their own hands, making intentional
decisions based on their own goals, and not basing their decisions solely on the opinions of others. Cognitive flexibility and openness, such as being open to a change in the field of employment or retraining as well as being open to taking different career development strategies, such as pursuing retraining, were experienced by the participants to be important in facilitating a successful career development.

The important external actions that were deemed to be important and helpful in their Canadian career development included: planning, obtaining Canadian retraining and work experience, bridging the cultural gap, and developing professional and social networks. The participants saw the importance of well thought-out plans through research of the job market and retraining programs to inform their actions. They found planning to be important even at the pre-migration stage. Obtaining Canadian retraining and Canadian work experience were deemed necessary to acquire employment, gain language skills, and bridge the cultural gap. Participants also acknowledged the importance of acculturation through learning about the cross-cultural differences and improving their English skills. Developing professional and social networks were found to provide helpful supports in their career development. Lastly, the participants experienced their pre-Canada education and work experience as having offered them transferrable skills and knowledge that aided their performance in their current Canadian employment.

That the participants noted the usefulness of their pre-Canada education and work experience offers a new insight into the immigrant professional career transition and development process. Despite the fact that many participants were unable to return to their original field of profession, the knowledge and skills that they gained prior to their immigration were not experienced as a waste of time or effort. Instead, the participants experienced their prior knowledge as offering them transferrable soft skills and technical skills to enhance their
performance in their Canadian jobs, and as providing them with self-confidence. The participants’ ability to recognize the transferability of their pre-Canada training and experience reflects a sense of flexibility in their perception of their knowledge and skills. It appears that by perceiving a continued usage of their pre-Canada skills and knowledge, the participants were able to maintain their sense of career identity, which also appears to provide a sense of meaning and self-confidence.

**Overarching Meta Themes**

The findings in this study provide much in-depth detail regarding the experiences and processes that the immigrant professional participants went through during their career development and retraining journey. These in-depth narratives not only shed light on the external circumstances that the participants experienced (such as career development barriers, retraining experiences, and Canadian work experiences), they also provided a picture of the processes of the internal worlds of the participants throughout their journeys (e.g. meaning-making, self-determination, cognitive flexibility, and acceptance of difficult circumstances). The present study’s findings illustrated that the immigrant individuals repeatedly underwent similar internal processes and re-experienced similar external barriers during the different phases of their career transition journeys.

The major themes and subthemes that emerged across all phases of the immigrant professionals’ career transition journeys (including the initial employment phase, retraining phase, and post-retraining phase) reflected common themes, which were sorted under, **overarching major themes**. These overarching major themes were further categorized under **overarching meta themes**, which describe the themes of internal processes and influential external factors that repeatedly occurred at each of the different career transition phases. The
Overlapping meta-themes, overarching major themes, and major themes and subthemes are presented in Table 6.

*Meaning-Making, Acceptance, and Openness and Flexibility* are the emergent Overarching Meta Themes that shed light on the internal processes that the participants

Table 6

Overarching Themes of the processes involved in the immigrant professionals’ career transition and retraining journeys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching meta themes</th>
<th>Overarching major themes</th>
<th>Major themes and Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-Making</td>
<td>Original career identity and career development</td>
<td>Improve work-life; Pursue higher education (Reasons for immigration); Re-enter original professional field; Canadian work experience; Save money for retraining (Meaning-making regarding initial employment); Re-enter original field of work; Gain employment; Maintain current job (Reasons for seeking retraining); Pre-Canada work experience and qualifications; Field of interest; Job prospects (Decision factors for type of retraining); Goal oriented; Previous work experience and education (Coping actions – Retraining); Pre-Canada education and work experience (Advice for immigrants, lessons, and factors for success); Continue to develop within original field; Obtain higher level position; Maintain current job; Find more meaningful work; Entrepreneurship (Future career goals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial security and quality of life</td>
<td>Improve quality of life; Escape poor economic and political environment; Gain life experience (Reasons for immigration); Financial survival (Meaning-making regarding initial employment); Salary (Reasons for seeking retraining); Job and financial security (Future career goals)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Acceptance of difficulties</td>
<td>Acceptance of difficulties/barriers (Coping actions – Initial experience in Canada; Planning actions – Retraining; Post-retraining actions and circumstances that led to current employment; Advice for immigrants, lessons, and factors for success); Acceptance of retraining (Coping actions – Retraining)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance of responsibility to take</td>
<td>Freedom to choose (Coping actions – Initial experience in Canada);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The higher order themes of the major themes and subthemes are presented within the parentheses to indicate the phase of the career transition journey from which the major themes and subthemes emerged.
experienced throughout their career journeys. The participants’ narratives reflected a meaning-making process at every phase of their career transition. This *meaning-making* overarching meta theme emerged from the participants’ responses regarding their reasons for immigrating to Canada, holding their initial employment in Canada, pursuing retraining, and pursuing future career development. The categories of reasons provided by the participants included: the intentions of pursuing their original career identities and career development, financial security and quality of life, and acculturation. The overarching meta theme of *acceptance* emerged from their discussions about the coping, planning, and post-retraining actions that they took throughout their career transition journey. Their narratives indicated that acceptance of the transition difficulties and of their responsibility to take action were important in the coping with the barriers that they faced in all phases of their career journeys and in the planning of their actions. For example, the participants shared that they came to accept the fact that they had to pursue retraining as part of their career development journey in Canada. They also accepted their responsibility to take self-initiative to pursue their goals in the face of the barriers and to make their own decisions with regards to their careers and retraining. The *Openness and Flexibility* overarching meta theme that emerged from their discussions indicated the importance of maintaining an open mind and being flexible to cope with barriers, make plans, and take action to further their career development. For instance, they found it important to be open to trying different strategies to pursue their career goals and to be open to pursuing work or retraining in a field other than their original professions.

*Social Factors* and *Transition Barriers* were the emergent overarching meta themes that described the external factors that impacted the participants throughout their career journeys. Social factors that were influential in helping the immigrant professionals cope with the barriers and in decision-making and planning throughout their career transition journeys included social
connections and professional resources. The social connections included family members, friends from their home countries, and friends made in Canada. The professional resources included community centres, professional connections made through networking, employers, and government financial aid. The participants shared that they experienced transition barriers including cultural barriers, systemic and financial barriers, and a lack of social connections throughout their career journeys. The cultural barriers that they experienced included cross-cultural differences, language issues, and discrimination. Settlement issues, non-recognition of their non-Canadian credentials and work experience, and the lack of financial and government supports were some of the systemic and financial barriers that the participants experienced.

Lastly, the participants shared that they experienced a sense of isolation as newcomers in Canada due to a lack of social connections throughout their career development journeys in Canada.

These overarching meta themes provide insight into the key internal processes and external factors involved in the immigrant professionals’ career development and retraining experiences. In the following section, these concepts are presented in a model to illustrate the participants’ career transition journeys.

*Implications of Findings for an Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development*

The detailed narratives that the immigrant participants described the processes and stages that they underwent to obtain retraining in order to pursue their career goals. These reported processes reflected overarching meta themes that are reminiscent of the core properties of Bandura’s (2006) concept of human agency (i.e. intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness) as well as the four stages of Cohen’s (2003) existential career model (i.e. responsibility, evaluation, action, and re-evaluation). These themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives gave rise to the Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development (see Figure 1). Through the participants’ narratives, it was clear that they had to
Figure 1. Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development
return to an earlier stage of their career development and re-enter the role of a student during their retraining. Therefore, the model refers to their Canadian career development as their career re-development.

This conceptual model represents the processes that occur internally within immigrant professional individuals and the external factors that impact these internal processes at each stage when there is a major barrier or change that requires career decision-making. Individuals cycle through the model until they reach their ultimate career goal and obtain authentic career meaning.

At the beginning of the process, individuals begin with intact meaning in the sense that they had a coherent sense of career identity and reasons for immigrating to Canada, i.e. their longer-term career goals. This stage is consistent with the existential concept of meaning, which refers to having a sense of purpose, intention, goal, or function (Yalom, 1980). The participants in this study had obtained at least an undergraduate degree and worked in professional fields for at least 3 years prior to their migration. Therefore, it is not surprising that their meaning-making and expectations involved further developing their career and improving their overall quality of life in Canada.

At the next stage, the individuals encounter transition barriers to meeting their long-term career goals. In the case of our participants, the systemic career development barriers that they experienced prevented them from attaining their career goals. Upon encountering these barriers, they undergo an evaluation of meaning-match, which allows them to evaluate discrepancies between the situation and their goals, and to acknowledge the existence of the barriers. The participants in this study acknowledged that their credentials and work experiences were not recognized by Canadian employers and that they were faced with a culture-gap, language barrier, and discrimination issues. Not being recognized for their prior credentials and experiences cause
individuals to experience a loss of career identity, meaning, and selfhood (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002), which lead to an existential death and loss of meaning (Yalom, 2009). During this initial stage, the acculturation and discrimination issues as well as the lack of social connections contribute to a sense of existential isolation (Maglio et al., 2005; Yalom, 1980).

In order to move forward in their career development process, individuals have to reach an acceptance of the barriers as well as their own responsibility to take action. In other words, they must come to accept their existential death and isolation while also acknowledging their freedom and responsibility (Yalom, 1980). The participants in this study accepted the difficulties and recognized their freedom to make career choices. By accepting that they are alone and that their previous career identities are at this stage “dead,” they recognize that they are responsible for creating their new meaning and embark on a new career journey. This stage echoes the responsibility stage in Cohen’s (2003) existential career model, whereby individuals must become aware of their own freedom and accept their responsibility to make carefully thought-out decisions to lead an authentic existence. It is also related to the concept of intentionality within the properties of human agency (Bandura, 2006), which involves forming intentions and proactive commitment to take action. During this stage of acceptance, individuals must also hold an attitude of openness and demonstrate cognitive flexibility. The participants in this study showed openness in developing new goals and trying new career development strategies. The literature has also found cognitive flexibility, adaptability, and an openness to change or uncertainty to facilitate positive career development for immigrant individuals (e.g. Leong & Ward, 2000; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). The concepts of acceptance and openness in this model are similar to Savickcas’ (2005) concept of concern and curiosity within the dimensions facilitating adaptability as well as Chen’s (2004) concept of open-mindedness within his theory of positive compromise. The acceptance and openness stage can be considered to be the pre-
requisite to Super’s (1996) concept of involvement of life-role and can be considered to be a requirement in personal ability in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

During the next stage, individuals undergo a *revision of meaning* and *planning*. After accepting the existence of the barriers and their own responsibility to take action, individuals develop intermediate goals as a middle step towards their long-term goals, which provide them with new meaning for their actions. For instance, many participants in this study decided to search for employment, even for non-ideal low-level employment, during their initial transition period with the intention of sustaining their financial survival. They also reported intermediate goals or meaning-making intended to help them attain their long-term career goals. These goals included obtaining Canadian work experience, saving money for retraining, and adjusting to the Canadian work environment. The participants kept their long-term goals in mind. Plans that involve long-term goals provide meaning (Bandura, 2006). Their planning involved obtaining help from external *social* networks, such as resource centres and professional resources, networking, and developing social connections. Some participants decided to immediately pursue Canadian retraining as an intermediate goal with the ultimate goal being to obtain their desired employment. The planning and goal setting of these participants also involved research of retraining programs.

This stage of meaning-making or goal setting and planning is reminiscent of the evaluation stage of the existential career model (Cohen, 2003) as well as the human agency concept of forethought (Bandura, 2006), which involve evaluating different options, setting goals, and anticipating outcomes. This stage is also similar to the stages of involvement of life role (Super, 1990), which include participation, commitment, knowledge, and value expectations.
During the next stage, individuals take action according to their revised goals and plan. Many of the participants in this study took action to obtain and hold employment during their initial transition period. Those who planned on pursuing retraining took action to fulfill program admission pre-requisites and underwent retraining. This action stage is similar to the action stage of the existential career model (Cohen, 2003) and the self-reactiveness property of human agency (Bandura, 2006). The transition barriers continued to be present during this stage, however, individuals continue to focus on their long-term goals as a means to motivate themselves. Participants in this study reported that they kept their long-term career goals of obtaining their desired careers in mind when they held their initial employment and during their retraining experience. This goal-focused attitude is consistent to previous findings that focusing on the future and being goal-oriented acted as helpful coping mechanisms (e.g. Gardener, 2002; Khawaja et al., 2008). In addition to focusing on the long-term career goal, this study found that maintaining an attitude of acceptance and openness as well as social supports are essential elements in facilitating perseverance throughout the revision of meaning/planning and action stages. Consistent with the literature, perseverance was reported by the participants to be one of the important coping mechanisms throughout their career development and retraining experience (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Chen, 1997). The present model acknowledges the presence of both internal factors that help individuals to continue on (e.g. acceptance and openness, and meaning-making) and the external factors that impact career development (e.g. barriers, social networks), which is similar to SCCT’s (Lent et al., 1994) proposition that personal and contextual factors impact career choices and development.

After action has been taken, individuals re-cycle back to the stage of evaluation of meaning-match. Just like the first evaluation stage, individuals re-evaluate their circumstances to assess for any discrepancies between their situation and their career goals, and to acknowledge
the barriers if discrepancies exist. If their long-term career goals have not been met, they again move on to the acceptance and openness stage, and repeat the process until they have met their long-term career goals. If, on the other hand, their long-term career goals have been met and they have obtained meaningful authentic career identity, they enter the *maintenance* stage. The evaluation of meaning match stage is similar in concept to that of the existential career model (Cohen, 2003) and the self-reflectiveness property in human agency (Bandura, 2006).

Individuals who had yet to reach their long-term career goals, re-entered the process by first accepting their circumstances and barriers, maintained openness and cognitive flexibility, and made plans to obtain retraining with the influence of social connections. Individuals, as did a few of the participants in this study, may also decide to begin their career transition at this retraining phase and bypass working survival jobs. Figure 2 demonstrates the application of the Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development to illustrate the immigrant professionals’ retraining phase of their career transition journey. A number of subthemes related to the retraining phase are included in the model to demonstrate the application of the model.

Individuals who have yet to reach their long-term career goals experience a lack of *match* between their meaning or long-term goals with their circumstances. They re-cycle through to the *acceptance* phase and come to accept the existence of the *transition barriers*, the importance of their own initiatives, and their own freedom to make career-decisions. They maintain an *openness* and flexibility to perceive retraining as a positive opportunity for their career development and to pursue different fields of retraining. They experience *social supports* – the participants in this study received supports from their families, and social and professional networks and undergo a *revision of meaning*, where the individuals developed intermediate goals such as obtaining employment, earning an income, maintaining their current jobs, and to acculturate. *Planning* for retraining and taking *action* to complete the retraining are the next
Figure 2. Using the Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development to illustrate the Retraining phase of immigrant career transition
steps. The retraining planning of this study’s participants involved researching retraining programs and courses, after which they took action to fulfill prerequisites for admissions to retraining programs and completed their retraining. During their retraining, the individuals continue to experience transition barriers, nevertheless their attitude of acceptance, openness, focus on their long-term career goals, and social supports continued to help them persevere.

After retraining, the individuals again re-evaluate their situation and re-cycled through the process, this time with the goal of obtaining their desired employment. Those individuals who obtain their desired jobs enter the maintenance stage after going through the stage of evaluation of meaning-match. The maintenance stage in this model is similar to that of Super’s (1996) life-span theory, where the participants reported a desire to hold on to what they had achieved and maintain their employment. On the other hand, those individuals who have not achieved their long-term career goals re-cycle through the entire process. The participants who had yet to attain their career goals were planning on obtaining more retraining with the intention of obtaining their ultimate career goals.

In sum, the findings of this study suggest that human agency plays a large role in persevering through the existential givens faced by immigrant professionals during their retraining process in Canada. In order to utilize their human agency, immigrant professionals must first come to a state of acceptance of the existential givens or career transition barriers in Canada and hold an attitude of openness and flexibility to change. With the support of their social connections, immigrant individuals may be able to revise their meaning-making, set intermediate goals, and create an action plan to meet those new goals, to move toward their long-term career goal. Individuals can then take action based on those plans. If they have not met their goals, they then re-enter the process starting with acceptance and openness. If, on the other hand, individuals do meet their career goals and have obtained personal meaning, they then enter the
stage of maintenance. Focusing on their meaning (i.e. their long-term career goal or self- and career-identity), maintaining an attitude of acceptance and openness, and having social supports, facilitates perseverance through the existential givens and transition barriers within their career development in Canada. Having a long-term career goal and career identity in which to strive towards provides individuals motivation and a reason to take action in the face of the transition barriers. By accepting the existing barriers and being open to change, they can pull together their energy and creativity to device new intermediate goals, make action plans, and take action to strive towards their ultimate career goals. Social supports offer emotional and practical supports to mitigate the transition barriers and facilitate the immigrant professionals’ journey towards their career goals.

*Theoretical Implications of the Study*

The findings in this study contribute to the scant literature pertaining to immigrant retraining. As noted under the *Summary of Present Findings*, most of the findings in this study regarding immigrant professionals’ positive and negative retraining experiences are corroborated by previous research findings. However, this study provides new findings that contribute to the scant immigrant retraining literature. For instance, the present study found that even when immigrant professionals do not retrain in their original field of profession, their pre-Canada credentials and work experience continued to be an important part of their identities and provided them with a sense of identity and meaning, confidence, transferable skills, career goals, and motivation to pursue their goals.

One of the major contributions of this study is the novel proposal of a theory of immigrant career transition and retraining experience within an existential perspective. This model is informed by diverse career transition and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals, including that of immigrant professionals who have and have not been satisfied
with their retaining, and have and have not continued on in their previous field of work following retraining. This model provides a major step forward in understanding the career transition and retraining processes in immigrant professionals, a growing segment of the Canadian population. The model also offers a beginning stage of a theory development from which future research could expand upon and further explore to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of immigrant professionals’ experiences of Canadian retraining and the role it has within their career transition journey.

The findings of this study provide insight regarding the internal processes that occur throughout the immigrant professionals’ career transition as well as the external factors that impact these internal processes. These themes regarding their internal processes and external factors are presented in a conceptual model to illustrate the career transition and retraining experience of immigrant professionals.

Existing major career development theories in the literature, such as SCCT (Lent et al., 2000), Super’s (1996) life-span life-space theory, and Saviackas’ (2005) career construction theory, provide models of the important factors that affect career decision making (e.g. life roles, life stages, personal demographics, environmental factors, personality, and interests) and the actions required during the different stages of career development (e.g. participation commitment, knowledge, value expectations, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). Those existing theories, however, do not offer insight into the internal processes necessary for individuals to take those actions in the face of major barriers and changes.

The present study contributes to the literature of career development theories by proposing the Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development, incorporates and expands on the concept of human agency (Bandura, 2001) and the Existential Career Model (Cohen, 2003). This conceptual model, derived from the findings of this study, illustrates the
internal processes that occur throughout the immigrant professionals’ career transition as well as the external factors that impact these internal processes. It also describes the internal processes such as acceptance and openness that need to occur in order for human agency to be utilized and the existential given to be overcome.

The findings of this study also have some practical implications for immigrant policies and resources, professional helpers providing services to immigrants, and immigrant professionals themselves. These practical implications are discussed next.

Practical Implications of the Study

Implications on a Policy Level

Consistent with previous findings, the immigrant professionals in this study were accomplished in their careers prior to their migration and had intended to improve their worklives in Canada (Khan, 2007; Reitz, 2005). Immigrant professionals feel confident in their career transition prior to their migration, which is not surprising given their established pre-Canada careers and approval for immigration to Canada based on stringent criteria for economic migration (Grant, 2007). Despite their expectations to succeed in their career transition, they experience a gap between their expectation for success and the career transition difficulties that they experience due to the systemic barriers. On a policy level, improvement needs to be made to provide readily accessible information to potential immigrant individuals to inform them of potential barriers they might face and the available career opportunities for immigrant skilled workers. Providing immigrants with this information would allow them to begin their career re-development process sooner. They would be able to make intermediate goals and plans prior to re-locating so they could take action soon after arriving in Canada. This would help to expedite their career transition, which could provide financial benefits and preserve their sense of self-worth.
About half of the participants had not anticipated having to obtain any retraining and did not foresee that their pre-Canada credentials and work experience would be considered insufficient. Contrary to immigrant professionals’ expectations, they found it necessary to obtain retraining in order to gain employer-recognized Canadian credentials. The necessity for immigrant professionals to obtain Canadian retraining and Canadian work experience should be made explicit to the immigrant individuals before their immigration is approved to provide realistic expectations prior to their immigration. Consistent with previous findings (e.g. Gorbatova & Eaglstein, 1998; Grant, 2007), participants found it important to do research about Canadian immigrant career transition experience to have realistic expectations about the barriers. Providing immigrant professionals with these realistic expectations allow them to make appropriate immigration decisions and planning, such as preparing an adequate amount of funds for retraining, and researching retraining programs and job market information before they relocate.

The participants in this study also noted a lack of bridging between retraining programs and available employment opportunities to aid immigrant professionals in obtaining employment. Given the culture gap, it can be difficult for immigrant individuals to obtain employment successfully through the Western job application process (Hakak et al., 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). Therefore, immigrant professionals could benefit from the teaming up of retraining programs and employers to provide job opportunities, such as co-olds or internships designed for immigrant professionals. In addition, job search resources should be made available to immigrants with staff that are sensitive to and knowledgeable about immigrant career transition issues to effectively help immigrant individuals find employment.
Implications for Professional Helpers

Immigrant professionals have been shown in previous literature, as well as this study, to experience many systemic barriers that can have a negative impact on their well-being. For example, they have been found to experience poor mental health, reduced self-esteem, and a loss of self-concept and meaning (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). Immigrant skilled workers would benefit from helping professionals, such as vocational counsellors and immigrant settlement workers, attending to these existential struggles of losing meaning, and experiencing “death” of their self-identity and pre-Canada accomplishments.

As indicated in the proposed Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development in this study, the transition barriers experienced by the immigrant professionals lead to a mismatch with or a loss of their career identity and meaning. The first steps required by the immigrant professionals to cope with the transition barriers are acceptance of the barriers and their responsibility to take action, and maintenance of an attitude of openness and flexibility. Immigrant individuals would benefit from the counsellors and workers helping immigrant professionals come to a state of acceptance of their difficulties and develop their cognitive flexibility and openness to change. Therapeutic models that help clients accept their circumstances without judgment and encourage them to take action towards their personal goals, such as mindfulness-based therapies and acceptance and commitment therapy, could offer the appropriate tools for counsellors to support immigrant skilled workers. Counsellors could also use cognitive reframing strategies to help immigrant professionals view the application and utility of their pre-Canada training and experience in a more flexible manner to facilitate the maintenance of their career identities.

By helping immigrant professionals come to a state of acceptance and openness, counsellors could help immigrant individuals utilize their human agency to devise a plan of
action and carry them out to pursue their career goals. During this stage, counsellors could take on a problem-solving approach to help immigrant professionals determine the intermediate steps and goals that need to be attained in order to move closer towards their ultimate career goals. Counsellors could use the immigrant professionals' ultimate career goals within their therapeutic interventions, perhaps by reminding them of the goal as a means to keep immigrant professionals motivated to take action and persevere through the career transition barriers.

Immigrant professionals experience many external barriers, including discrimination, acculturation issues, language barriers, and a lack of information sources. They may benefit from practical supports by counsellors facilitating the appropriate training and education to bridge the culture gap, and providing the appropriate information (e.g. job market and retraining related information) and referrals for services. Immigrant professionals have been found, both in this study and in previous literature, to experience isolation and a lack of support network (Coffman & Norton, 2010; Hakak et al., 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). Counsellors or support workers may benefit immigrant professionals by referring them to the appropriate resources or community centres to help facilitate their development of a social network, which has also been found in this study to help immigrant professionals persevere through the difficulties.

After action has been taken by immigrant professionals, counsellors could facilitate the evaluation of whether they have met their long-term career goals or obtained personal meaning. If their goals have not been obtained, counsellors could help immigrant professionals by supporting them through the re-cycling of the career re-development process by first facilitating the acceptance and openness process again. If their goals have been met, counsellors could help immigrant individuals address and develop strategies for their concerns regarding the maintenance of their current employment.
Implications for Immigrant Professionals

The findings of this study suggest that seeking social supports from family, friends, and fellow immigrant individuals help immigrant professionals cope with the transition stressors. Social supports were found to provide immigrant professionals emotional, financial, and practical supports (e.g. obtaining useful information). Immigrant professionals were also found to receive financial and practical supports from the government and community resources. These findings suggest that professional immigrants could benefit from seeking and utilizing their social supports to help them through their career transitions.

This study’s findings also suggest that holding a mindful acceptance of the barriers and maintaining an openness to change can be useful in facilitating career development in Canada. By accepting the barriers, immigrant professionals may have more energy to spend on planning and implementing their plans to pursue their career goals. Keeping an open mind also allows for creative strategizing and trying of different means to obtain their goals, which can improve their chances of success.

Reminding themselves of their ultimate career goals, was also found in this study to facilitate immigrant professionals’ ability to persevere through the difficulties and continue to pursue their career goals. They would also benefit from making thoughtful plans by doing research before taking action. For instance, researching the job market and the available retraining options before they relocate to Canada can be of much help in their career transition. The findings also suggest that they would benefit from taking the responsibility of making their own career decisions instead of basing their decisions on the opinions of others, who may provide a negative picture and be discouraging due to their own negative experience.

This study found that obtaining Canadian retraining and work experience is an important part of the Canadian career development journey. Not only do Canadian retraining and work
experience provide the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences, they also provide the opportunity to develop social connections, acculturate, improve their confidence, and hold on to their previous career identities through utilization of their pre-Canada knowledge and skills. Professional immigrants may also benefit from actively seeking out opportunities to acculturate, networking, and developing professional and social connections. Lastly, this study’s findings suggest that taking up self-care activities, such as engaging in hobbies and socializing, could help immigrant professionals cope with the career transition barriers.

*Limitations of the study*

One of the limitations of this study is the use of English to conduct the interviews. For the majority of the participants, English was a second language. Therefore, it may have been difficult for the participants to express themselves in as comprehensive a manner as they could have in their native tongue. Another related limitation is that the interview questions were presented in English as well, and it was at times difficult for some participants to grasp the meaning of the questions. In these cases, the researcher tried to explain the question in a different way or use simpler terms to aid the participants’ comprehension.

Researchers, regardless of their selected research methodology, all have their own beliefs and views. Researchers inevitably bring their own subjective views with them while embarking on their studies, which can have its limitations. The researcher in this study acknowledged her personal biases and remained aware and vigilant of her biases throughout the research process. She also kept notes and memos during the analysis to monitor her own process. By being aware of her own subjectivity and her own perspective, the researcher provided strength to the integrity of the findings of the study. The researcher also discussed the result with her supervisor, who was also the primary researcher in this study, and the research team.
Another limitation regarding the study’s methodology involved the semi-structured questions. The extensive list of questions was developed by a team of researchers with the intention of collecting detailed and comprehensive narratives from the participants. However, the questions may have increased the possibility that the participants’ responses were directed by the types of questions asked. The researchers attempted to mitigate this limitation by keeping the questions as open-ended as possible.

Finally, this study generated an abundance of qualitative data that is too plentiful for one dissertation project to analyze fully. This current study therefore focused on the specific research questions that were proposed at the outset of the study. It was beyond the scope of this current study to venture outside of the parameters of those research questions.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The limitations of the current study provide potential directions for future research to continue pursuing a comprehensive understanding of immigrant professionals’ career transition and retraining experiences. Future research could facilitate more in-depth information being provided by the participants by conducting the interviews in the immigrant individuals’ native language. Metaphors and figurative language are a rich source of information and can be lost in translation or not mentioned at all. Presenting the questions in the participants’ native language could also improve the comprehension of the questions and improve the quality of their responses. Interviewing participants in their first language could remove language barriers and provide richer narratives.

Since this study only recruited individuals from the most multicultural metropolitan areas in Canada, future studies could look to interview immigrant professionals in rural areas that are likely less multicultural than the GTA. The results collected from participants in rural areas may be compared to the results from this study to note any differences in immigrant professionals’
career transition and retraining experiences. The oldest participant in this study was 50 years of age and the findings indicated that only a few participants had reached the maintenance career stage. Future studies could explore the experiences of immigrant professionals at later stages in their career development by recruiting older participants or participants with longer periods of employment experience in Canada. Interviewing participants at later stages of their career development could add useful information to the current Existential and Human Agency Model of Career Re-development presented in this study. Given that this study generated more data than one dissertation study could analyze in-depth, future studies could further explore and analyze the rich information provided by the participants.

Since this study was largely exploratory, future research could examine the discovered themes in more depth. For instance, the concepts of openness or cognitive flexibility and acceptance were shown in this study to be important in helping immigrant individuals’ cope during their career development. Future studies could examine these concepts in more depth to provide a better understanding of the roles of these concepts within immigrant professionals’ career transition journeys, e.g. what the related concepts are and how these abilities can be accessed.

More in-depth exploration of the themes that emerged from this study would also serve to expand on the model proposed in the present study. Future studies could aim to confirm or refine the model by using quantitative or mixed method research designs. Additional qualitative studies could examine career transition and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals of similar demographics as the present study to confirm the present findings. Engaging in qualitative research of career transition and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals’ of different demographics, as suggested above (e.g. those in a less multicultural area and older in a later stage of career development) could also serve to confirm present findings or expand on present
finding with new findings. Quantitative studies could explore the correlations between the emergent themes and between the themes and the immigrants’ experiences. For example, correlational studies could examine the relationship between the presence of acceptance, openness, active meaning-making, planning, and action taking. Studies could also look at the relationship between the presence of these themes and the outcome of the immigrant professionals’ career development or their subjective career outcome experience. Quantitative studies could also be used to examine the effectiveness of different treatment modalities in enhancing different aspects necessary to access human agency i.e. openness, acceptance, active meaning-making, and action taking. This quantitative research could be done in conjunction with qualitative inquiry of the immigrant clients’ subjective experience of the different interventions.
References


http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/en/working/OI_HOW_WORK_PROF_PROFS.html


APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Poster

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 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles Chen's research projects to date in order to be eligible to participate.
APPENDIX B

Telephone Script of Initial Contact

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 audiotaped 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 C

Email Script of Initial Contact

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 audiotaped 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,

Your name
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,

Your name
CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto
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,

Your name
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,

Your name
CRC research team
OISE/University of Toronto
APPENDIX D

Consent Form

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 work-life 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 audiotaped 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, 2001 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 audiotaped data will be kept in secured files and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased. In the event that, during the interview, you express an intention to harm yourself or 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: mailto: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

Participant Demographic Information

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.) ________________________________

1. 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): ________________________________

2. Degree or type of retraining completed after coming to Canada:
   -Institution ________________________________________________
   -Program length ____________________________________________
   -Type of qualification/credential ______________________________
   -Type of document (Diploma/certificate/degree) ___________________

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

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

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

Date of interview: ________________________________
APPENDIX F

Theme Questions for the Interview

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

Questions:

I. Before Coming to Canada

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

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

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

(4) (If not answered already) Was employment and 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). -if applicable.

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

(18) Was there a period of time during which you were unemployed after coming to Canada? For how long? How did this affect you?

(19) How difficult or easy was your original job search? What factors made the search easier and/or more difficult?

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

   a) What was most helpful, least helpful to you?

(21) What were some of the supports you found in your job search in Canada? Could you give me some specific examples?
(22) In your job-search in Canada, how useful was your work experience from your home country?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(31) How did you find this new "learning" experience in Canada? Did you have to change your "learning style"? In what ways?

(32) Could you describe your general impression and feeling about this training experience? -- Things you enjoyed the most. -- Things you enjoyed the least.

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

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

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

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

(37) How much control (or lack of control) did you feel you had in terms of your retraining experience? (ref for interviewer e.g. choice of institute, choice of certificate, ability to 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?

(48) Has your career taken on a different role in your life as a result of your retraining experience?
   -- Has your career identity changed as a result of your retraining experience?
(49) During the retraining, what did you discover about yourself? (Prompt: Self-discovery and meaning on a personal career-related level)

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

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

(52) Is there anything else that you feel you gained or lost through retraining?

(53) What were some of the main lessons you learned from your retraining experience in Canada?

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

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

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

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

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

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

(60) After your retraining, what did you do to build your career in Canada? (Steps toward current employment… see next section)

V. Current Employment

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

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

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

(64) How important is your vocational life in your total new life in Canada? How does your work-life affect your personal and family life here?
(65) Do you feel a sense of vocational and career identity from your current employment experience in Canada? Why or why not?

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

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

(68) Have any factors challenged your beliefs that you could succeed in your career/work-life?

(69) How satisfied do you feel about your career/work-life experience in Canada?

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

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

(72) What are some of your main concerns and needs about your future work-life 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?
APPENDIX G

Receipt of Compensation for Participation

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Receipt of Compensation for Participating in Research Project

(Please PRINT all the information below except the signature section – Thank You!)

Research Project Title:
How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants’ vocational well-being

Principal Investigator:
Prof Charles P. Chen, OISE, University of Toronto

The participant confirms that he/she has received the amount of $35 for participating in the research project as specified above.

Name of Participant and Recipient (Print Please):__________________________________________

Signature of Participant and Recipient:_______________________________________________

Date (Print Please):_______________________________________________

Mailing Address:

Street_______________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

City____________________________ Province________________________

Postal Code______________________

Tel.:  (Home) ______________________ (Work) ______________________

     (Cell) ______________________

Email:  ______________________________________________________________

******************************************************************************

Name of GA and Receiver (Print Please):______________________________________
### APPENDIX H

**Summary of Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Month/Year of migration</th>
<th>Highest education pre-migration</th>
<th>Pre-migration vocation</th>
<th>Retraining in Canada</th>
<th>Current job title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>11/1999</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in engineering</td>
<td>Director of new business development fund</td>
<td>Diplomas: Accounting Assistant &amp; Paralegal; Court Agent; Legal Assistant &amp; Private Investigation</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>5/2005</td>
<td>Master’s degree in respiratory medicine</td>
<td>Pediatrician</td>
<td>Clinical Trial Monitoring &amp; Research site coordination diploma; Program Management certificate; Professional grant development workshop</td>
<td>Clinical research project coordinator</td>
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<td>P3</td>
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<td>Serbia</td>
<td>4/2002</td>
<td>Medical degree</td>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
<td>Diplomas: Cardiology technologist; Clinical research coordinator</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>9/2006</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in pharmacy</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>Professional regulatory affairs diploma</td>
<td>Freelance pharmaceutical consultant; Market researcher in pharmaceuticals</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>3/2003</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in engineering</td>
<td>Financial manager</td>
<td>Addictions &amp; community service worker diploma</td>
<td>Customers service; Background acting</td>
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<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>12/2002</td>
<td>PhD in botany</td>
<td>College lecturer of botany</td>
<td>Special education, guidance &amp; counseling course</td>
<td>Supply Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2/2003</td>
<td>Master’s degree in biotechnology</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Bachelors of Applied Sciences in public health and safety</td>
<td>Communicable disease investigator</td>
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<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>6/2002</td>
<td>Master of Business</td>
<td>Program manager</td>
<td>Master of Business Administration</td>
<td>VP Energy &amp; Utilities for</td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Degree Acquired</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Additional Education</td>
<td>Field</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>2/2001</td>
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<td>Administration</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s degree in business administration</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>9/2005</td>
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<td>Master’s degree in chemical engineering</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>8/2005</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in earth science and international business</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Import and export business certificate</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>9/2005</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in architecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Master’s degree in architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>P14</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>5/2003</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in computer technology</td>
<td>Software</td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>Computer programming and analysis advanced diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>3/2002</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in English literature</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master of Arts in immigration and settlement study</td>
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<tr>
<td>P16</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>10/2004</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Fire protection engineering technology diploma</td>
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<tr>
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<td>40</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>10/2004</td>
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<td>Business</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Global logistics and supply chain management certificate</td>
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<td>P18</td>
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<td>China</td>
<td>4/2004</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in engineering (hydropower major)</td>
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<td>Technical professional engineering courses</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Peru</td>
<td>2/2001</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in health sciences (midwife major)</td>
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<td>Community worker/ Social Service worker diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>P20</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
<td>3/2004</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in computer engineering</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Wireless networking technologies diploma</td>
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