**University of Alberta**


**The Influence of Adult Upgrading on the Possible Selves**

**of Foreign-Trained Professional Women**


by


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**Abstract**

After immigrating to Canada, some foreign-trained professional women (FTPWs) enrol in adult high school–level upgrading to begin to reestablish their careers if their international credentials are unrecognized. To explore this phenomenon, the theoretical framework of possible selves was used as a mechanism to examine the effect of context (i.e., upgrading) on their personally relevant goals. Semistructured qualitative interviews were conducted with four FTPWs who attended two postsecondary institutes in central Alberta. The participants' salient possible selves were related to familial duties and employment; they viewed upgrading as a mechanism to work toward these hoped-for selves. Upgrading was also found to increase the number of and clarify their hoped-for selves. Because of the significant impact of immigration on the participants' possible selves, upgrading should also include referrals to immigration services and support for the credential assessment process, help to build confidence, and encourage the development of social networks for immigrants.

## Acknowledgements

Completion of this thesis would have remained a hoped-for self without the contributions of many people.

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**Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, whom I have yet to meet.
With the exception of one interview, we have journeyed
through this inquiry together. It is safe to say that
we have both grown along the way.

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**List of Acronyms**

ABE – Adult basic education

CIC – Citizenship and Immigration Canada

CPE – Continuing professional education

ELL – English language learners

ESL – English as a second language

GED – General equivalency diploma

IRPA – Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

MR – Research participant

NB – Research participant

PSQ – Possible Selves Questionnaire

RR – Research participant

SD – Research participant

## Epigraph

The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible. (Arthur C. Clarke)

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow. (Robert H. Goddard)

Alice: There is no use trying; one can't believe impossible things. The Queen: I dare say you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. (Lewis Carroll)

**CHAPTER 1:**

**INTRODUCTION**

This master's-level qualitative research project is my exploration of the experiences of four foreign-trained professional women[1] (FTPWs) in high school- and college-level adult upgrading programs at two postsecondary institutes in central Alberta, Canada. Using the theoretical framework of possible selves, I examined the influence of adult upgrading on the personally relevant goals of four FTPWs using semistructured, open-ended interviews. In this first chapter I will explain who I am and how I came to this project, the objectives and questions that guided my inquiry, and why I believe that this research is of consequence.

**Locating Myself Within This Inquiry**

It may seem strange for someone like me—a Caucasian, Canadian-born, middle-class individual—to undertake an inquiry into the experiences of FTPWs. To locate myself within this research, I must first explain that I spend my days in the midst of junctions. My identity is both fractured and cohesive because I am a person with many titles. I am a teacher. I am an artist. I am a biologist. I am a friend. I am a wife. In June of this year I will become a mother. I spend my daily life within and amongst these titles; as a result, I am constantly shifting focus between my passions of teaching science, teaching art, making art, and

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[1] *Foreign trained* refers to individuals who have received their education and/or work experience outside of Canada. *Professional* refers to individuals who work within regulated professions that require specific educational credentials and/or licensing exams to practice. This can include (but is not limited to) architects, accountants, dentists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, nurses, optometrists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, teachers, and veterinarians (Office of the Fairness Commissioner, 2008). Similar terms used in the literature include *internationally educated professionals* and *internationally trained immigrants*.

developing my relationships with others. Although these occupations may seem to be very different from one another and disconnected from the topic of my thesis, it was through their intersections that the focus of my research project emerged.

### *Intersection: My Role as a Biology Teacher and Adult Educator*

I have taught high school–level biology upgrading at a large technical institute in central Alberta since 2004 (because it is one of the sites of my inquiry, to maintain confidentiality, I refer to my workplace as *Institute B*; I will describe it in more detail in chapter four). My adult education classroom is diverse in terms of ages and experiences, and many of my students are immigrants who have enrolled in upgrading to acquire the high school courses that they need to apply to Institute B or other postsecondary institutes. While I was writing my application for graduate school in February 2008, my students were preparing their own applications for Institute B's spring deadline. As I do every year, I volunteered to proofread their applications. This experience that I shared with my students of completing letters of intent, paying registration fees, and filing for transcripts to be judged suitable (or not) for the programs of our choice attuned me in a deeper way to their emotional and physical efforts as they completed their postsecondary applications.

One of my students, Ryan (a pseudonym), asked me to proofread his application FOR a competitive technical diploma program in the health field. He had recently moved to Canada from Asia with his wife and young son and was worried that his written English displayed too many English language learner (ELL) idiosyncrasies. Reading his application introduced ME to a new world, one

that I had never taken the time to notice in the past. I learned that Ryan had

worked as a doctor of internal medicine for more than a decade in his home

country. However, he had enrolled in high school upgrading to apply for a

technical diploma in the health field because his educational credentials did not

qualify him to be licensed as a doctor in Canada. His goal was to work in the

health field as a technician while he was learning the English medical terminology

that he needed to pass the Canadian medical residency exam.

Ryan's story motivated me to ask other immigrants in my classes about

how they came to be enrolled in upgrading. I was troubled by the number who

were foreign-trained professionals: doctors, nurses, dentists, engineers—all of

them intelligent, highly educated, and well-spoken individuals who had enrolled

in high school upgrading because their foreign credentials were not recognized in

Canada. Not only were these students unable to find work in their former fields,

but their credentials were also not adequate to apply for Institute B's programs,

which consider only high school grades in selecting applicants. I wondered, How

could a foreign medical degree be viewed as being *less* than equivalent to Alberta

high school biology? Although I did not know it at the time, this question was my

first major step towards the inquiry that I describe in this thesis.

### *Intersection: My Role as an Artist and Art Teacher*

As I have already mentioned, my project emerged from a series of

intersections in my life. In the role of a science educator, I was first introduced to

the experiences of foreign-trained professionals in Canada by Ryan's story;

however, through my work as an artist and an art teacher my research topic and theoretical framework coalesced.

In my spare time I am a mosaic artist. I host my own mosaic Web site on which I share and sell my work (www.jocelyncrocker.ca) and occasionally teach art classes in my home and in community centres. In early 2008 I became involved with a local nonprofit social-services organization. I was hired by a community worker to teach a series of art classes to its clients, primarily female immigrants who were struggling with their immigration experience. The first class I delivered was a three-hour introduction to mosaics using collage. The original purpose of the class was light-hearted socialization. However, halfway through the evening it became obvious that the class had become involved in a task that was much more than having fun with friends while making art. A hush had descended; all of the women were completely engrossed in their projects, and the only noises in the room were the rustling of papers and the snipping of scissors. The community workers and I looked at one another and knew that we were in the middle of a poignant moment. Through art, these women were expressing themselves without worrying about accents or grammar. Through art, these women were able to leave their worries behind, if only for a few hours. Most important, through art, these women were exploring personally relevant aspects of their identities, which had recently undergone significant upheaval.

I met with the community workers shortly after the class to discuss what had occurred. We knew that art could offer us a unique approach to supporting these immigrant women. After some research we decided to develop a version of

the body mapping workshop originally designed by South African artist Jane Solomon to help HIV-positive women work through the emotions that emerged after their diagnoses. Following several months of development and fundraising, I facilitated two 10-hour body mapping workshops in July and November 2009 for groups of FTPWs. The purpose of the workshops was to use art as a creative means of identity exploration and problem solving.

Prior to delivering the first workshop, I applied to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board for approval to interview the participants in the workshop to determine whether body mapping is an effective tool to explore one's identity following a significant life transition such as immigration. In August 2009 I conducted semistructured qualitative interviews with four women who had participated in the body mapping workshop. Although the findings from these interviews are not directly relevant to my thesis research, the four participants' stories left me with a sense of disquiet. I had became privy to what I view as important stories of successes and failures, of happiness and optimism coupled with sadness and grief, of women striving to improve their lives and the lives of their children. These women had come to Canada expecting to be able to work, but were unable to find employment or have their educational credentials recognized. Their lives and identities had drastically changed, and they were struggling to redefine themselves and reestablish their careers in Canada. These stories made me wonder, What might I be able to do to address this issue?

As a result of the body mapping workshop interviews, when it was time for me to chose a topic for my thesis, I decided to explore the issue of FTPWs in

Canada within the context of adult upgrading. I chose to focus my research

project on women primarily because of the deep connection that I felt to their

stories and experiences through the interviews; this focus also led me towards a

feminist theoretical perspective (which I describe in chapter 3). The context of my

classroom also lent itself to a focus on women in that the majority of my

upgrading students have been female.

My body mapping interviews were also the initial inspiration for my

choice of theoretical framework, possible selves. Although the topic of the

interviews was the process of body mapping, the overarching theme concerned

the identity changes of immigration to Canada. During my review of the literature

in preparation for the ethics application and interviews, I came across Markus and

Nurius's (1986) seminal article on the use of possible selves as a means of

identity exploration. Possible selves (which I describe in detail in chapter 3)

represent an individual's construction of what he or she might become as

embodied by hoped-for selves, manifestations of what he or she would like to

become; and feared-for selves, manifestations of what he or she does not want to

become. It intrigued me that possible selves could be used as mechanisms for self-

exploration (Markus & Nurius, 1986). It also seemed to me that they could

provide a mechanism to explore the effect of context (e.g., adult upgrading) on

personally relevant hopes, dreams, goals, and fears.

## Research Objectives and Questions

In the first half of this chapter I have located myself in this inquiry by

describing how the research topic and theoretical framework emerged. It is

important to note that just as I am an intersection of seemingly unrelated but intimately interconnected passions, my thesis is also an intersection of different areas: the topic of FTPWs in Canada, the context of adult upgrading, and the theoretical framework of possible selves. Figure 1 displays the relationship among these three areas.
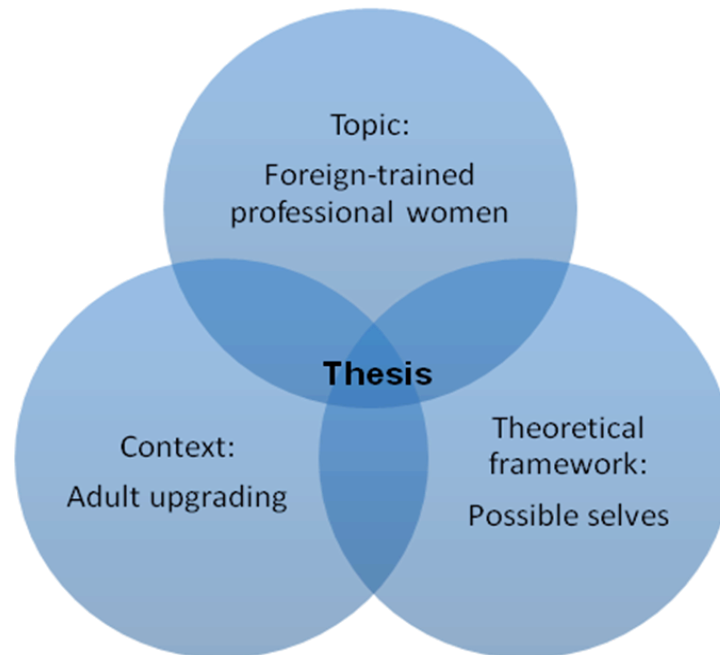


*Figure 1*. Topic, context, and theoretical framework of the thesis.

Within these intersections, my research had two main objectives. The first objective was to explore the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading to add to our understanding of immigration in Canada and its connections to adult education. Specifically, using the theoretical framework of possible selves, I examined the effect of adult upgrading on the personally relevant goals of four FTPWs. Rooted in this objective was my desire to find out more about the immigrant students whom I encounter in my upgrading classroom and art classes.

The second objective was to explore from the perspectives of FTPWs who choose to enter an adult upgrading program how adult education might support and enhance their experiences. This objectives stemmed from my desire to identify how I, as an individual and an educator, might be able to address what I see as an important issue in Canada and for Canadians.

These objectives provided the foundation for the two main research questions that guided this inquiry: (a) What is the influence of adult upgrading on the development and realization of the possible selves of the participants in this study? and (b) How might adult upgrading support the development and realization of the possible selves from the perspectives of these women?

## Rationale for the Research

Although I have described how my research topic, objectives, and questions emerged, an important question remains unaddressed in this introductory chapter: Why? Why are this study and its findings of significance? In the following section I explain the rationale for the research by expanding on the topical, contextual, and theoretical significance of this study and its implications.

### *Topical Significance: FTPWs in Canada*

First, this research is of significance because immigration is an important issue in Canada. In terms of population size, immigrants currently comprise approximately 20% of Canada's population (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2008a; Statistics Canada, 2007). These numbers are even more significant in the more populated provinces; for example, Ontario and British Columbia are currently home to a larger proportion of recent immigrants than of Canadian-born

individuals (CIC, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2007). CIC (2009) estimated that in 2010 Canada will admit between 240,000 and 265,000 new permanent residents. A recent Statistics Canada (2010) report estimated that, by 2031, the percentage of foreign-born individuals in Canada will rise to 25%–28%. The scores of immigrants who come to Canada are important to its future growth; it is estimated that, by 2011, immigration will account for nearly all of Canada's net labour force growth (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008; CIC, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2007). Furthermore, Statistics Canada also anticipated that, by 2030, immigration will be Canada's only source of population growth. From this perspective, immigration is therefore a significant current and future issue in Canada and for (current and future) Canadians.

However, as I discuss in my literature review in chapter 2, immigrants in general, and FTPWs specifically, are underemployed in Canada despite overall high levels of educational attainment (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that immigrant women demonstrate much lower levels of labour-market participation than do immigrant men and Canadian-born women and men (CIC, 2005; Guo, 2006a; Statistics Canada, 2003b). In economic terms, this underemployment is a vast disadvantage. The Conference Board of Canada estimated that the failure to recognize the skills and credentials of immigrants and their resulting underemployment costs the Canadian economy as much as $5 billion a year (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2006).

It has been said that employment in Canada is driven by a knowledge-based economy (Bouchard, 2006); knowledge, as represented by formal-education credentials, is considered a business investment or product that can be exported or imported for monetary returns (Neef, Siesfeld, & Cefola, 1998). In a knowledge-based economy, individuals with desirable educational credentials and thus desirable knowledge-related skills and abilities are viewed as human capital. Human capital that leaves a country (the exportation of knowledge) is referred to as *brain drain*; human capital that arrives in a country (the importation of knowledge) is referred to as *brain gain* (Reitz, 2001b). The underutilization of immigrant human capital, as manifested by underemployment, can therefore be viewed as *brain waste* (Hawthorne, 2006; Raghuram & Kofman, 2004; Reitz, 2001a), which results in what a *Toronto Star* reporter recently dubbed "the crying shame of the taxi-driving surgeon" (Fiorito, 2009, ¶ 1). Not only does this reduce immigrants' contributions to Canadian economic prosperity, but it may also reduce the capacity of Canada to attract skilled immigrants (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004, 2008) and thereby the potential for Canada's brain gain and future growth. Research projects such as mine that have addressed this issue are therefore of benefit to Canada's economy.

However, the issues of immigration in Canada should not be examined only in terms of an economic bottom line, because foreign-born individuals bring many cultural and social benefits to Canada. Immigrants and their descendents have helped to shape Canada as "one of the most ethnically diverse nation in the world" (Statistics Canada, 2003a, p. 1). Li (2003) argued that, despite the fact that

"Canada's existing population is made up of the descendents of earlier immigrants and of current immigrants" (p. 36), the immigration discourse overlooks the importance of immigration to the history of Canada's national and social development. Therefore immigrants can alternately be viewed as *social capital* (Azania, 2009), a term that encompasses all of the cultural, political, ideological, and other personal attributes that immigrants contribute to Canada's multiculturalism and diversity (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). Recognition of the cultural as well as economic benefits of immigration is manifested in the federal Bill C-11, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). The first two objectives of the IRPA are "(a) to permit Canada to pursue the maximum social, cultural, and economic benefits of immigration [and] (b) [to] enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Canadian society" (Department of Justice, Canada, 2001, ¶ 2). Therefore, this research also adds to the understanding of how to maximize the cultural benefits of immigration in Canada.

Although research on immigration is certainly related to economic and cultural benefits, the foundation of this inquiry rests on a social-justice point of view. Put simply, I believe that the underemployment of immigrants in general and of FTPWs specifically is inequitable. Canada admits hundreds of thousands of immigrants each year, many of whom have been chosen specifically because of their educational qualifications and work experience (see Appendix A for a detailed description of the various immigration classes as defined by the IRPA). Because employment is a key indicator of settlement in and integration into Canadian society (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; Foroutan, 2008; Statistics

Canada, 2003b), the significant levels of underemployment cause both the expectations of newcomers and the goals of the IRPA to be unmet. The IRPA recognizes in its objectives that the issues of immigration involve "mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society" (Department of Justice, Canada, 2001, ¶ 2). The underemployment of immigrants also implies that this two-way commitment is unmet (Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2008), and it is therefore imperative that this issue be addressed.

Moreover, from a social-justice perspective, the simplistic connections among immigration, educational credentials, and economic and social benefits to Canada may even be harmful; Kirkham and Wild (2005) contended that "the implied correlation between literacy and economic well-being may sometimes be used to side-step other social injustices such as bad housing, discrimination and low standards of living, all of which cannot be combated by literacy alone" (pp. 522-523). It is therefore imperative that research be conducted to address the complexity of the issues with regard to immigration in Canada. After reading my student Ryan's story and hearing the stories of the women who attended the body mapping workshop, I asked myself what I could do to address this issue. I therefore conducted this research in the spirit of recognizing what I view as a significant social problem and exploring what I might be able to do to address it.

### *Contextual Significance: Adult Education*

In the previous section I explained the rationale for the topic of this research in terms of its economic, cultural, and social-justice benefits. In the

following section I detail the contextual significance of this research to the field of adult education.

It was fitting that I conduct a research project with FTPWs within the context of adult upgrading because adult education involves intimately connected issues of immigration and employment. Moreover, the Alberta provincial government has identified adult education as a key factor in addressing the labour-market barriers that foreign-trained professionals face (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008). This is partly because many immigrants utilize adult education as a steppingstone to the labour market. For instance, the 2001 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Canada revealed that approximately 20% of the 164,000 immigrants surveyed cited schools, community colleges, or universities as important sources of help when they are seeking employment (Statistics Canada, 2003b). From an anecdotal point of view, this has certainly been the case for most of the foreign-trained professionals I have encountered in my classroom. They have chosen to enter upgrading as a first step in reestablishing their careers in Canada after their educational credentials were invalidated and they were unable to find employment. The context of the study (i.e., adult upgrading) is therefore a source of relevant and meaningful information on the complex immigration and labour-market issues.

The implications of the findings of my research are also connected to the context of adult education. Because educational institutes can act as bridges between communities and policy makers (Hamilton, 2005), research on adult education is a rich source of information that can link the needs of a community

(e.g., FTPWs) to the decision makers in adult education (e.g., those involved in the administration of adult upgrading programs). Thus, the findings and implications from my research (detailed in chapters 4 and 5) can be used to guide meaningful programming for immigrants enrolled in adult upgrading programs or to question the policies of existing programs.

Finally, the contextual significance of this research relates to my position as an adult educator. In this era of globalization, Canadian classrooms as a whole are becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural (Statistics Canada, 2010). Educators in general are being challenged to develop "more comprehensive and inclusive means of addressing cross-cultural issues in both our teaching and research as a consequence of globalization" (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006, p. 81). This research is important because it exemplifies how adult educators might embark on a journey to better understand the needs of the students in their multicultural classrooms. In a more general sense, adult education is also a powerful mechanism to raise "people's critical consciousness through action and critical reflection or praxis" (Guo, 2006b, p. 108). This process occurred for me personally as I conducted this research project and analyzed the data, and through writing and disseminating the findings of my study, I also encourage this process in others.

### *Theoretical Significance: Feminist Research and Qualitative Methodology*

Finally, in addition to the topical and contextual importance of this research, my exploration of the experiences of women through qualitative methodology and methods has theoretical significance.

This research focused specifically on the experiences of women. As I further describe in chapter 3, a feminist theoretical perspective guided the methodology of this research because I structured this inquiry from the idea that gender (specifically, the female gender) is an important category of analysis given that the social constructions of gender are related to gender-based inequities. This inquiry has theoretical significance because the literature frequently overlooked or devalued the importance of women's experiences and contributions (Taber & Gouthro, 2006). This was the case with regard to the topical focus of my study (i.e., FTPWs) in that the stories of racialized or immigrant women rarely appear in dominant narratives (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Lee, 1993; Ng, 1993; Raghuram & Kofman, 2004). Regarding this topic, Mohab (2001) contended that it is "virtually impossible to find much discussion of women or gender relations in studies of skilled international migration, except for the occasional statistics on the gender breakdown of employment" (p. 46). This was also the case for the context of my inquiry (i.e., adult upgrading/education) because women's experiences and research about women are missing from adult learning theory (English & Irving, 2007; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Taber & Gouthro, 2006). Therefore, my research is significant in that it provided a forum for the voices of its female participants by allowing them to share their unique perspectives and experiences. Moreover, its acknowledgement of the interconnecting social axes of race and immigration, gender, and learning (English & Irving, 2007) will add to the literature in two fields (immigration and adult education).

In addition to the feminist perspective that I employed in this study, the qualitative methodology and methods also created opportunities for theoretical significance. Immigration in Canada is a complex, multilayered, multidisciplinary issue, and significant concerns (such as the underemployment of FTPWs) cannot be resolved with simplistic approaches. Thus, in gathering information on these complex issues, it is important to utilize a variety of information sources. The primary sources of data on immigration in general are quantitative: from analyses of census data (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Frenette & Morissette, 2003; Galarneau & Morissette, 2004, 2008; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Hawthorne, 2006; Iredale, 2005; Picot et al., 2008; Reitz, 2001a, 2001b) and from surveys (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2003a, 2003b). However, because the issues of immigration and cross-cultural relations cannot be "neatly compressed into tidy tables or figures" (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006, p. 89), qualitative research in this area can be also a rich source of information (Street, 2005). Although a well-established body of literature had addressed the gendering of the immigration experience (Foroutan, 2008; Salaff & Greve, 2004), comparatively few qualitative studies have focused on groups of immigrant women (Maitra & Shan, 2007; Man, 2004; Mohab, 1999). Research into the lives and experiences of women is also well matched with qualitative research in the field of adult education. Taber and Gouthro (2006) contended that "qualitative research has provided essential insights into the reasons behind women's continued lagging process in attaining full social, economic, and educational equality in Canadian society . . . [by] revealing complex factors that articulate

women's experiences in living and learning" (p. 60). In speaking of this complexity, Hum and Simpson (2004) wrote of "individual heterogeneity" with respect to immigration issues, wherein "each immigrant has a unique experience of economic adjustment" (p. 57). Thus, as a qualitative research project, my exploration of the experiences of my study's participants and the rich detail and description complement quantitative data sources on FTPWs and thereby identify opportunities and barriers that they encountered in a manner that "longitudinal quantitative studies alone [could not] accomplish" (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2006, p. 8).

## Summary

I came to this inquiry primarily through my work as a biology instructor and art teacher because I was disturbed by the stories that my immigrant students had shared with me regarding their struggles with the Canadian labour market. This research project's objectives, questions, and theoretical framework of possible selves facilitated my exploration of the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading. This research is important because immigration has the potential to bring many economic and cultural benefits to Canada, because the plight of immigrants is a social justice issue, because the field of adult education is related to the labour-market success of immigrants, and because qualitative research is a rich source of information on immigration and a forum for women's issues and perspectives.

In the following chapters of this thesis I document my journey into this inquiry; they include a review of the pertinent literature (chapter 2), a description

of the study's methodology and methods (chapter 3), the research findings (chapter 4), and the implications of the findings (chapter 5). The following chapters in this qualitative research project contain my reflections on what I learned during the research process and discussions of the answers to my research questions. These findings therefore resonate with me and my work as an adult educator, and I hope that they will resonate with you, the reader, as well.

**CHAPTER 2:**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

As I reported in chapter 1, the focus of this research is primarily on the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading. In this chapter I review the literature to provide a context for the objectives of my study as well as a foundation for my findings. I also describe the relationships among immigration legislation, economic immigrants, and participation in the labour market and describe the labour-market barriers that economic immigrants face, with a particular focus on FTPWs. In the last section I discuss how adult upgrading as a branch of adult education is related to FTPWs' goal achievement.

**Immigration Policy and the Labour Market Participation of Immigrants**

This first section discusses how and why federal legislation is related to the labour-market participation of economic-class immigrants in Canada. It is pertinent to my inquiry because the participants had enrolled in adult upgrading (or, in one case, adult education) to access the Canadian labour market despite the fact that they had already attained high levels of postsecondary education.

*Immigration Policy in Canada*

Canadian immigration procedures are guided primarily by federal legislation—the IPRA—and enacted through federal, provincial, and territorial government portfolios (Green & Green, 2004). The IRPA, which came into force in 2002 and replaced the Immigration Act of 1976, has three main goals: (a) to develop a strong Canadian economy, (b) to reunite families, and (c) to fulfill humanitarian commitments (Statistics Canada, 2007). These goals are manifested

in the three main categories of Canadian newcomers: economic-class immigrants,

family-class immigrants, and protected persons, including refugees (for more

information on the classes and subclasses of immigrants, refer to Appendix A).

Three of the immigrant women who participated in my study had entered Canada

either in the economic class or as dependents of a principal applicant in the

economic class. The fourth entered on a student visa with the intention of

applying to become an economic-class immigrant following the completion of her

studies.

### *Economic Immigration*

I believe that although the IRPA has three main goals, the economic goal

is the focus of the enactment of Canadian immigration legislation. Evidence of

this economic focus can be found in the fact that the majority of immigrants

admitted to Canada as permanent residents are in the economic class; for

example, 55% in 2007 (CIC, 2008a) and 60% in 2008 (CIC, 2009). Canada's

Innovation Strategy of 2002, which was intended to further economic growth and

prosperity, identifies economic immigrants as key factors in the maximization of

Canada's economic development (Government of Canada, 2001; 2002;

Mirchandani, 2004). The CIC (2009) recently announced plans to further increase

economic immigration in 2010 "in order to support Canada's economy as it

recovers from the recession" (p. 9)—a strategy that was also employed in

response to the recession in the 1980s (Green & Green, 2004). Immigrants are

therefore viewed as economic resources and are admitted into Canada with the

assumption that they will help to stimulate the Canadian economy.

*Human Capital and Assumed Labour-Market Participation*

Canada's economic goal from immigration is intimately linked with the labour market because economic-class immigrants are specifically "selected for suitability for the Canadian labour force based on an assessment of their skills" (Statistics Canada, 2003b, p. 9). In a recent issue of *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Statistics Canada contended that filling gaps in the labour market is "one of the principal goals of Canadian immigration policy" (Zietsma, 2010, p. 13). This is because it is assumed that economic-class immigrants will stimulate the economy specifically through their employment in Canada.

Economic immigrants are therefore viewed as a source of human capital in that the majority of successful candidates are deemed most likely to succeed in a knowledge economy (Man, 2004; Picot et al., 2008). It is assumed, then, that the greater the human capital of immigrants, the greater their "capacity to contribute to the receiving society" (Li, 2003, p. 79). Said another way, greater numbers of economic immigrants are admitted to Canada than family-class immigrants and refugees because they tend to bring more human capital and are therefore considered more desirable (Guo & Andersson, 2005).

As a result, the educational attainment of immigrants to Canada has risen dramatically since the early 1990s (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; CIC, 2005; Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Picot et al., 2008). Male and female immigrants are now twice as likely as Canadian-born individuals to possess a university degree (Galarneau & Morisette, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2007; Tastsoglou & Preston, 2006). Thus, the women in my study came to Canada as human capital

with the assumption that they would participate in the labour market driven by a knowledge economy.

### *High Rates of Unemployment and Underemployment of Immigrants, Especially Women*

Despite their intention to work and their overall high levels of educational attainment, the literature established that immigrants face higher rates of unemployment, part-time employment, and temporary employment than do Canadian-born individuals (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; Frenette & Morissette, 2003; Galarneau & Morissette, 2004; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Krahn et al., 2000; Mirchandani, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2003b). High levels of educational attainment (i.e., human capital) do not ensure success in the labour market; Galarneau and Morissette reported that, among those of the prime working age with a university degree, the unemployment rates for immigrants has "consistently been at least triple the rate for the Canadian-born" (p. 5) with similar levels of education. Compared to immigrant men and Canadian-born women and men, immigrant women in particular face much lower levels of labour-market participation (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; CIC, 2005; Hawthorne, 2006; Maitra & Shan, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2003b; Tastsoglou & Preston, 2006, Zietsma, 2010).

Not only is finding a job a concern, but finding employment at a level appropriate to educational attainment and prior occupational standing is also a major issue for immigrants (Krahn et al., 2000; Statistics Canada, 2003b). Many immigrants who are employed have considerably more education than would

normally be required for their positions (Zietsma, 2010). For example, in 2006, 248,000 foreign-trained professionals were employed in Canada; however, only 24% were working in their trained professions (Zietsma, 2010). Immigrant women experience the greatest levels of underemployment in Canada. For example, Galarneau and Morrissette (2004) reported that a greater proportion of immigrant women with a university degree held jobs that did not require a high school–level education: 38% compared to 25% of immigrant men, 13% of Canadian-born men, and 12% of Canadian-born women. CIC (2005) also found that immigrant women are more likely to work in processing, sales, and service occupations and less likely to work in administrative and management occupations than are immigrant men and Canadian-born individuals.

### *Economic Immigration and Labour-Market Expectations*

The assumption that admitting economic immigrants with high levels of human capital into Canada will stimulate the economy creates dual expectations between the host country and its immigrants. The host country admits the economic immigrants with the expectation that they will be able to work and stimulate the economy, which therein justifies their admission. Furthermore, economic immigrants arrive in Canada expecting to participate in the Canadian workforce (Statistics Canada, 2003b). However, the expectations and goals of both the host country and its economic immigrants are unmet if the immigrants are unable to fully participate in the labour market (Picot et al., 2008); this section on immigration policy and the labour-market participation of immigrants has certainly demonstrated that this is the case.

**Labour-Market Barriers for Immigrants**

The previous section discussed the complex relationship among immigration policy, the Canadian economy, and immigrant participation in the labour market. The question remains: If immigrants are generally more educated than the average Canadian, why are they not able to participate fully in the Canadian labour market? This question can also be reframed in the context of my research: Why were the FTPWs in this study not able to find employment despite high levels of human capital? In seeking answers to these questions, I will explore several categories of labour-market barriers that immigrants face, with a focus on those that affect FTPWs. The first category includes the general labour-market barriers that most immigrants face: official language proficiency, country of origin, length of time spent in Canada, and immigration class. The second category includes the credential-recognition process, a labour-market barrier unique to foreign-trained professionals. The third category includes the social construction of the notions of *immigrant* and *immigrant women* as a social labour-market barrier that also affects the employment of FTPWs.

In describing these labour-market barriers, I am not suggesting that all individuals with education and/or experience in a particular profession are suitable for work in the Canadian labour market. It is also important to have standards and quality criteria because individuals must be able to communicate in the dominant language and must have the necessary professional and social skills to be successful in any profession. The reason that these labour-market barriers are prevalent in the literature is that they prevent qualified individuals from

working as professionals in Canada despite the fact that they meet these quality criteria.

### *General Labour-Market Barrier: Official-Language Proficiency*

Proficiency in one of the official languages is a factor in immigrants' success in the Canadian labour market (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; Galarneau & Morissette, 2004; Krahn et al., 2000; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993). Immigrant women in particular are more likely than immigrant men to have less English- or French-language speaking ability (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Ng, 1993; Statistics Canada, 2003b). However, it is important to note that official-language proficiency is not a major factor for all immigrants, particularly for foreign-trained professionals. The immigrants most likely to cite official-language proficiency as a critical labour-market barrier have the lowest levels of formal education and are in the older age brackets (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Moreover, the majority of immigrants whose mother tongue is not English or French report conversational proficiency in at least one of these languages (CIC, 2008a; Statistics Canada, 2003b, 2007). Therefore, although official-language proficiency is an important fact to consider, the literature agreed with the CIC (2005) that this accounts for only "part of the disparity in labour force participation of very recent immigrants" (p. xii).

### *General Labour-Market Barrier: Country of Origin*

Country of origin appears to have a substantial effect on the labour-market participation of immigrants (Foroutan, 2008; Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Krahn et al., 2000; Statistics Canada, 2003b). Individuals from Eurowestern

countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States have more labour-market success than do those from non-Eurowestern regions such as Iraq, Taiwan, Lebanon, and South East Asia (Hawthorne, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2003b). Foreign-trained professionals are also affected by the country of origin; Friedberg (2000) identified the origin of an individual's human capital as a "crucial determinant of its value" (p. 221). The country of origin of female immigrants affects their labour-market success to a much greater degree than it does for male immigrants (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Krahn et al., 2000; Mohab, 1999).

### General Labour-Market Barrier: Length of Time Spent in Canada

The length of time spent in Canada is another influence on immigrants' success in the labour market. In their first year in Canada immigrants generally experience low labour-force participation rates (CIC, 2005). Moreover, the length of residence in the host country has a greater effect on the labour-market success of immigrant men than of women (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Foroutan, 2008). Factors related to spending a longer period of time in Canada are the resulting greater ability in English or French (Statistics Canada, 2007), the development of a social network in the labour market (Statistics Canada, 2003b), and more Canadian work experience (Guo & Andersson, 2005; Krahn et al., 2000; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993; Statistics Canada, 2003b). In these instances *success in the labour market* refers to being employed; however, as I discussed earlier, many immigrants face underemployment as well. Many initially take on *survival jobs—* transitory employment that falls well below their educational qualifications or

expectations and makes it difficult to find commensurate employment in the future (Badets & Howatson-Leo, 1999; Krahn et al., 2000; Ng, 1993; Statistics Canada, 2003b).

### *General Labour-Market Barrier: Immigration Class*

Immigration class is another important factor in the labour-market success of immigrants (Foroutan, 2008). Large numbers of immigrants with high levels of education and work experience who enter Canada as protected persons, family-class immigrants, or economic-class dependents are not assessed for their suitability for the labour market (CIC, 2008a; Hawthorne, 2006; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993). In its findings from the Longitudinal Study of Immigrants in Canada, Statistics Canada (2003b) reported that principal economic applicants have much higher rates of employment: 59% compared to 21% of economic-class spouses or dependents, 39% of family-class immigrants and 21% of the protected-persons class. The immigration class appears to be an influential factor in the labour-market success of immigrant women in general (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Iredale, 2005). Women are far more likely than men to enter Canada in the family class or as economic-class dependents (CIC, 2008b, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2003b), which directly impacts their employment rates. In my study, of the three participants who entered Canada directly in the economic class, two entered as dependents and did not have their educational qualifications assessed before they entered the country.

***Professional Labour-Market Barrier: Credential Recognition***

The credential recognition process is an important labour-market barrier for foreign-trained professionals (as defined in chapter 1, *foreign rained* refers to individuals who have received their education and/or work experience outside of Canada, and *professional* refers to individuals who work within regulated professions that require specific educational credentials and/or licensing exams to practice). Credential recognition is the process of comparing immigrants' education to Canadian educational standards. This process has been identified as the primary cause of the underemployment of foreign-trained professionals (Foroutan, 2008; Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Li, 2003; Mirchandani, 2004; Reitz, 2001a; Statistics Canada, 2003b), particularly for females (Guo, 2006a; Man, 2004).

Complicating this process is the fact that profession-specific credential recognition is not regulated at the national level (Girard & Bauder, 2007). As a result, both credential standards and the credential-recognition process can differ from province to province (Guo, 2006a; Guo & Andersson, 2005). The reluctance of professional regulatory bodies to recognize foreign credentials is also a significant barrier in the credential recognition process (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Girard & Bauder, 2007; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Iredale, 2005; Kofman, 2000; Krahn et al., 2000; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993; Reitz, 2001a; Statistics Canada, 2003b). In particular, immigrants with credentials from non-Eurowestern countries are accepted less frequently than those from Euro-Western countries (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Girard & Bauder, 2007; Statistics Canada,

2003b). Some of the influencing factors include the lack of available information on the educational quality of these credentials (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008), the difficulty of matching the credentials to the Canadian educational system (Statistics Canada, 2003b), and the lack of time or experience to access information to evaluate whether educational credentials or work experience from another country meets Canadian standards (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008).

Not only does this result in inconsistent procedures and practices with respect to the credential-recognition process (Guo & Andersson, 2005), but it also perpetuates the misinformation and miscommunication that interfere with immigrants,' employers', professional regulatory organizations', and educational institutes' abilities to "obtain accurate, reliable, and consistent information about the steps and processes required for the recognition of foreign qualifications" (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008, p. 9). The IRPA also acknowledges these problems in its pledge "to work in cooperation with the provinces to secure better recognition of the foreign credentials of permanent residents and their more rapid integration into society" (Department of Justice, Canada, 2001, ¶ 4).

### Social Labour-Market Barrier: The Construction of 'Immigrant Woman'

A final factor that influences the employment of immigrants is what I call a social labour-market barrier. The literature demonstrated that the labour-market barriers that I described in the preceding paragraphs affect women to a greater degree than they do men. The question is, Why? I contend that this is related to socially constructed assumptions about immigration and women. Many have

pointed out that the terms *immigrant* and *immigrant woman* have differing legal and social connotations (Guo, 2006a; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Li, 2003; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993; Tastsoglou & Preston, 2006). The legal connotation (or what Li called the *bureaucratic* definition) of an immigrant is a foreign-born individual who has been admitted as a permanent resident or citizen of Canada under criteria established by the IRPA. The social connotation is the assumed lower social status associated with being an immigrant, whereby immigrants are assumed to be non-Caucasian individuals with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds who work in lower positions (Guo & Andersson, 2005).

Approached from a feminist theoretical perspective (which I describe further in chapter 3), the category of gender can also be considered socially constructed (English & Irving, 2007). Thus, the term immigrant woman also carries similar social connotations in that an immigrant woman is an entity assumed to have even less status than immigrant men (Lee, 1993; Ng, 1993). Therefore, gender, skin colour, and accents are used as a means of social stratification (Guo, 2006a; Guo & Andersson, 2005; Lee, 1993; Man, 2004; Ng, 1993). According to Guo, the lower social status attributed to immigrant women reinforces class position and permits exploitation. For example, when immigrant women are assumed to be unfit for the labour market, their unemployment and underemployment are not problematic. Therefore, this social connotation affects how immigrants "are evaluated and ultimately how they are incorporated into Canadian society" (Li, 2003, p. 39). Furthermore, when the social construction of immigrant women remains unacknowledged and unchallenged, the labour-market

barriers that immigrants face are considered individual barriers, which obscures the underlying racist assumptions that structure their lives (English & Irving, 2007).

## Adult Education

In the previous sections of this chapter I elaborated on the labour-market outcomes and barriers that FTPWs face, which is the topical focus of this study. The following section focuses on the context of the study: adult upgrading, which is a branch of adult education. Three of the participants in this study enrolled in adult upgrading after they were unable to participate in the labour market and because upgrading offered them a means of achieving their personal goals, particularly those related to their future careers in Canada. In exploring this context, I will first define adult education and adult upgrading programs and describe the various reasons that adult learners enrol in these programs and the different barriers to their participation.

### *Defining Adult Education and Adult Upgrading*

To set the context for this study, it is first important to clarify what I mean by *adult education* and *adult upgrading*, because both terms have many definitions associated with a variety of purposes and outcomes. Adult education can be broadly defined as organized learning activities for adults (Merriam & Brockett, 2007); more specifically, it can describe vocational or career-oriented educational pursuits (Orton, 2009). Jarvis (2004) summarized the spectrum of definitions for adult education by describing it as both post-compulsory education

and post-initial education. However, in its broadest sense adult education refers to activities that involve the learning processes of adults (Knowles, 1980).

The primary context of this study is a branch of adult education called adult upgrading, which refers to programs or courses that deliver junior or senior high school–level curricula to adults. The purpose of adult upgrading is not to teach basic literacy skills, as it is in adult basic education (ABE), or to improve English language skills as it is in ELL and English as a second language (ESL) programs; rather, the purpose of adult upgrading is to gain secondary school credits that can be used to apply to postsecondary institutes and/or to gain a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The literature also referred to adult upgrading as school board adult education (Orton, 2009), adult secondary education (Merriam & Brockett, 2007), and continuing education (Courtney, 1992). Because the participants in my study were foreign-trained professionals who had enrolled in upgrading as a means of entering the Canadian labour market, it could be argued that, in the context of this study, adult upgrading is also a form of continuing professional education (CPE), which refers to the ongoing education of professional practitioners throughout their careers (Queeny, 2000).

Knowles (1980) initially used the term *andragogy* to describe the "art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43) as an alternative to *pedagogy* because, etymologically, pedagogy is based on the Greek word *paid*, meaning "child," whereas andragogy is based on the Greek word *aner*, meaning "man, not boy," which thus relates to adults. Although the concept of andragogy has been

criticized for creating a false dichotomy between the learning of adults and the learning of children (Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Merriam, 2001), the term can be used to highlight the fact that literature on children's learning processes and needs does not necessarily encompass all of the aspects of the adult learning processes. Following this debate, Knowles (1984) even suggested that andragogy is defined more by the learning situation than by the specific learner. Thus, research in the field of adult education has focused on the use of a context within adult education (e.g., adult upgrading) to identify and meet the needs of the learners in that particular situation (e.g., FTPWs).

### *Participation in Adult Education and Adult Upgrading*

The context of adult upgrading is well suited to an examination of the issues related to labour-market barriers and participation. Although some adults enrol in adult education to learn for the sake of learning (Merriam & Brockett, 2007) or to meet other people (Jarvis, 2004), the majority of adult learners enter adult education for professional advancement (Jarvis, 2004). For example, adult learners may want to stay current in their careers, start a new career, or advance in their careers (Banerjee & Verma, 2009). Future participation in the labour market is the primary reason that the students in Whitty's (2005) study cited for specifically entering adult upgrading. This was also the case for all of the participants in my study. Their choice to enter adult education was fitting because such programs have been particularly useful in helping immigrants to integrate into Canada and participate in the labour market (Banerjee & Verma, 2009; Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Friedberg, 2000; Mohab, 2001) because many

immigrants utilize a variety of educational programs to help them to "upgrade their language, knowledge, and skills" (Guo, 2006a, p. 198). Returning to the unmet expectations of the host country and its immigrants when they fail to find work, adult upgrading as a branch of adult education can therefore be viewed as a response and as an opportunity to meet both personal and societal needs (Courtney, 1992).

### *Barriers to Participation in Adult Education*

Adult education is not always a site of opportunity; barriers prevent adult learners from maximizing the benefits of adult educational programming. The literature identified some of the barriers as a lack of time, money or financial support, childcare, and daytime opportunities (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Jarvis, 2004; Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Individual barriers include a lack of confidence in one's ability to learn and a view of education as irrelevant or useless (Jarvis, 2004). These barriers highlight an important point: Adult education programs are not available to all members of our society when those who lack the appropriate resources or supports are unable to attend. For this reason immigrant populations are much less represented in adult education than are native-born adults (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Therefore, adult education cannot be seen as a "one-size-fits-all, neutral system" (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009, p. 157) that benefits all learners equally. However, within these barriers exists a site of opportunity for research: In accepting that different groups of learners have different needs and are affected by barriers to participation in different ways, particular groups of learners can offer the literature on adult education important

insights into their learning needs and processes. Therefore, adult upgrading is a fitting context in which to examine the needs of a particular group of learners such as FTPWs.

### *Feminist Perspectives on Adult Education*

Just as children's learning processes do not necessarily encompass all of the aspects of adults' learning processes, feminist scholars have recognized that adult learning theory does not have universal relevance and applicability to women's learning experiences as adults (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Mohab, 2001; Taber & Gouthro, 2006). With regard to the term andragogy, it is interesting to note that the root of the term actually refers to the experiences of *men*. This indicates the general omission of women's experiences, contributions, and viewpoints in adult education theory, which I described in chapter 1.

From a feminist perspective (described in chapter 3), the omission of women's views is problematic because research driven by and for men privileges their particular learning needs (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000). The absence of literature on women in general is harmful because "women are more likely than men to face conditions that restrict access to social and material support" (Prins, Toso, & Schafft, 2009, p. 336). The omission of women's views from education research specifically is problematic because research driven by and for men privileges their particular learning needs (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000). Moreover, just as women's experiences are lacking in research on adult education, the experiences of immigrants in adult education are also missing (Banerjee & Verma, 2009; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000), particularly those

of female immigrants (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). This omission results in a disadvantage when immigrant women's unique needs are neglected through exclusion in adult education curriculum and policy (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009).

Because women comprise the largest growing cohort of participants in many educational settings (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), including adult education (Courtney, 1992; Cuban & Stromquist, 2009), it is crucial to include their perspectives to support them as they engage in a range of meaningful and constructive educational pursuits (Taber & Gouthro, 2006). Including immigrant women's perspectives in adult education research means that the barriers and opportunities that they encounter can be explored to maximize the benefits. Thus, in this study I explored (through the use of the theoretical framework of possible selves that I described in chapter 3) the influence of adult upgrading on the personally relevant goals and dreams of the participants to identify the barriers and opportunities for these four women.

### *Adult Education and Social Justice*

Research is not a politically or socially neutral enterprise (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000). The choice of topic reflects a concentration on a specific area or group of individuals for a variety of reasons. As an "instrument of social action and social change" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 36), adult education— the context of this study—must be concerned with the education and empowerment of all adults (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000). How is adult upgrading an instrument of social justice and change? Ewert and Grace (2000) answered this question insightfully:

> Ordinary citizens can transform their own lives and communities through learning and action. That simple assumption, embedded in adult education history, has driven the development practice of people committed to helping others acquire knowledge, develop skills, and adopt new behaviours that improve communities. (p. 327)

Hayes and Flannery (2000) contended that focusing on women learners themselves is a commitment to political and social justice. As I described in chapter 1, my choice of topic reflects my commitment to addressing what I view as a significant social problem and exploring how I might address it. Adult upgrading was therefore a fitting context for such an exploration because adult education is intimately related to social transformation for immigrant women (Mohab, 2001). It is important to note that examining immigrant women's experiences in adult upgrading does not imply that only they have needs or that they are the only or most important types of students in an upgrading classroom; however, their experiences "serve[d] as a consequential lens through which to view other oppressive systems" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000, p. 147). With this in mind, in the following chapters of this thesis I describe the experiences of the participants to identify how the barriers and opportunities that they encountered and how adult upgrading influenced their goals for the future.

## Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the literature on immigration and adult education to provide a context for the findings and implications of my research. The literature helped to explain how and why FTPWs are not able to find work despite high levels of educational attainment as well as how and why adult upgrading, as a subcategory of adult education, was a fitting context in which to

examine these issues. In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology and methods that I

employed to answer my research questions.

**CHAPTER 3:**

**METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

In chapter 1, I located myself in the inquiry, outlined my research objectives and questions, and explained the rationale for my research. Chapter 2 described the labour-market barriers of FTPWs and the role of adult upgrading and education in the experiences of foreign-trained professionals in Canada. The first objective of this research was to explore the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading to add to our understanding of immigration in Canada and its connections to adult education. The second objective was to explore how adult education might support and enhance the experiences of FTPWs who choose to enter an adult upgrading program, from the perspectives of these study's participants. These objectives provided the foundation for the two main research questions that guided this inquiry: (a) What is the influence of adult upgrading on the development and realization of the possible selves of the participants in this study? and (b) How might adult upgrading support the development and realization of the possible selves from the perspectives of these women? This chapter describes the methodological and theoretical underpinnings that guided and structured my research as well as the methods that I employed in seeking the answers to my research questions.

**Methodology**

Before I detail the frameworks that structured the strategies of inquiry and analysis that I used in my study, it is useful to distinguish between methodology and method. Methodology refers to the general logic or theoretical perspectives,

frameworks, or paradigms used to structure research projects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In contrast, methods involve the technical aspects of data collection, including surveys, interviews, case studies, and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I therefore begin my focus on methodology by outlining my paradigmatic orientation and theoretical framework. Following this, I detail the specific methods that I employed in my inquiry. This chapter ends with the limitations and delimitations of my research.

### *Paradigmatic Orientation*

The following section details the paradigmatic orientation that underlies my research project. For the sake of this discussion, I use the word *paradigm* in the sense in which Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined it, as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (p. 24). A paradigm is a way of looking at the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); thus, an individual's paradigmatic orientation structures his or her underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The ontological assumptions of a paradigm shape the researcher's understanding of the forms and nature of reality and, consequently, what can possibly be known about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Additionally, epistemological effects such as the paradigmatic orientation influence the researcher's understanding of the "nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known" (p. 201). Paradigms also have methodological assumptions that guide how the researcher engages in finding out "whatever he or she believes can be known" (p. 201). Therefore, because any

research project (qualitative or otherwise) begins by posing a question, the paradigmatic orientation and its associated theoretical frameworks structure how the question is phrased and how the researcher proceeds to seek answers (Merriam, 2009).

### *Constructivist Paradigm*

My theoretical orientation aligns with the broad tradition of the constructivist paradigm, which involves a commitment to the "view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 236). Thus constructivism breaks from positivist paradigms, which assume that reality is "observable, stable, and measurable" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8) because the constructivist paradigm views the world in terms of ontological relativism (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). As a result, constructivism also views epistemology as being transactional and subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) because it is assumed that knowledge cannot be separated from existence. Therefore, within a constructivist paradigm, research findings are viewed as subjective and contextually bound.

As a result of these ontological and epistemological assumptions, constructivist research methods are hermeneutical and dialectical in that the best informed and the most sophisticated construction of 'truth' relies on an inquiry process that unfolds through a "dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis and so on" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243). The investigator (the observer) and the object of the investigation (the observed) are thus interactively engaged in a process of constructing the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2009).

Therefore, the investigator/observer cannot and should not be disentangled from the investigated/observed and the investigation/research (Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 1998).

### *Feminist Theoretical Perspectives*

This inquiry was concerned with the experiences of women and was guided and informed by a feminist theoretical perspective. The feminist theoretical perspective focuses specifically on the lives of women and their positioning within socially constructed categories of gender (Grossman et al., 1997). In viewing these roles as being socially constructed, feminist research is also aligned within the constructivist paradigm. Feminism has many perspectives; hence, many scholars refer to this theoretical tradition as "feminisms" (Brickhouse, 1998; Hayes & Flannery, 2000) because there are many different ways to understand the relationships among institutes, social practices, and notions of gender. Therefore, there are "many different feminisms that seek to explain and change them" (Brickhouse, 1998, p. 1067). In this thesis I will use the term *feminist theoretical perspective* to encompass these feminisms.

Brickhouse (1998) described feminist theories as useful heuristic devices that can be used to make certain issues problematic and subject to analysis. The editors of the research publication *Feminism and Psychology: An International Journal* share this view in evaluating manuscripts for publication. Some of the criteria for inclusion are that "it challenges traditional or devaluing views of women, . . . it explores alternatives that empower women and minorities, . . . [and] it contains implications for social change" (Grossman et al., 1997, p. 77).

In using and applying feminist theoretical perspectives, feminist researchers seek to illuminate the lives of women by generating new knowledge that was previously "invisible, unaddressed, or deemed unimportant" (Grossman et al., 1997, p. 76). Feminist research is also aligned with the constructivist paradigm because such forms of research typically reject "the idea that the world is 'directly knowable'; it 'cannot empirically present itself' (Willis, 1997, p. 194; as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 33). One aim of feminist research is "to give 'voice' to women who have been marginalized by their social, cultural, or class positions" (Grossman et al., 1997, p. 77). Therefore feminist research purposefully addresses social justice issues, such as the barriers that FTPWs face as they attempt to reestablish their careers in Canada. This focus on change, power, and oppression also aligns the feminist theoretical perspective with the critical theory tradition (Merriam, 2009). Although constructivism is concerned with the building of meaning, there is room for a critical aspect that uses the knowledge constructed about society to critique and change society (Merriam, 2009).

Therefore, my research was guided by a feminist theoretical perspective because I structured it by adhering to the idea that gender (specifically, the female gender) is an important category of analysis because the social constructions of gender are related to gender-based inequities. Moreover, the social justice rationale (see chapter 1) was also guided by a feminist theoretical perspective in its focus on the inequitable experiences of FTPWs in Canada.

**Theoretical Framework: Possible Selves**

With regard to a research project's methodology, the theoretical

framework must fall within the paradigmatic orientation. My use of possible

selves as a theoretical framework reflects the constructivist paradigm and the

feminist theoretical perspective; in the following section I describe how possible

selves fit within this research's methodology by briefly detailing the history of

possible selves in research, the social construction of possible selves, how

possible selves change over the lifespan, their connection to educational research,

and possible-selves research methods.

### *Possible Selves Represent Self-Relevant Goals, Hopes, and Fears*

First described in the field of psychology by Markus and Nurius (1986),

possible selves are "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they

would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (p. 954). Thus

possible selves are cognitive representations of self-relevant hopes, fears, goals,

aspirations, motives, and threats (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves

include two main categories: hoped-for selves and feared-for selves. Hoped-for

selves, which are desirable future incarnations that the individual would like to

experience, might include the successful self, the creative self, the popular self, or

the admired self. Feared-for selves, which are undesirable incarnations that the

individual would like to avoid, might include the lonely self, the depressed self,

the unemployed self, or the terminally ill self. Possible selves are linked with the

past and the future; although they are forward focused, they derive from past

representations of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and can therefore be viewed

as a cognitive bridge to the future because they specify how "individuals may change from how they are now to what they will become" (p. 961). Figure 1 depicts the various factors that influence an individual's possible selves.
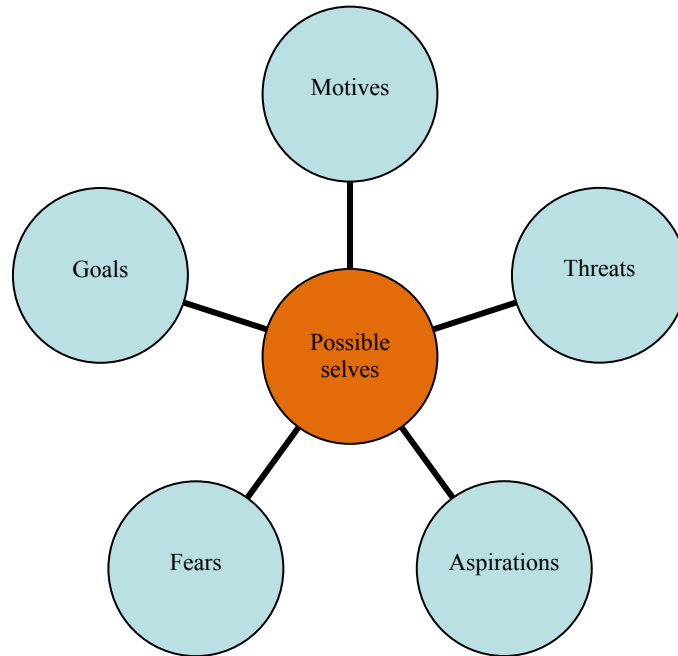


*Figure 2.* Possible selves, a cognitive manifestation of motives, goals, threats, fears, and aspirations.

### *Possible Selves Change Over the Lifespan*

Self-knowledge and the self-concept change and develop over the lifespan through interactions with others and self-reflection (Frazier & Hooker, 2006). Development across the lifespan can thus be viewed as a process of acquiring, achieving, or resisting possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In their study of possible selves over the lifespan, Cross and Markus (1991) found that the types and number of possible selves varied with age groups: The possible selves of those aged 18-24 years were more focused on realms of family and occupation,

whereas those aged 40-59 years were focused on personal- and health-related possible selves in addition to family. Adolescents' possible selves are most often focused on friends, school, and future occupations (Kerpelman, Shoffner, & Ross-Griffin, 2002; Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 1998; Kortsch, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2008).

Although the number of possible selves is greatest for adolescents (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001), adults' possible selves continue to change because, despite the stability and enduring nature of the adult self-concept in adulthood, the adult self-concept continues to be "contextually sensitive and dynamic" (Frazier & Hooker, 2006, p. 44). Hence identity exploration has been correlated with the number of possible selves and changes, and the changing numbers and saliency of an individual's possible selves become a reflection of changes in identity (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). Therefore, because adults' possible selves continue to evolve and change as a result of interactions with their environment, it is fitting to use possible selves as a mechanism to explore the influence of adult upgrading on the possible selves of a group of FTPWs.

### *Possible Selves Are Socially Constructed*

Possible selves reflect the aspects of the selves that are "socially determined and constrained" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954); they are one of the first elements of the self-concept to respond to socioenvironmental changes (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Kerpelman, 2006; Knox, 2006). As a result, the self-concept and related possible selves are greatly affected by transitional life periods (Rossiter, 2007) such as immigration (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006).

Possible selves are therefore a useful tool to "help explain how individuals change and evolve as a result of engagement with people and ideas from the social milieu" (McCallister, 2004, p. 429), and they reflect the constructivist paradigm because they concern how an individual's self is constructed as a result of his or her interactions in the environment.

### Possible Selves and Education

Jarvis (2004) noted that the self-concept is central to learning theory; consequently, the theoretical framework of possible selves fits well within educational research. Because possible selves allow for an evaluative and interpretive context for individual self-concepts (Markus & Nurius, 1986), the resulting insights "can inform instruction and guide learning" (McCallister, 2004, p. 435). On the connection between possible selves and learning theory, McCallister wrote:

> If the self is understood as a flexible, shifting identity, wedded to individuals in social contexts that are forever changing, the most compelling learning theories take into account the multiple influences on the development of self, and provide ways to view the self as an entity tied to context. (p. 459)

Possible selves are therefore useful in giving educators critical information about the complex relationships among pedagogy, students, the learning environment, and the learning process. For example, because possible selves are intimately connected with motivation and goal setting, feared-for and hoped-for possible selves can be "incentives for future behavior" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Thus, possible selves have been used to study the link between motivation and academic achievement (Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998), strategies

for reaching future academic goals (Kerpelman et al., 2002), and strategies for enhancing student motivation and commitment (Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2006).

More recently, possible selves have been identified as a "useful and largely unexplored framework for understanding adult learning as the medium through which change, growth, and goal achievement occur through the life course" (Rossiter, 2007, p. 5). Knox (2006) argued that possible selves can help educators to motivate adult students toward personally defined goals, represented by hoped-for selves, and away from personally meaningful negative outcomes, represented by feared-for selves. In addition to school-aged students (Hock et al., 2006), teachers and schools have been found to be instrumental in increasing the number and saliency of possible selves of adult students (Knox, 2006). Thus, when development over the lifespan is viewed as a process of acquiring, achieving, or resisting possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), they offer a mechanism to explore the influence of adult upgrading on the goals of FTPWs, as revealed in their hoped-for and feared-for possible selves.

### *Possible Selves Research Foci*

Because possible selves originated in the field of psychology, much of the earliest research on possible selves is likewise focused on the exploring the self-concept and its relationship to the social environment (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986) as well as motivation and goal setting (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Possible selves have also been used to study a wide variety of topics such as occupational choices (Chalk, Meara, &

Day, 1994), parenthood optimism versus pessimism (Carver, Reynolds, & Scheier, 1994), the psychological effects of parenthood (Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, Morfie, & Schwagler, 1996), and borderline personality disorder (Janis, Veague, & Driver-Linn, 2006). As evidenced by the research on the gendering of possible selves, a substantial number of possible-selves research projects have focused specifically on the possible selves of females (Anthis, 2006; Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000; Janis et al., 2006; Kerpelman et al., 2002).

In the field of education the bulk of the research on possible selves has centered on children and adolescents (Hock et al., 2006; Knox et al., 1998, 2000; Kortsch et al., 2008; Leondari et al., 1998; McCallister, 2004) and university students (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Some research on possible selves has also focused on adulthood, particularly later in the lifespan (Frazier et al., 2000; Cross & Markus, 1991).

### *Possible Selves Research Methods*

Markus and Nurius (1986) determined that "individuals can reflect on their possible selves and that these selves are not identical with their current or now selves" (p. 958). Since 1986, when their seminal paper was published, a number of research instruments and approaches have been developed to elicit, measure, and analyze possible selves.

Quantitative research into possible selves makes use of primarily the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ), which was first developed by Oyserman and Markus (1990; $N = 228$) and Cross and Markus (1991; $N = 200$) and was based on Markus and Nurius's (1986) seminal research paper on possible selves.

The PSQ is an open-ended questionnaire that elicits the type, number, and salience of an individual's possible selves. Quantitative researchers who utilized the PSQ include Anthis (2006; N = 120), Dunkel and Anthis (2001; $N$ = 116), Knox et al. (2000; $N$ = 212), Frazier et al. (2000; $N$ = 112), and Leondari et al. (1998; $N$ = 289).

Possible selves have also been used in qualitative research projects. For example, in their evaluation of the Changing Lives Program, Kortsch et al. (2008) adapted the PSQ and created the Possible-Selves Questionnaire Qualitative Extensions. This instrument is a qualitative method for "eliciting narrative expressions of the subjective meaning and significance of participants' possible future selves" (p. 345). Another qualitative researcher who studied possible selves was McCallister (2004), who used the construct of possible selves as a framework for the analysis of the narratives and writings of her elementary-aged children to explore how notions of the self evolve within and across social contexts such as schools.

More recently, researchers have employed mixed methodology to explore possible selves. For instance, Kerpelman et al. (2002) used qualitative interviews informed by the PSQ and a Q-sort statistical analysis to explore African American mothers' and daughters' beliefs about possible selves. In the first longitudinal study of possible selves Frazier et al. (2000) used the PSQ and qualitative interviews to examine the possible selves of a group of women aged 55-89 years.

Whether researchers employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies, they can use possible selves to frame many types of research projects to explore various influences on the self-concept.

## Methods

The previous section demonstrated that possible selves are a theoretical framework that can be used to guide methodology and methods in research on a variety of topics and in a number of different ways. Within the constructivist paradigm and guided by a feminist theoretical perspective, I used possible selves as a framework to explore the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading to meet my research objectives and questions (outlined in chapter 1). The following section details how I used the theoretical framework of possible selves in my inquiry as I collected and analyzed the data to elicit answers to my research questions.

### *Site and Participant Selection*

After developing my research questions, methodology, and methods, I identified criteria for the potential sites and participants in the research to answer my research questions. I purposefully chose the sites, two postsecondary educational institutes (which I describe in chapter 4) because they offered adult upgrading programming, and I used nonprobability sampling to select the participants because statistical generalization was not one of the purposes of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). (Refer to the section on the limitations and delimitations of this study later in this chapter for further discussion.) I therefore used purposeful sampling to "select a sample from which

the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77); thus I solicited only individuals who had direct experience with the central phenomenon of the study (i.e., FTPWs in adult upgrading) as research participants. This involved criterion-based selection (Merriam, 2009) in which the participants had to be female foreign-trained professionals who were enrolled or had been enrolled in adult upgrading in the past six months. I used a poster (Appendix B) and announcements in upgrading classes to recruit four participants. Furthermore, I used opportunistic sampling (Creswell, 2008) for one of the four participants; although she did not meet all of the initial criteria (she was enrolled in a diploma program and had not taken adult upgrading), I established that she could still provide information on the central phenomenon based on her experiences with adult education as a foreign-trained professional.

### Data Collection

After I made the initial contact with each potential participant, I briefly met with them to explain the purpose of the study, the content and number of interviews, and the research process. To gain informed consent, I gave each participant an information letter (Appendix C) and a copy of the interview questions (Appendix D) to fully inform them of the topic and the content of the interviews. I also openly discussed with them the benefits and risks of the research project.

After I received the participants' informed consent, I interviewed each participant twice. Three completed the interviews in two separate meetings, whereas one chose to do both interviews in one meeting. The first was an

audiotaped, open-ended, semistructured, conversational interview in which I asked questions that I adapted from the PSQ (Cross & Markus, 1991). The purpose was to elicit the individuals' hoped-for and feared-for possible selves, particularly those related to the context of adult upgrading. The second interview, also an audiotaped, open-ended, semistructured, conversational interview, focused on the relationship and potential influence of adult upgrading on the participants' self-identified possible selves. After I transcribed both interviews for each participant, I had a telephone conversation with her to member-check her views of the credibility of my interpretations of her responses (Creswell, 2008).

In the qualitative research process, data collection and analysis are simultaneous rather than separate activities (Merriam, 2009), and I analyzed the central claims, concerns, or issues constructed in the initial interview with the first participant and used them to structure the interviews with subsequent participants (Merriam, 2009). As a result, the recursive and dynamic nature of qualitative data collection (Merriam, 2009) caused the interviews questions to evolve as I proceeded through the research process.

During the data collection I also maintained a research journal in which I recorded my observer comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) on my thoughts and feelings during and after the interviews. As well, this journal included observations, connections with the literature, relevant metaphors or analogies, and any diagrams or charts that came to mind as I proceeded with the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

*Ethical Considerations*

Any research involving human participants requires strict ethical conduct. This research did not proceed until I had gained Research Ethics Board approval from the University of Alberta and both participating educational institutes. As I reported in the Data Collection section, I fully informed the participants on the nature and topic of the research. I confirmed their informed consent before each interview and informed them that they could retract any interview data or remove themselves from the research project up until two weeks after their interview. I kept the interview data strictly confidential and have made every effort to protect the identifies of the participants in this thesis.

A final ethical consideration involves my work as an instructor at one of the sites in this study. To respect the researcher-participant relationship, I did not interview any of my current students. One of the four participants was a student in my classroom in a previous semester; however, I did not recruit her until she was no longer my student and my role as her teacher and evaluator had ended.

*Minimizing Participants' Stress Levels*

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic of my research, in addition to general ethical considerations, I will also elaborate on how I minimized the participants' stress levels and supported their emotional needs. This research topic involved a risk of stress to the participants. The interviews had the potential to revive painful memories or stories related to their immigration experiences, including loss, loneliness, and/or culture shock. To maximally reduce their stress, I gave each participant ample time to make an informed decision about whether or

not to consent to and proceed with the interviews. Because of these precautions, three potential participants decided that they did not want to participate because of the sensitive topic of the research and the time commitment.

I conducted all of the interviews at a time, date, and location of each participant's choice. I gave them the option of meeting in an informal public location (one participant met with me in the school's cafeteria) or a private location (the other three participants chose to meet with me in my office). At the beginning of each interview I reminded the participants that they could choose to stop the research process at any moment, refuse to answer any questions, and/or retract any statements that I had recorded during the interview. To support the emotional needs of the participants, I compiled a comprehensive list of educational and community services that offer relevant counselling or support (Appendix E). Included on this list were agencies that offer support to immigrants, women, and students.

### *Data Analysis and Interpretation*

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process of searching and arranging the data collected from the interviews to answer the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In comparison, data interpretation refers to developing ideas about "the findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts" (p. 159). Although there is a distinction between the two terms, the research findings that result from the analysis of and ideas about the findings (i.e., the interpretation of the analysis) often emerge together. The following section describes how I analyzed and interpreted the interview data that

I gathered from my four participants as I sought answers to my research questions.

### *Coding*

Qualitative data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data; that is to say, it is a process of knowledge construction through "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the research has seen and read" (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). The purpose of this process is to answer the research questions. With this in mind, after each interview I listened to the audio-recording three times and jotted down my observer comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in my research journal, including items that I needed to member-check, potential analytic codes or themes, areas that required more attention or exploration, and questions to ask in subsequent interviews.

Afterwards, I carefully transcribed each interview and checked the transcript twice for accuracy of representation. I then printed the interview transcripts and analyzed them by hand (Merriam, 2009). Preliminary exploratory analysis of the data (Creswell, 2008) involved reading the transcripts in their entirety several times while I jotted notes in my research journal and the margins of the printed transcripts (a process that Bodgan and Biklen, 2007, called *eyeballing*). After this initial data analysis, I divided the data into text segments and labelled them with codes (Creswell, 2008) to identify segments of my data that provided insight into my research questions. Merriam (2009) referred to this coding process as "open coding" (p. 178) because they identify any item of data that might be useful.

*Category Construction*

I then compiled and grouped these open codes to construct categories in an inductive process referred to as "analytic coding" (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). I compiled a list of the codes from the transcripts and my research journal and reflected on the patterns and regularities that emerged. Subsequently, I compiled textual evidence in the form of short excerpts from the interviews for each of the categories and used these patterns to construct categories and subcategories that were exhaustive, responsive to the purpose of the research, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent in terms of the level of abstraction (Merriam, 2009). I then reduced the final list of categories into the major themes that I used to answer my two research questions on the influence of adult upgrading on the possible selves of FTPWs (detailed in chapter 4).

**Quality Criteria for Trustworthiness**

The previous section described how I collected and analysed the data in this study. Qualitative research methods have both strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative research can provide individual case information, richly describe contextually embedded phenomena, respond to local stakeholders' needs, and explore dynamic and complicated processes (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). On the other hand, the findings generated from qualitative research tend to have lower levels of inference and generalizability, and the results are more easily influenced by researcher bias (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Because one of the underlying assumptions for qualitative research (including this study) is that reality is multidimensional and ever-changing (Merriam, 2009), reality is not

considered a fixed objective phenomenon; therefore, traditional quantitative measures for quality—validity and reliability—cannot be applied in the same way to qualitative research.

Qualitative researchers approach validity and reliability by carefully considering how data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented (Merriam, 2009). In addressing the concerns of validity and reliability in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1998) referred to the alternate concept of trustworthiness to encompass the notions of credibility, dependability, and confirmability instead of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. In the following section I detail how my study specifically meets these quality criteria.

### Credibility

First, my study's design involves credibility, which can be paralleled with the quantitative measure of internal validity. In a qualitative study, credibility refers to how congruent the researcher's findings are with the research participants' constructions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam, 2009). The following describes how my study has achieved credibility through member checking, adequate engagement with the data, and reflexivity.

One means of achieving credibility is member checking (Creswell, 2008), also referred to as *respondent validation* (Merriam, 2009), which involves soliciting feedback from the participants on the emerging findings from the research. I member-checked the initial findings of each interview with the participant. Moreover, because I structured the subsequent interviews from these

initial findings as the research proceeded, multiple participants also addressed and confirmed these findings.

Credibility can be also sought through adequate engagement in data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2009). I achieved adequate engagement by interviewing each participant twice. Furthermore, because I am an adult upgrading instructor, my daily work involves engaging with the central phenomenon of this study, which has given me ample opportunity to understand the context in which this study unfolded.

A final criterion for credibility involves reflexivity on the positioning of the researcher. This involves explaining the researcher's biases toward, dispositions to, and assumptions about the research (Merriam, 2009). In many ways the first three chapters of this thesis are a testament to my reflexivity. In the first chapter I located myself in this inquiry, in the second chapter I explained my understanding of the contextual factors related to the study, and in the third chapter I have detailed my paradigmatic orientation and explained the assumptions that underlie this orientation. In my discussion of the limitations and delimitations of this research in this chapter, I will also describe my biases and assumptions as a researcher.

### *Dependability*

The design of my study also reflects dependability, which corresponds to the quantitative measure of reliability. Reliability is difficult to measure in social sciences research because human behaviour is never static, and there are many interpretations of reality (Creswell, 2008); therefore, it is impossible to "take

repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense" (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Hence, a more important question for qualitative research is whether the results are dependable in the sense that they are consistent with the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2009). My study has achieved dependability through several mechanisms that I described in the previous section, including member checking, as well as reflexivity in my positioning and related biases towards this research (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, as I described earlier, I have taken pains to accurately represent the words and stories of the participants in my findings and discussion.

### *Confirmability*

A final criterion for quality involves what Guba and Lincoln (1989) referred to as *confirmability*, which corresponds to the quantitative measure of external validity. In her discussion of quality criteria for qualitative research, Merriam (2009) used the term *transferability* to refer to the same concept. External validity in the statistical sense (i.e., generalizing from a random sample to the larger population) is impossible in qualitative research; however, confirmability and transferability are achievable through rich, thick description of the central phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, rigor in qualitative research is assured by providing "a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and in particular, the findings of the setting" (p. 227). This study meets this criterion by providing a rich description of the setting and the findings in chapter 4.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Related to the previous section's discussion of the quality criteria that I employed in this research project are the constraints and limits that impacted the transferability of the study's findings. The following section therefore denotes the delimitations and limitations of this study and describes the inherent researcher biases and assumptions.

*Delimitations*

A number of factors constrained this master's-level research project. As I designed it, I made conscious choices on how to proceed with these constraints in mind. As an unfunded study conducted by one individual, there was a limit to the number of participants I could interview, particularly because I also had a teaching load at the time of the data collection. I chose to end my period of recruitment and interviews after four months because I felt that I had reached an adequate level of data engagement with the interview data. For the same reason, I limited the number of participants in the study to four women. As I described earlier, I decided to include one participant who did not meet all of the criteria for the study because she was still able to comment meaningfully on the central phenomenon.

In terms of the research process, I chose to conduct two interviews and one member-checking telephone conversation per participant to adequately engage with them and the study's central phenomenon. To be sensitive to the busy lives of the participants, I chose to conduct two short interviews and a telephone member check instead of one long interview to limit the time commitment of each

meeting and the overall intrusiveness of the research. However, I was also flexible in this regard, and I combined the two interviews into one at the request of one participant. In pursing answers to my research questions, I chose to conduct a purely qualitative research project rather than using a quantitative or mixed methodology. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, I felt that qualitative interviews would ensure sensitivity and flexibility towards the participants' needs. Furthermore, because I could not be sure of the participants' English-language abilities prior to recruitment, I felt that it was more appropriate to engage in interviews rather than administering a survey.

### *Limitations*

As with any qualitative research project, my study was limited in terms of its transferability or confirmability. First, the small sample size limited the number of individual perspectives that I attained on the central phenomenon and thereby also limited my ability to triangulate the data. I conducted only one type of data, interviews, which precluded additional data triangulation through documents or photographs. These limitations are important to consider because constructivist research methods are based on the notion that the best-informed and the most sophisticated construction of 'truth' relies on an inquiry process that unfolds through a "dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis and so on" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 243).

Another limitation that affected the transferability and confirmability of my research findings concerns the fact that I conducted the interviews in the participants' second (or third) language (Padilla, 2004). Even with a homogenous

group of native English-language speakers, it can be difficult to come to a consensus on topics related to this inquiry such as identity, responsibility, hope, and fear. In a number of instances it was clear to me that the participants did not understand a question, even after several repetitions and rephrasings. This limited their ability to communicate with me their experience with the study's central phenomenon and limited my ability to seek answers to my research questions.

To address these issues if I had had unlimited time and resources, I would have interviewed a greater number of individuals and used more than one research method. As I described earlier in this chapter, the theoretical construct of possible selves can be used in both quantitative and qualitative research; I would have employed a mixed methodology and methods by giving each participant the PSQ and following up with multiple interviews. Interviewing more participants would have fostered a deeper engagement with the data and the central phenomenon, and my research process would have been more iterative and dialectic. Triangulation and the gathering of multiple perspectives would have been possible as I sought answers to my research questions and, in addition to the use of translators, could have also helped to overcome some of the language barriers.

### *Researcher Biases and Assumptions*

Merriam (2009) asserted that "in applied fields of practice such as education., the vast majority of research topics come from one's personal interest in the field and from the work setting itself" (p. 56). This is certainly true for me; as I explained in chapter 1, my research project emerged from my experiences as an instructor in an adult upgrading program and an art teacher with an immigrant-

serving nonprofit organization. Because of my interactions as a teacher with students in these settings, I wanted to learn more about the FTPWs whom I encounter in my classrooms. My focus on women stems from the connections I have made with women and their stories; my social justice perspective (which I detailed in chapter 2) stems from my desire to identify how I, as an individual and an educator, might be able to address what I view as an important issue for Canada and Canadians.

Within such a study, the issue of researcher positionality also arises and must be addressed. Positionality refers to "the advantages that some people have over others in a society because of particular characteristics such as race, social class, gender, or sexual orientation that situates them in a more powerful position" (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006, p. 87). Throughout this inquiry I was acutely aware of the power dynamics inherent in this study: As I stated in chapter 1, I am a Caucasian, English-speaking, middle-class individual born, raised, educated, and employed in Alberta. My educational credentials have always been validated, and I have never struggled to find my place in the Canadian labour market. I own my own house and a car and have many other items of material wealth associated with my middle-class socioeconomic status. My work as an adult educator also holds status; I am in a formal position of power over my students, many of whom are older and have higher educational credentials than I do. In undertaking this research, I realized that I would be writing the stories of other women's lives, women who have not had the opportunities and validation during their time in Canada that I have. Like English (2003), who conducted a qualitative study on

female international adult educators, I am aware that the lives of my participants have "too often been written for them" (p. 77).

In addressing these issues, I contend that I undertook every phase of this research project with awareness of and sensitivity to these power dynamics. The purpose of this research was not to use the women for their stories; rather, it was to engage in meaningful discussion to explore an issue that I have encountered as an educator. The findings of this research have more to do with my journey as an educator than they do with (re)presenting or (re)constructing the stories of the participants. Moreover, in declaring my positionality in this research, I invite the women who participated in my study as well as any women who did not to read and respond to the stories in this thesis. I welcome their responses and critical engagement with my interpretations.

## Summary

This chapter explained the methodology and methods that I used to seek answers to my research questions and described the study's quality criteria, limitations, delimitations, biases, and assumptions. With a paradigmatic orientation towards constructivism and guided by a feminist theoretical perspective, my methodology included the theoretical construct of possible selves to structure my research methods. These methods included the research site and participant selection, ethical considerations for data-collection procedures, and the data analysis and interpretation. In chapter 4 I report the findings to provide answers to my research questions.

**CHAPTER 4:**

**FINDINGS**

The first objective of this research was to explore the experiences of

FTPWs in adult upgrading to add to our understanding of immigration in Canada

and its connections to adult education. The second objective was to examine how

adult education might support and enhance the experiences of FTPWs who

choose to enter an adult upgrading program, from the perspectives of these

participants. These objectives provided the foundation for the two main research

questions that guided this inquiry: (a) What is the influence of adult upgrading on

the development and realization of the possible selves of the participants in this

study? and (b) How might adult upgrading support the development and

realization of the possible selves from the perspectives of these women? In this

chapter I discuss the findings of my inquiry. I have made every attempt to

accurately portray the participants' possible selves by citing their words; however,

as I noted in chapter 3, the coding and analysis of this data are also based on my

observations, impressions, and interpretations.

The theoretical framework of this study was the construct of possible

selves (described in chapter 3). I employed possible selves as my framework for

the analysis in preparing the interview questions and analyzing the interview data;

hence, the themes and categories that emerged as the answers to the research

questions are grounded in the possible selves of the participants in this study. My

analysis also included a paradigmatic orientation to constructivism in my view of

possible selves as socially constructed, which means that, if an individual's social

environment changes, those changes are reflected and can be reflected upon by changes in their possible selves (see chapter 3 for more information). Moreover, I conducted my analysis from a social justice point of view and have written this section from the perspective that the difficulties that immigrants in general, but specifically FTPWs, face are inequitable. Finally, I have structured my analysis from a feminist theoretical perspective in viewing the constructions of gender as analytical axes that highlight gender-based inequities.

In this chapter I introduce the participants and research sites; describe the most salient possible selves elicited from the participants; discuss the impact of immigration on the participants' past, current, and future selves; and describe the themes and categories that emerged from the interviews to answer my two research questions.

## Introductions

As I reported in chapter 3, in this qualitative study I utilized the interview data from four FTPWs. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the individual in context (Merriam, 2009), and studies grounded in the constructivist paradigm are concerned with how the individual constructs meaning within his or her context (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), so I will briefly introduce the research sites and participants prior to discussing the findings of the study. I have carefully constructed these descriptions to highlight relevant contextual information while adhering to the strict guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality that I structured into the ethical design of this research.

In this thesis I refer to the two sites as *Institute A* and *Institute B*, and I identify the four participants as NB, MR, RR, and SD. I deliberately chose to use initials rather than pseudonyms to respect the privacy and wishes of two of my participants. One participant vehemently did not want any name at all to appear in the research, including a pseudonym, but she agreed to the use of two initials of her choice. A second participant was very concerned about any variation of her name appearing on documents related to the research, including the signed consent forms, and she too was satisfied with the use of initials. For the sake of consistency, I used initials for the other two participants even though they would have been comfortable with the use of pseudonyms.

### *Introduction to the Research Sites*

*Institute A.* Institute A is a publicly funded community college in central Alberta with approximately 15,000 full-time and part-time students. The institute serves a significant number of immigrants: 60% of its students were born outside of Canada. Institute A's primary objective is to provide untrained and underemployed Albertans with the opportunity to develop the skills that an industrialized workforce requires and therefore offers a wide variety of applied diploma programs for business, industry and trades, social services, and health care. The institute's Web site also boasts that it is Alberta's largest provider of adult upgrading programs, including programs aimed at postsecondary education and employment preparation. Institute A offers a wide range of high school–level and basic literacy upgrading options, including programs aimed specifically at immigrants and ELLs. Although no specific department offers support to

immigrant students, because the majority of the students at Institute A are newcomers to Canada, all student services are equipped to handle specific issues that immigrant students face. (I gathered most of the above information from Institute A's Web site.)

I chose this institute as a site for my research because of its immigrant student population, well-developed upgrading programs, and labour market–focused mandate. However, because of factors outside of my control, only one of the participants came from this institute. During my recruitment efforts in late 2009, this institute lost a major source of its funding, including the funds that supported immigrant students in adult upgrading. As a result, my potential sample population was drastically reduced, as was the administrative support for my recruitment efforts.

***Institute B.*** Institute B is a large, publicly funded technical institute in central Alberta with approximately 80,000 full-time and part-time students. The mandate of this institute is to provide technical training and applied education programs that are designed to meet the demands of Alberta's industries, and it therefore offers a wide range of applied diploma programs for business, industry and trades, social services, and health care, as well as two applied baccalaureate degree programs. The institute offers more than 1,000 continuing education programs, including a range of adult upgrading options and ELL programs. Unlike Institute A, this institute does not offer any high school–level upgrading programs specifically targeted to immigrant students. Furthermore, with the exception of an International Student Centre, no specific services cater to

immigrants. Thus, immigrant students may receive different advice or undergo different assessment procedures depending on the staff members whom they first encounter when they apply to Institute B. (Most of the above information was gathered from Institute B's Web site).

In addition to its adult upgrading programming and labour market–focused mandate, I chose this institute as a site for my research because of my work as an instructor in one of its adult upgrading programs. This allowed me to bring to the research a rich understanding of the institute's priorities, upgrading programs, foreign- and Canadian-born student populations, and administrative support services. Only one of the participants in my study was ever a student in my classroom (RR); however, as I noted in chapter 3, I recruited her after all aspects of our relationship as student and teacher had ended.

### *Introduction to the Participants*

*NB.* NB is in her mid 30s and grew up in East Africa. In her home country she completed a bachelor's degree in economics and worked for one year as a researcher. She immigrated to Eastern Canada in the early 1990s because she felt that her home country had become unsafe as a result of civil war. Unable to find employment, she volunteered as a receptionist to gain Canadian work experience. Following this, she was hired as a researcher in the health field. Several years later she met her husband while visiting her mother in Africa and subsequently had three children with him. Because her husband was unable to come to Canada, she returned to her home country for seven years to live together as a family, but returned to Eastern Canada in 2008, again because of unsafe conditions because

of the continued civil war. She came to Alberta in 2009 on the recommendation of her brother, who had heard that the labour market was favourable for immigrant professionals. She also thought that the educational system offered superior opportunities for her children. NB's children kept her away from the labour market for a number of years. Once she felt that they were well established in school and old enough not to require her full-time care, NB decided that she needed to upgrade her skills and choose a new profession. After selecting a health-related program at Institute A, she enrolled as a full-time student in one of its immigrant-focused adult upgrading programs to increase her eligibility for the program. She is now a permanent resident of Canada while her husband works to support the family in Africa.

*MR.* MR is also in her mid 30s. She grew up in South Asia, where she completed a bachelor's degree in engineering, and she worked as an engineer in her home country for seven years. MR and her husband (who was also an engineer in their home country) immigrated in 2005 as a principal applicant and a dependent under the economic class and as skilled workers to pursue a better life in Eastern Canada. They found it difficult to find employment as engineers, and because of their dwindling savings, they found 'survival' work as technicians with an electronics company, without benefits or job security. Soon afterwards MR became pregnant with her first child, and at the end of her year's maternity leave, she became pregnant with her second child. She and her husband decided to move to Alberta because Institute B offered a technical diploma program that was of interest to her husband. Because her children are still young, MR has enrolled as a

part-time adult upgrading student to attain the high-school courses required for a different technical diploma program. She felt that she needed to upgrade her skills because her children had taken her away from the labour market for a number of years. However, she does not intend to become a full-time student (upgrading or otherwise) until her children are a few years older. As a result, she has not fully committed to a particular program at Institute B, but has several options in mind. She is now a permanent resident of Canada, along with her husband and children.

*RR.* RR is in her mid 20s and has completed a bachelor's degree in engineering in her home country in South East Asia. She worked as an engineer for less than a year in a factory, but left her position to immigrate with her parents to reunite with a sibling and pursue work opportunities in Alberta. After her immigration, she did not apply for engineering positions in Alberta because she felt that her education and experience were not adequate to meet the requirements of the advertised engineering positions. Because she was not interested in taking any more engineering classes, on the recommendation of her sister and brother-in-law, she decided to try a new career in the health field. She prepared to apply for a technical diploma program at Institute B that would offer the training for this new career, and the assessment of her credentials revealed that she required one semester of upgrading to be eligible to apply. During this semester of upgrading RR was in my classroom at Institute B.

*SD.* SD is in her mid 20s and has immigrated twice since she grew up on an island nation in the Western Indian Ocean. Her first immigration was to the UK for the purpose of family reunification; she followed her younger siblings and

parents, who had gained work permits. Unfortunately, because she was older than 18 at the time, she was permitted to stay in the UK only through a student visa, which she used to complete a Bachelor of Science degree in computing. After graduating, she was unable to find full-time employment in her field because her UK student visa did not permit her to work more than 20 hours per week. Unable to attain a UK work permit, SD decided to immigrate to Alberta with her fiancé in 2009 to pursue work in Canada. She had heard that if she entered on a student visa and completed an educational program, it would be possible for her to receive a work permit, and she decided to enrol in a technical diploma in the field of business in Institute B to gain employment.

SD approached me to participate in my study after having seen the recruitment posters in the hallways of Institute B. Although she did not meet all of the criteria for my study (i.e., she was not enrolled in an adult upgrading program), she was eager to share her story about immigration and the labour market. She also viewed her program as a form of upgrading for the labour market, which made her inclusion in the study relevant.

## The Participants' Possible Selves

I used possible selves as the framework for the analysis in this inquiry. I conducted two interviews with each participant, in the first of which I asked questions that I adapted from the PSQ (Cross & Markus, 1991) to elicit the individuals' hoped-for and feared-for possible selves, particularly those related to the context of adult upgrading. The second interview focused on the relationship and potential influence of adult upgrading on the participants' possible selves. I

analysed the data that I collected from these interviews and used the emerging themes to answer my research questions and meet my research objectives.

In this section I use the term *salient* to mean the possible selves that the participants identified as most important or critical in their lives and identities. I recognized that the participants in the study were not a homogeneous group, nor did I expect them to be, but they all shared three salient possible selves. However, I am not suggesting that all of the participants have exactly the same goals, aspirations, motivations, and dreams. Furthermore, this does not imply that these three categories are the only possible selves that the participants identified. I will focus on the three that they share because of the force with which they described them, as well as their relevance to my research questions and objectives.

As I described in chapter 3, possible selves can be categorized as hoped-for selves, which are desirable future incarnations that an individual would like to experience, and feared-for selves, which are undesirable incarnations that an individual would like to avoid. The three salient possible selves that were most relevant to this inquiry were two hoped-for selves—the working woman and the responsible woman and one feared-for self—the unactualized woman. I have purposefully titled all three with a noun and a corresponding adjective. From the perspectives o constructivism and feminist theory, the noun *woman* is both a biological category and a socially constructed category (English & Irving, 2007). The biological category refers to the physical gender in that women are born with the ability to give birth to others. They begin their lives as daughters, and when they in turn give birth, these daughters then become mothers. The socially

constructed aspect of this category refers to notions of womanhood, including individual and societal views of woman/daughter/mother and how they should act. The corresponding adjectives for each category—responsible, working, and unactualized—are therefore intimately linked with the social construction of gender and the participants' constructions of womanhood, motherhood, and daughterhood. In the following section I discuss these possible selves in more detail.

### Hoped-for Self: The Responsible Woman

A salient possible self that emerged during the interviews was the hoped-for self of the responsible woman. This category is a familial-related self, which refers to a desire to provide for one's family grounded in a sense of responsibility and duty and related to the participants' roles as women, mothers, and daughters.

NB and MR have children and therefore view themselves as both daughters and mothers. Motherhood is a constant theme in their lives that affects their current selves and influences their hopes, dreams, and fears for the future. Because their primary responsibilities are their children, for NB and MR being responsible women also involves being responsible mothers. The younger participants, RR and SD, are not yet mothers, though both expressed a desire to have children one day in the future; therefore, they are both daughters and future mothers. However, these women view motherhood as a more distant possible self; the state of being a daughter is more important and relevant to RR and SD. Therefore, for them, being responsible women also involves being responsible daughters because their primary responsibilities are their parents and siblings. In

the following two sections I will describe in more detail the two subcategories of this salient hoped-for self: the responsible mother and the responsible daughter.

***The Responsible Mother: NB and MR***

Being and coming to be the responsible mother was critical for both NB and MR. When I asked MR to describe her most important goals, she immediately connected motherhood and responsibility: "of course to be a good mother and also responsible person." When I probed for a description of what the responsible person means to her, MR used motherhood to describe her views of responsibility:

> I can talk about responsible mother, because they are children, they have no control over themself. So I can teach them what is right, what is wrong. I can, in our new life, control them. Still, they can make their own decision, but I can tell them, "You can look at these things this way and can look other thing, that way."

Hence, MR considers it her duty to be a responsible role model for her children by guiding them in their decision making and teaching them important values. NB also connected motherhood and responsibility to her most important goals:

> My career is most important thing. And it comes priority for myself and for my children. So taking responsibility is not just 1, 2, 3; . . . if I am responsible, I have to think about what I gain out of life and what I can leave for my kids.

Although NB's current primary goal is to reestablish a career (the working woman hoped-for self that she described later), NB had constructed goals based on her notion of the responsible mother.

The hoped-for self of the responsible mother is a salient possible self because it is a major motivating force that has shaped the lives of NB and MR.

Although both came to Canada with the intention of working, the subsequent births of their children delayed their return to the labour market. In becoming and being responsible mothers, both felt that it was important to delay their career goals and stay at home with their children while they were very young. For MR, being the responsible mother required that she temporarily "forget" about her career:

> And then my child is born, and I become very busy taking care of him, and I forgot about my career. And then in this way one year passed. My son, when he was 13 months, I became pregnant again without searching job. Just by taking care of him, I forget everything. I forget about my career, that once I was an engineer in my country.

Because her children are still young, she feels that it is important for her to be at home: "Still I am busy with work at home. . . . I am taking care of my baby; still I am a responsible, good human being." Therefore, by staying at home with her children at this time, she is achieving her goal of being the responsible mother.

NB's views of responsibility and motherhood also kept her away from the labour market while her children were young: "It's very important for the children to have their mother at home. . . . When they very young, they need a mother. They need somebody to look after them every time, every second." However, because her children are now older and more independent, her view of being the responsible mother has expanded to include working outside of the home; as she stated above, a career has now become her first priority "for myself and for my children." This expansion has opened up space in her life to pursue a career, particularly because she felt that her energies were not needed in the home in the same way that they were when her children were young.

Being the responsible woman has also shaped NB's immigration journey. Even though she did not want to live in East Africa, she moved back there in 2001 to reunite her children with her husband: "I didn't like it, but I had to be there for the children to know their father well." After her home country again became too unstable, she decided to move to Alberta instead of Eastern Canada because she believed that Alberta's education system would better meet her children's needs as ELLs and immigrants. Thus, being and the continued process of coming to be the hoped-for self of the responsible mother are major forces in both NB's and MR's lives.

### The Responsible Daughter: RR and SD

The younger participants, RR and SD, did not directly mention motherhood as a primary force in their lives because they were neither married nor had children. However, being and coming to be responsible daughters served as a salient hoped-for self that has shaped their lives and immigration journeys. RR immigrated to Canada to reunite with her sister and parents; SD's first immigration to the UK was for the same reason. Togetherness with their families was very important for these women. For example, SD referred to family meals as a way of explaining the importance of family cohesiveness in her life: While they were in the UK, despite having had different schedules, her family would try to have "at least one of them [meals] together, to keep the family."

Although both RR and SD cited the establishment of careers as their primary goal (the hoped-for self of the working woman, which I describe in the next section), the motivating force behind this objective was structured by their

views of familial responsibility. For RR, establishing a career was a way for her to support her parents and older siblings financially. When I asked how her family has influenced her life, RR immediately linked her career goals with familial responsibility: "I want to help them [my family]. My goal is to help them. If I want to help them, then I need to get a good job." Thus, the reason that she wants to have a successful career in Canada is her family: "As I have said, I want to help my other siblings back home and my nephews; my parents also." RR's current and hoped-for self of responsible daughter is also evident in her long-term goal to "buy a house for me and for my parents to live in."

As I stated earlier, SD's first immigration was for family reunification. Unfortunately, because she was 18 years old at the time, she could get only a student visa for the UK, which restricted her ability to work and live there once she had completed her studies. Unable to obtain a UK work permit, she decided to immigrate to study and then, she hoped, to work in Canada. Like RR, SD's goal of establishing a career was also motivated by her need to help her family:

> My first [goal] will be just get a job, and hopefully a job I will like. And then my second one is really to give back what my family gave to me. I know maybe it's going to be impossible, but my mom and dad have really helped me.

Thus SD felt that her parents had worked hard to give her as many opportunities as possible, particularly to pay for her postsecondary education, and that her role as their daughter is to give back to them as much as she can.

When I asked them about motherhood, both RR and SD very clearly stated that helping their parents and siblings is more important. Although RR wants to have a family in the future, being the responsible daughter is more salient for her:

"Because I'm not yet married, my own family is first." In fact, her first joking comment about becoming a mother was only in relation to reuniting with her siblings, who are still living in her home country: "There's one way I can help them. If I get married here and have a child, I can sponsor my other siblings and my nephews, come here as a caregiver for my children." Although SD is engaged to be married, her most important goals are also motivated by the desire to give back to her family. For example, in discussing her engagement, she stated, "I wanted to work first, get some money, and then not letting my parents pay for the wedding."

Despite motherhood being a distant goal for both of these women, their hoped-for selves as responsible daughters were also linked with the idea of being responsible mothers. For RR, if and when she becomes a mother, it will be another reason for her to work hard in a career: "If I'm going to be a mother, then my children's going to be the reason for me to strive hard and think of their future also." In explaining the importance of familial responsibility in her life, SD described her parents as role models for her future self as a hoped-for responsible mother:

> I think that family has a big impact on my life. Sometimes I hear people say, "Oh, they are my parents; they had to do that. They gave birth to me, so they have to do that; it's their duty." For me, it's not really like that, because when I think of myself as a mom, I don't know if I'll be able to do as much as my mom and dad did for me, or even my sisters.

Thus SD did not view her familial responsibilities as burdens; rather, the hoped-for self of the responsible woman/daughter had formed the foundation for her notions of family and what it means to be part of a family.

In summary, the hoped-for self of the responsible woman can be subcategorized into the responsible mother and the responsible daughter. This was the most salient possible self that all four participants identified; thus, it has been a major factor in shaping their lives as they have made choices that have moved them towards the hoped-for self of being responsible to their families.

### Hoped-for Self: The Working Woman

Because the participants entered adult upgrading or education to obtain future access to the Canadian labour market, it is no surprise to me that a second salient hoped-for self that they shared is related to establishing a career in Canada. However, this emergent hoped-for self involves more than a simple aspiration to find employment because it is intimately linked with the hoped-for self of the responsible woman. The participants' desire to find employment was driven by their notions of familial responsibility. Achieving the hoped-for self of the working woman was one of the means by which the participants planned to achieve the hoped-for self of the responsible woman, and this hoped-for self therefore originated from a sense of duty rather than a desire for individual advancement or benefit.

In attempting to capture its connection to the responsible woman, I purposefully chose the term *working* rather than *employed* as the adjective in this hoped-for self. In my view, employed connects primarily to the immediate goal of entering the labour market. When I asked the participants about their most important goals, only two (SD and NB) directly answered "getting a job." However, they both told me that the reason that they wanted to be employed was

to support their respective families financially and fulfill their familial responsibilities. Although they identified it as important, the desire to enter the labour market was less direct for RR and MR, the other two participants. RR's most important goal was to enrol in a technical diploma program at Institute B to find a job to help her family. Therefore, her goal was to begin working towards becoming employed. Although she intended to enter the labour market in the future, MR's primary goal was to be a responsible mother to her young children; for this reason she was enrolled as a part-time student at the time of the interviews. However, she was enrolled in upgrading to be able to work in the future once her children were older. Thus I used the term working to encompass all of these labour market–related goals, both distant and immediate, and the various strategies that the women have chosen to meet them as they work towards meeting their familial responsibilities.

The younger women viewed the responsible daughter as working to support or working towards supporting their parents and siblings, whereas the older women considered the responsible mother as working to support her children. NB chose a specific technical diploma in an industry with high job demand because of the stability it offers for her children: "The demand of the job is growing. That's what makes me thinking about the job. I have the responsibility and children that I need always the job for." NB poignantly used the term *double-shift mother* to describe the interrelated responsibilities of supporting her children's immediate needs and working towards a career. The concept of a

double-shift mother also applies to MR; once her children are older, MR intends to work towards reestablishing her career:

> If I study, then I believe that I will strongly pursue to work. I think it will be important for me [to reestablish a career] because my children will be grown up. They will not need me the way they need me right now.

These women are therefore working 'double shifts' by taking care of their children's immediate needs at home and going to school to take care of their children's futures by reestablishing their careers, which demonstrates the close relationship between the responsible woman and the working woman and highlights how this possible self originates from duty rather than personal/individual advancement or benefit.

### *Feared-for Self: The Unactualized Woman*

In the relationship between the hoped-for selves of the responsible woman and the working woman lies the most salient feared-for self that emerged from the interviews: the unactualized woman. The participants were unable not only to achieve the hoped-for self of the working woman, but also to fulfill their construction of as the responsible woman. Therefore, they viewed their nonparticipation in the labour market as their inability to fulfill their duties as mothers and daughters. I have thereby chosen the adjective *unactualized* to represent the state of being a nonworking, nonresponsible woman (I use the noun *woman*, as with the previous categories, with both biological and socially constructed connotations).

This feared-for self emerged in a number of ways in the interviews. As mothers, NB and MR were very clear about not wanting to stay home after their

children became more independent. MR felt that she was still needed at home, so her childrearing efforts fulfilled her conception of being the responsible woman:

> Because still now I am not frustrated because I do not have any free time. Still I am busy with work at home. It is not like I am free all the time, I am spending my time in rest; no, not like that. . . . Still I am responsible.

However, because she felt that her children would not need her in the future, she would expand the hoped-for self of the working woman to participation in the labour market: "Right now I have no career goal. . . . If I study in [a technical diploma program from Institute B], then I will dream that I will work in a Canadian company as a technologist or a junior engineer." I asked MR about undesirable future selves, and she replied, "Not applying to [Institute B]; that I do not want. I want to apply. Definitely I want to work." She further expressed the importance of working after her children are older:

> I think it will be important for me [to work] because my children will be grown up, so they will not need me the way they need me now. So at those time I will have enough free time, and if I do not work, that will kill me.

Now that her children are older and more independent, NB is actively pursuing a career. I asked her about undesirable future selves, and she forcefully answered, "I do *not* want to be a housewife again! I do *not* want to go back to the house!" NB also described remaining at home as a source of negative feelings: "Going back to the house when they are independent, it makes you feel bad." Thus NB's intent to pursue a career at this time was very important to her.

With regard to the relationship between the hoped-for selves and feared-for selves, NB and MR both felt that it is important to pursue careers not only to

achieve the hoped-for selves of the responsible woman and the working woman,

but also as a strategy to avoid the feared-for self of the unactualized woman.

The feared-for selves that RR and SD described also reflect their

connection between familial responsibility and participation in the labour market.

RR's two feared-for selves involved missing this year's application deadline for

her program of choice and losing her family. She explained the connection

between the two: "Because if I miss that, I'll wait another year, and it's getting

late and later for me to finish school." She therefore viewed upgrading as the best

way to financially support and maintain close connections with her family.

SD's most feared-for self was to remain an unemployed student. As did

RR, she considered working as the best way to give back to her family.

Remaining in the education sector therefore prevented SD from being the working

woman and the responsible woman because her continued time away from the

labour market detracted from her ability to fulfill her familial responsibilities. For

example, SD conveyed this in her discussion of her younger siblings and money:

> Since I'm the eldest in the family, I used to achieve something. But now it
> wasn't really me. And I'm really close to my two sisters, but there was a
> time that I couldn't work, and they were both working and they had to
> give me money. And that was very, very bad.

Thus, failure to gain access to the labour market moved the participants closer to

their feared-for self of the unactualized woman and farther from their familial

duties.

**Immigration and Possible Selves**

The previous section focused on the salient possible selves that the four participants shared. Before I describe the influence of adult upgrading on these possible selves to answer my first research question and discuss how adult upgrading might support these possible selves to answer my second research question, I must first address a significant theme that emerged from the interviews: the impact of immigration on the participants' possible selves. The following section reveals that the impact of immigration on the participants' possible selves directly affected how upgrading has influenced their possible selves and might support them.

Whether by choice or coercion, immigration is a significant life transition that has profound effects on personal identity (Schwartz et al., 2006). The changes wrought by immigration distinguish immigrants from the other students in the adult upgrading classroom whose identities have not been shaped by the process of adapting to a new country, climate, language, culture, and language. Before she came to Canada, NB in particular was aware of immigration-related life changes and accepted that she would be required to adapt in many ways:

> In certain areas of the world, especially when you are living where in a place there is a continuous civil war, you think of moving somewhere. And you think of adjusting yourself profession-wise, health-wise, weather-wise, anything. Into this situation that you are newly going to adapt. . . . When the things change, you must be very flexible. You can adjust to the new changes.

NB was evidently very conscious that her identity (and, correspondingly, her possible selves) would change as a result of immigration. Prior to coming to Canada RR and SD were aware of the effect that immigration would have on their

lives. RR immigrated primarily for family reunification reasons, but also because she viewed Canada as a place of opportunity compared to her home country: "I know there's lots of opportunities here rather than back home." RR therefore came to Canada with the idea that her possible selves (particularly her hoped-for self of the working woman) might be altered or adapted. SD immigrated specifically to change her status as a nonworking trained professional; therefore, she used immigration to change and attain her hoped-for selves of the responsible woman and the working woman.

### Immigration and Lost Selves

A theme that emerged from the participants' discussions of the immigration-related changes to their possible selves was lost selves in that immigration is a catalyst for the eradication of certain past, current, and future selves. Following her immigration, RR lost her past self as an engineer: "I was working in a good company, and I was able to practice what I've studied, what I finish." When I asked when that changed, RR replied, "When we came here." In speaking of these changes, RR referred to a process of forgetting in which she had to forget her career as an engineer after immigrating to Canada: "I already forget that I finish a five-year course back home. I already accept that I'm already here." RR's process of forgetting was related to her struggles with the labour market and resulted in a change in her future possible selves: "So I really need to study then for something. So it's just okay. And then I realize that the change field, just to change field." In this, RR expresses that by changing her career field away from

being an engineer, RR's future selves were different than they were when she was in her home country.

NB described her immigration as a process of starting over: "When you come to this country, you don't know anybody, you don't have anything, you start all from scratch. You start all over again." She explicitly connected her changed possible selves to the selves that she lost during immigration:

> I was trained economist. And there is where I was thinking to have a management position, quite high position. . . . So if it wouldn't be me moving to Canada, I would think of being a [technician in the health field].

MR also spoke of lost selves, particularly the working woman: "In my country my career goal was different. My life over there was totally oriented around my career at that time." She came to Canada with the intention of working as an engineer. When I asked whether she had planned to enter adult education upon coming to Canada, MR replied: "No! Because we feel that we came as skilled worker, so why not work right away?" However, both her immigration and her subsequent pregnancies resulted in these lost selves:

> My parents and my brother, sister, they are so surprised how I can live like this way. I am not raised that way, I was very good student. So how can I forget about those career in my country and just taking care of my baby? They are so surprised. But though they are surprised, they do not hurt me because I know what I am doing, and I know my belief now, it is changed.

SD's situation was slightly different from those of the other participants in that she immigrated to Canada to study at Institute B because she was unable to find work in her field in the UK. However, her first immigration to the UK and her subsequent failure to work represented a loss of selves: "I did get interviews and

everything, everything went okay, but since I was an international student, I wasn't allowed to work full time."

Another area of lost selves relates to the participants' connections to others in social and community networks. Immigration involves leaving family and friends behind. SD described this loss of connection to others with regard to the Christmas holidays: "I don't want school holidays because I have nowhere to go, I have no friends, . . . because it's kind of hard staying in your room with your laptop." Furthermore, the loss of social networks is related to lost possible selves. For example, the loss of her social network is one reason that MR feels that it is so important to stay home with her young children. Had she remained in her home country, her children would have been cared for by her extended family network, which would have allowed her to be both family- and career-focused:

> I would be family focused, and at the same time I would also be career oriented, because over there I have lot of family, I have lot of family contacts, so they can take care of my baby. And also I would feel they are in loving environment, so I can concentrate on my career. But here, no. Here only I and my husband; no other family. So, yeah, career goal was totally different in my home country.

### *Acceptance of Lost Selves*

As a whole, the participants accepted these changes and lost selves. RR particularly accepted her lost selves:

> Sometimes I am thinking, "Oh, I finished that five-year course back home, but then I didn't use it." But then I think that maybe that's what God's plan for me, and there's a better opportunity for me here, something like that. I just look on the brighter side, the positive side, rather than the negative side.

NB also embraced the alterations in her life after her immigration: "I have to be adjusted in the situation that I have moved in and adapt the life. Culture, religion, whatever needs to be changed, has to be changed. That's what basically is my thinking." However, although MR was accepting, she also appeared to feel resigned:

> If as soon as I came to Canada and if I did [upgrading] five years ago, maybe I feel like I was not doing right thing. . . . But right now, no. After staying in this country for a long time, I do not mind anything. Nothing bother me.

SD immigrated to Canada precisely because of the selves that she had lost in her first immigration to the UK; she therefore used her immigration as a mechanism to change her possible selves.

It is important to note that the participants' awareness of the changes caused by immigration and their acceptance of lost selves do not imply that these processes have been easy for them. SD spoke of the difficulties she faced in the first few months after she left her family and arrived in Canada and her inability to concentrate on her goals for the future:

> I wasn't really thinking about the goals when I first started school because it was a bit hard for me, . . . because the people I was living with, they weren't too nice. And at school it was hard too. So it was both sites. So I wasn't really thinking anything at all. I was just thinking, "Oh God, why did I come here?"

The difficulties that resulted from SD's immigration (including the lost selves) interfered with her ability to connect with her changed future selves (i.e., goals). MR still felt that she was facing many difficulties as a result of her status as an immigrant: "Actually, I feel like we are still struggling. Maybe life will be

good for the children if we work hard. So maybe they will get that dream, whatever we are dreaming now." Although NB appeared to embrace the changes in her life, she also lamented that "starting over was not easy."

### Immigration and Lost Confidence

Another theme that arose from the interviews was the participants' overall lack of confidence. Their inability to participate in the labour market was a significant reason for their lack of confidence, which highlights the importance of the feared-for self of the unactualized woman.

After being unable to work in the UK because of her immigration status, SD told me that she lost her overall confidence: "I was a very confident person; I would say overconfident. And then I went to the UK, and I think all my confidence just vanished. Until now, it's very hard for me." When I asked her to explain what had decreased her confidence, SD identified not working as an important factor; for example, when her family and friends questioned her on her employment status:

> Every time you meet someone, they [would say], "Oh, you're still studying." I didn't want to go out. And they keep saying, "Oh, you're still studying; you're not finding a job." It was quite frustrating. We have parties and everything, because I used to party a lot, but then the questions keep coming, and I just didn't want to go; I didn't want to go out.

Both NB and MR cited their time away from the labour market (because of immigration and childrearing responsibilities) as a reason for their decreased confidence. For example, MR stated, "I feel like that for last five years or four years; I didn't work, so I lacking confidence that nobody will hire me as an engineer."

RR, MR, and SD expressed a lack of confidence in their foreign credentials and/or experience. Upon her arrival in Canada, RR did not apply for jobs because she assumed that her credentials were inadequate:

> I think it's going to be hard for me to get into that job, because I know the education level is different from back home. I think I need to upgrade them before I can get into the kind of job, and then I need more experience. I already think that I'm not going to be hired.

Although MR arrived with the intention of working as an engineer, while she was searching for work, she became less and less confident: "I was looking for a job in [engineering], but they ask lot of requirement. And sometimes it matches, but most of the time I feel like they are talking about updated technology." When she planned her immigration, SD chose to enter the country as a student to gain Canadian educational credentials because she assumed that her UK degree would not be acceptable for employment: "So I thought, even though I had a degree, I would need some Canadian experience, because everything's so different here." The saliency of this lack of confidence is that both RR and SD did not apply for jobs and that MR stopped applying for jobs because they assumed that their credentials were inadequate.

In addition, their lack of confidence led to the participants' fear and concern for their futures, for SD in particular. She wondered whether she had chosen the right technical diploma program: "And I'm thinking, 'Will I choose the right thing?' Because I haven't been choosing the right thing apparently, because that's why I am still in the education sector. I don't know. I just feel quite scared sometimes." Because of her lack of confidence, SD felt "quite scared of getting back into the work field as everyone said because I don't think I'm quite

confident." RR spoke about her future and admitted that she is not an "optimistic person" most of the time. When I asked why, she replied, "Because when I'm doing something, sometimes I [tell] myself, 'No, I cannot make it.'" She also expressed "a little doubt" about being accepted into her program as a result of her lack of confidence.

The two younger participants, SD and RR, also identified a third area in which they lacked confidence. Both felt that they would be judged by their Canadian classmates because of their status as immigrants. RR was especially worried about her accent: "I'm thinking just for myself, like when I'm talking with them, they might say that 'Oh, we couldn't really understand what she's talking about,' something like that, because I know that my English is not that good." This lack of confidence resulted in RR's feelings of isolation and loneliness in the classroom: "When I go to school back home we're all [South East Asians], and here I'm the only one Asian in the class, so . . . I feel different." Particularly in her first few weeks, SD also felt as an outsider with her classmates:

> I guess it's different because it's their country, so they'll know how things work. And for me it's a bit strange. If someone maybe says something, I don't know if it's a joke or if it's just the language. I guess sometimes I'm scared of saying something in case it's not the right thing to say. . . . Sometimes it's a bit strange for me because I don't know how they're going to judge me.

RR's and SD's sense of isolation also indicates their loss of social networks.

### *Immigration and Compromisation*

Thus far I have described how immigration changed the possible selves of the participants and caused them to lose certain selves (particularly those related to their previous careers), which resulted in an overall loss of confidence.

Although the participants articulated overall acceptance of these changes, they also found this process difficult. MR's description of her early efforts to find employment particularly summarizes the effects of these changes:

> And first one month I was looking for job seriously as an engineer. At those time I didn't compromise. Okay, I worked as an engineer in my country, so I have to work, because I didn't have that realization that I should have Canadian experience, something like that. Okay, after one month we thought that we are losing money, so we have to do something else. *So we compromise; we are compromised.* [italics added]

By accepting the changes wrought by immigration and letting go of their past selves and their former careers, these women were forced to compromise their hopes and dreams. Additionally, I contend that there is a further level of meaning within the syntax error at the end of this quotation. When MR was speaking about the compromises that she was forced to make, she stated, "We are compromised." I found this unintentional statement to be quite poignant because it aptly summarized the effects of immigration on the participants' lives: They made compromises (as evidenced in their descriptions of lost selves) and, as a result, their inability to achieve their hoped-for selves compromised them economically and socially (which thereby resulted in a loss of confidence).

The immigration-related systemic process of being compromised—what I will call *compromisation*—also distinguishes FTPWs from other students in the adult upgrading (and, for SD, adult education) classroom. Whereas Canadian-born adult upgrading students may have lost selves and lost confidence because of a variety of life circumstances, the FTPWs whom I interviewed experienced these losses because of systemic processes and barriers. For example, Canadian-born individuals may also enrol in adult upgrading because they have to change their

careers (e.g., because of injuries, redundancies, or personal preferences), their change is not triggered by compromisation because Canadian-born students do not face the general, specific, and social labour-market barriers that I described in chapter 2.

For this reason I conducted this study from a social justice point of view. In my opinion, the systemic barriers that FTPWs face in achieving their hoped-for possible selves are inequitable. Moreover, as I discussed in chapter 2, because the labour-market barriers affect women to a greater extent than they do men, this inequitable compromisation also involves the specific marginalization of women. Therefore, in viewing gender as an important category of analysis and attempting to give voice to a group of marginalized women, I also conducted the analysis of this research from a feminist theoretical perspective.

## Influence of Adult Upgrading on the Development
## and Realization of Possible Selves

The participants in my research chose to enter adult upgrading (NB, RR, and MR) or adult education (SB) because they were unable to participate in the labour market for a variety of reasons. RR and MR felt that their credentials and experience were not adequate for the Canadian engineering field. SD was studying to gain Canadian credentials before attempting to participate in the Canadian labour market after being unable to work in the UK on her student visa. Both NB and MR identified their childrearing years and time spent away from the labour market as additional reasons that they could not currently find employment. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the participants' concern about

finding employment was related to achieving their hoped-for selves of responsible women and working women and avoiding their feared-for self of unactualized women. The previous section illustrated how immigration resulted in lost selves, lost confidence, and a systemic process of compromisation that impacted the participants' ability to achieve their hoped-for selves.

In this section I will build upon my descriptions of the participants' possible selves and the impact of immigration on these possible selves by addressing my first research question: What is the influence of adult upgrading on the development and realization of the possible selves of the participants in this study? Two categories emerged to answer this research question: (a) adult upgrading as a mechanism for achieving hoped-for selves and (b) adult upgrading as a mechanism for expanding hoped-for selves.

### Adult Upgrading: A Mechanism for Achieving Hoped-for Selves

The first theme that emerged to answer my first research question was that the participants viewed adult upgrading as a mechanism to achieve their hoped-for selves. They considered adult upgrading (and education) a pathway to the labour market. NB, MR, and RR had chosen adult upgrading as a means of enrolling in a technical diploma program that would give them a discrete set of skills and training for a particular field in the labour market. SD was enrolled in a diploma program that offered such training. Thus adult upgrading (for NB, MR, and RR) and adult education (for SD) can be considered the means by which the participants chose to access the labour market. Regarding this journey towards her goals, NB commented:

> The [upgrading] takes you to the high school grades that you might require for the courses that you're taking. So [upgrading] is just a closed path, very fast and very narrowed, that takes me to the requirement course that I am supposed to be taking. And soon after that I'll be taking my courses for [a technical diploma at Institute A]. There is where I am, where my goal will be.

MR viewed upgrading as related to her goals because it "makes me prepared to apply to [Institute B], so I am fulfilling my entrance requirement." RR recognized that upgrading offered her a mechanism to achieve her goals: "I know if you can go upgrading, upgrading, there's opportunities." NB also identified upgrading as a mechanism for reaching those opportunities: "Your horizon is full of opportunities you can see, but you cannot reach it. You have to go through a way that leads you to that situation." SD planned to achieve this hoped-for self through a technical diploma: "I think [Institute B] is helping me in getting me towards my goals because my goal is to get a job." She therefore found her time at Institute B useful, because, "at the end of the day, you're going to get a job—maybe not a great job to start with, but a job—and allowed to be able to work full time." Thus, all four participants believed that a technical diploma would eventually help them to access the labour market and their hoped-for self of the working woman. Upgrading was the means that NB, RR, and MR chose to attain a technical diploma.

Because each participant believed that becoming the working woman (as soon as possible for NB, RR, and SD and eventually for MR) would make her the responsible woman, upgrading also became a strategy to achieve her hoped-for self of the responsible woman. This is significant, because upgrading also

becomes a strategy to overcome the labour-market barriers associated with the

process of compromisation.

### *Adult Upgrading: A Mechanism for Expanding and Developing Hoped-for Selves*

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants'

use of adult upgrading to develop and expand their hoped-for selves. Prior to

entering adult upgrading (or adult education, as was the case for SD), three of the

four participants had chosen their desired technical diploma program and the

profession that they wanted to enter upon finishing. NB chose the program

because of its labour market opportunities:

> I looked at the demand of the position, and it looks like it's a profession
> that's increasing in demand. And there will be lots of requirements, lots of
> required skills that they will be asking a year or two down the road.

RR chose her program for similar reasons: "My sister told me that it's a good

program, it's a good career, lots of opportunities." SD applied for her chosen

technical diploma program prior to immigrating to Canada after she had

researched her options on the Internet. MR's plans were less concrete because she

did not intend to enter the labour market until her children were older; however,

she had one particular program in mind that is related to her former work as an

engineer.

Despite this, all of the participants reported some changes to their future

goals (and, consequently, to their possible selves) after they had enrolled in adult

upgrading or education. For two of the participants (SD and MR), these changes

included an expansion of their possible selves. SD's program requires students to

choose a specialization for their second year. Although she intended to enter one particular specialization, after being in her program for a semester, she has found herself also drawn to a different specialization. At the time of the interviews, she had not yet decided which specialize to choose. Each choice would eventually result in a different career; thus, her view of herself as the working woman had expanded to two possibilities instead of one. SD also reported that her views of her familial responsibilities had also expanded and clarified as a result of enrolling in her program: "I can see other goals now, like forming a family. I mean, not right now, but before I didn't really think about it, but now it's coming into place slowly. Very slowly, but it is coming." Thus SD expanded both of her hoped-for selves of working women and responsible women. MR also expanded her possible selves, particularly the hoped-for self of the working woman. After her first semester in upgrading, MR began to consider a diploma program in the medical field rather than one related to her former work as an engineer. Regarding the effect of upgrading on her future career, MR stated, "It is wider now. It opens my mind."

In addition to expanding the number of possible selves, adult upgrading and education also influenced the development of the participants' hoped-for selves. Although NB's and RR's time in adult upgrading had not changed their programs of choice, they reported that their experiences in the program further developed their hoped-for selves. RR felt that her goals became clearer as a result of upgrading:

> My goal is going into [a program at Institute B], and then little by little it's changing, because I already now finished [upgrading], so there's a chance

for me, a great chance to get into the program. And then after that, finish that program, I find a job for me.

As a result of her experiences in upgrading, NB also felt closer to her career goals: "Coming to have an environment where you are growing your education, your education side of your mind is growing, and is growing to a path that leads you to a profession." When I asked SD how being in adult education has changed her goals, she replied that "it reinforces them" because

it's going to come to reality. It's not just like I'm thinking of the goals, because back in the UK, I've been thinking of it for years and it's like a never-ending goal. But this one seems to be maybe, in a five-year time, I'll be okay.

Thus, upgrading was a mechanism for the participants not only to clarify and develop their goals to become and be working women and responsible women, but also to develop and clarify their hoped-for selves.

**Supporting FTPWs in Adult Upgrading**

In the previous section I discussed the influence of adult upgrading on the participants' possible selves, but it could be argued that any student can use adult upgrading to develop, enhance, and achieve his or her possible selves. The FTPWs in my study expressed unique needs as learners because they had experienced lost selves and a loss of confidence as a result of the systemic process of compromisation. In this section, to address my second research question, How might adult upgrading support the development and realization of the possible selves from the perspectives of these women? I will describe how adult upgrading might support these unique needs. This information is useful particularly for upgrading programs and institutes such as my workplace, Institute B, that do not

offer much programming that caters specifically to immigrants. In answer to this question, two main themes arose from the interview data: (a) the importance of acknowledging the impact of immigration on these individuals' lives and (b) the importance of building confidence.

### Acknowledging the Impact of Immigration

A strategy for adult upgrading programs and instructors to address the learning needs of FTPWs would be to acknowledge the impact of immigration on these students' lives. According to the participants in my study, this can be done in three ways: (a) by adult-upgrading teachers, (b) by referrals to immigrant-supporting student services and agencies, and (c) through support for the credential-recognition or -assessment process.

MR praised the upgrading program at Institute B because the program and teachers seemed to understand her as an individual and as an immigrant: "[Upgrading], it is very good. Teacher, they are very good too. I feel like they know that why we came here. They already know that." This recognition of why she was in the classroom and her background as an immigrant professional was important for MR; she felt that it contributed to her success in upgrading: "Teacher is very good. She wants to understand every student's problem. That makes different. . . . Still I am struggling, but I am struggling less because of the teacher." MR also explicitly linked excellent teaching practices with students' achievement of their goals: "[Upgrading] department, make sure that teaching is excellent so the student can achieve their goal. So they will not lag behind; they will learn and definitely can score better." Therefore, acknowledging these

women's lost selves and understanding why they came to be in the classroom helps them to develop and realize their hoped-for selves.

However, acknowledgement of the impact of immigration on the participants' possible selves must go farther than the level of the teacher. SD suggested that adult education programs offer referrals to services that cater to immigrants. For example, she attended an immigration orientation in Institute B's International Centre that addressed issues of integration rather than academics: "They told us everything about Canada and the winter, which was really good." When I probed about whether the orientation should have also addressed academic issues, SD replied, "Not really the academic part, but . . . living places, because when I first came here, I didn't know what bank to chose." Although none of the other participants suggested this, they all mentioned the technical challenges directly related to their immigration journey that included adapting to Alberta's cold climate (NB and SD), searching for affordable housing (MR and SD), and finding a bank (SD). Therefore adult upgrading programs can help the participants to meet their basic needs, which in turn allows them to focus on achieving their hoped-for selves.

A final area of acknowledgement is associated with a need unique to foreign-trained professionals: support with the complicated, convoluted, and often expensive credential-recognition process. As I described in chapter 2, this process is not regulated at the national level and can vary greatly between provinces, professional regulatory bodies, and educational institutes. Although adult upgrading programs likely will not change the policies of professional regulatory

bodies such as the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta with regard to accepting foreign credentials, they can offer some support in the credential-assessment process associated with the postsecondary application process. To enter a postsecondary institute, foreign-born individuals must submit their educational credentials to the institute to determine whether they are eligible to apply directly or if they require some form of upgrading to obtain prerequisites. For instance, many of the diploma programs at Institute B require a Grade 12–level science course. Foreign-educated individuals must have their transcripts assessed to determine whether they already have an equivalent course.

The credentials of all of the participants in upgrading (RR, NB, and MR) were assessed in some way or would be in the future. RR used the International Qualifications Assessment Service and then submitted her results to Institute B to be assessed for her suitability for the diploma program. NB's chosen institute also assessed her credentials. Institute B did not formally assess MR's credentials, but she intends to complete the assessment offered by the upgrading office once she has finalized her choice of diploma program. Because credential assessments are key in determining whether individuals require upgrading in the first place, having supports in place to guide them through the process is important to meet immigrant students' needs. Correctly done, this process can help to develop individuals' hoped-for selves by giving them a clear idea of what they need to do to reach their desired goals, and they might effectively utilize adult upgrading

during this process. It can also reduce the time that it takes them to achieve their hoped-for selves by preventing them from taking unnecessary courses.

### Building Confidence

A second immigration-related barrier that the participants faced was a lack of confidence, and another opportunity for adult upgrading to support the development and realization of the participants' possible selves that emerged from the interviews is related to building confidence.

Earlier I discussed how a lack of confidence related to the participants' immigration journeys has impacted their possible selves. Many of the participants reported that enrolling in upgrading created a space for them to build confidence. NB, for example, felt that upgrading allowed her to address her lack of confidence after she had been away from the labour market:

> I have been a housewife for 11 years; I cannot throw myself in the job. I felt that I might need some kind of knowledge, some kind of skills that I can look for a job with even with I forgot about how the interview used to be. I might need some kind of enlightening skills. That's what I can call it. I'm not completely missing the skills, but I might need enlightening skills that takes you to be refreshed to the job.

SD also found that her confidence from being able to enter the workforce increased after she enrolled in her program: "It was quite hard, but then slowly, once we get into group works and stuff like that, I gained more confidence. . . . Slowly, as I gained the confidence, definitely I start thinking maybe it's going to be okay." RR reported increased confidence related to her ability to succeed in her desired technical diploma program following her time in upgrading: "I feel more comfortable now because I know the feeling of how it is to have classmates different, classmates like that, and the way that the teacher and the student, how

they interact each other." Adult upgrading itself has therefore been an opportunity for the participants to build their confidence and develop possible selves because it has helped these immigrant students to refresh their skills and learn how to learn in a Canadian context, thereby increasing their ability to eventually enter the labour market.

Another way that adult upgrading might build confidence is related to the specific needs of immigrant students. Particularly if they are newly arrived, these students often lack social networks. Both of the younger students reported feeling isolated and lonely because they felt that they did not belong to a community in their academic settings. SD stated, "I am the only one in the class that's an immigrant, and everyone's been born here, so it was quite hard." RR also found it difficult, especially because she did not expect to be the only South East Asian in the class: "At first it was really hard for me because I didn't know anybody and I'm expecting that there will be other [classmates from my home country]. And then I was the only one there."

Thus, the need to offer community-building activities or referrals to such activities to build the confidence of immigrant students in adult upgrading or adult education classes emerged as a theme. For example, SD spoke to the lack of a campus community at Institute B, an issue that affects immigrant students: "I was quite surprised that we don't have campuses at [Institute B] because there's so many international students." Offering activities that would help immigrant students to interact and share experiences could address the isolation that SD and RR described. The upgrading office itself would not necessarily organize these

activities; for example, SD identified International Student Services at Institute B as a place where she had developed a community that supported her social needs. By sharing information about the services that are already in place, upgrading programs would help to link students with the services specifically designed to meet their needs.

However, in some ways the isolation and lack of confidence that SD and RR felt appear to be derived from their perceptions rather than the reality of the classroom. As the teacher in RR's class, I know that the class contained a number of immigrant women, all of whom were visible minorities and ELLs. Although none were from RR's specific home country, several were from Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia, which meant that RR felt alone in her experiences as an immigrant student despite the fact that she was not the only immigrant or immigrant woman in the class. RR initially stated that she was the only immigrant in the class, but she identified her friendship with a South Asian woman as a factor that increased her comfort in the classroom: "So good thing there's [the South Asian woman]. She talked to me, and then we kind of get along with each other." SD also mentioned connecting with foreign-born classmates, although she does not consider them to be immigrants because they have been in Canada for many years: "In my row there's just me and the three girls from [South East Asia]. But they've been here a long, long time. I don't know why we choose to sit like that; it was just normal, I guess." The important issue in this narrative is that both SD and RR felt isolated and wanted to make connections with their classmates, particularly those who had faced some of the same immigration

and/or integration issues. Therefore, another opportunity for upgrading programs to support the possible selves of the participants would be to help students to get to know one another in their classrooms, which would help them to develop community networks.

It is also interesting to note that neither of the older participants (NB and MR) reported being the only immigrant in the class; nor did either report feeling lonely or isolated. When I asked MR about her relationships with her classmates, she replied, "I think I speak with five or six students. Some are Canadian and some are immigrant. That is friendly environment. If I want to talk to them, they respond very good." I also asked NB about her interactions with classmates, and she reported that she was too busy taking care of her children to spend much time with her classmates. Her busy schedule and the fact that she is not in a cohort have also limited the importance of her classmates:

> We share class we are in at the time. Everybody has their own classes. Sometimes you meet people that goes through English with you, and they go to math class or somewhere else. So people different from one to one class.

Thus, unlike the younger women, the older women were not looking or needing to connect with their classmates on more than a superficial level, and therefore individuals who are seeking such communities, but not necessarily those who do not feel that this is important, would seek community-building opportunities.

### *Benefits*

The supports that I discussed in the previous sections ultimately move individuals closer to their hoped-for selves and farther from their feared-for selves. If we return to the possible selves that the participants in this study

identified, the satisfaction that they reported from being on a path that they viewed as leading towards their hoped-for selves is linked to the process of actualization, of becoming working and responsible women. NB espoused this feeling: "I am in the right path. That's what makes me really confident and happy." When I asked why this made her more confident, she replied, "Is a position that I am going to, and the [upgrading] class takes me to the position." Thus, not only did adult upgrading/education bring the participants closer to their hoped-for selves, but it also took them farther away from their feared-for self of the unactualized woman, as evidenced in their reports of increased levels of confidence. Upgrading was also a source of relief for MR: "I feel like I will apply to [Institute B]. I can apply. I will fulfill all entrance requirement. So I feel like some load will get off my shoulder." RR also developed confidence during her upgrading because of its connection to her future goals: "I feel like... I'm on the right track. It's the first step of getting into what I want some day."

However, the benefits of such supports go farther than the level of the individual. From a social justice perspective, adult upgrading can assist FTPWs in overcoming the systemic process of compromisation by supporting their possible selves. By acknowledging their difficult paths and the impact on their identities, adult upgrading can support, develop, and enhance the goals of these women, thereby helping them to overcome the labour-market barriers that prevented them from being and becoming responsible and working women.

Supporting these women in achieving their goals also addresses the socially constructed view of immigrant women that has reinforced their lowered

socioeconomic status (which I discussed in chapter 2). Building their confidence and acknowledging their past as professionals expands and develops the construction of immigrant women, just as their possible selves are expanded and developed. From a feminist theoretical perspective, this acknowledgement process breaks the silence of their experiences and pulls them into the adult education narrative where their stories and experiences matter.

**Summary**

In this chapter I introduced the four participants (NB, RR, MR, and SD) and the research sites (Institutes A and B) to provide a context for the research findings. The salient hoped-for selves that the participants described were the responsible woman (subcategorized into the responsible mother and the responsible daughter) and the working woman. The salient feared-for self was the unactualized woman. I discussed how immigration changed the possible selves of the participants and resulted in lost selves and lost confidence through the process of compromisation. Adult upgrading is a mechanism that helped them to develop, achieve, and enhance their hoped-for selves. Thus, to support the unique learning needs of FTPWs (and thereby support the development and realization of their possible selves), adult upgrading programs and instructors should acknowledge the profound impact of immigration on their lives by referring them to immigrant-supporting student services and agencies and helping them to navigate the credential-recognition process and build confidence and social networks.

**CHAPTER 5:**

**DISCUSSION**

In this research, using the theoretical framework of possible selves, I explored the experiences of four FTPWs who had entered adult upgrading or education. With regard to my first research question, the participants viewed adult upgrading as a mechanism to achieve the hoped-for self of the working woman, which would move them closer to becoming the responsible woman and farther away from becoming the unactualized woman. For these women, adult upgrading was also a mechanism to develop and expand their possible selves, which assists in the process of moving closer to their hoped-for selves and farther away from their feared-for selves. In answering the second research question, I suggest that, to address the unique learning needs of these participants as FTPWs and the systemic process of compromisation that they have faced, adult upgrading should acknowledge the impact of immigration on their lives, offer referrals to immigration services, support the credential-recognition process, build confidence, and encourage the development of community networks for immigrants.

Although the focus of this study was the participants' possible selves and their experiences in adult upgrading or education, undertaking this research project was an important learning process for me, both personally and professionally. The first objective of this research was to explore the experiences of FTPWs in adult upgrading to add to our understanding of immigration in Canada and its connections to adult education. The foundation of this objective

was my desire to find out more about the immigrant students whom I encounter in my upgrading classroom. The second objective was to explore how adult upgrading might support and enhance the experiences of FTPWs who choose to enter adult upgrading programs from the perspectives of these women. This originated from my desire to identify how I, as an individual and an educator, might be able to address what I view as an important issue for Canada and Canadians. This chapter discusses how I met these objectives and how my own journey through this research project has changed my practice as an educator.

## Changes to My Understanding of FTPWs

This section addresses my first research objective. I discuss what I have learned about the FTPWs who are in my classroom (keeping in mind that I constructed this knowledge from the perspectives of four individuals, and thus it does not and cannot necessarily represent all views and experiences). I will also describe two areas of change: (a) my understanding of the saliency of immigration and (b) my understanding of familial responsibility.

### *The Saliency of Immigration*

The term *immigrate* originates from the Latin term *imigrare*, which means "to remove, to go, move in" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2010). One of the lessons that I have learned from this research concerns the saliency of immigration in shaping lives. Whether by choice or coercion, immigrants must remove themselves from one place and move to another. This speaks to the settlement challenges that they face: Upon arrival, they must become accustomed to a new language, locate new housing, adapt to the new climate, find work in a

new labour market, discover a new social network, and so on. There are issues involved in settlement and integration that Canadian-born individuals might take for granted. For example, SD mentioned her difficulties with choosing a bank. I have never been confused about such matters because I have always had my parents or friends to ask should I need advice, whether it be for financial (e.g., which bank to choose), legal (e.g., what my rights are), or educational (e.g., which postsecondary institute to choose) matters. There is security in this network because, even if my family or friends do not have the answers, they will be able to refer me to resources that can assist me. For people who arrive in a new country, this network and its associated supports are lost.

However, this study has taught me that the saliency of immigration runs much deeper than the technical challenges that I described in the previous paragraph. If we look further into the etymology of the term, we see that *imigrare* is related to the Greek base *mei-*, which means "to change" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2010). I have certainly learned that to immigrate is to change. The changes wrought by immigration have technical aspects, but the changes that my study uncovered were related primarily to identity. Immigration changed the participants' possible selves and thereby changed their notions of who they are and who they could be or should be in the future. One example from my study relates to the participants' career-related selves. Three of the four participants (NB, RR, and SD) had chosen technical diploma programs that were very different from their previous (foreign) careers and work experience. Although the fourth participant, MR, was considering a program related to her previous work as

an engineer, she was also thinking of pursuing training in the health field. The process of choosing a new career in a new field requires that she change her view of herself for the future, and therefore her identities. Another example of the impact on identity that emerged from the research was the impact of these changes on the participants' levels of self-confidence (which I discussed in chapter 4). Thus I have come to better appreciate that immigration is a force that changes identity and that these changes in turn impact the lives of immigrants.

The etymological connection of immigration to change is also reflected at the societal level. Immigration does not result in only individual change to the immigrant; the receiving society is also changed (Gibson, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006). As a society that was literally built from generations of immigration and immigrants, Canada and Canadians certainly seems to be quick to ignore this important aspect of our history (Li, 2003). With regard to contemporary education, these changes are reflected in the fact that classrooms are now comprised of a plurality of nationalities, languages, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives. Because "there is little attention to issues of intersectionality or the complex ways in which race, class, gender and sexuality both intersect and cut at right angles to each other in everyday school life" (McCarthy, Rezai-Rashti, & Teasley, 2009, p. 77), it is important that educators such as I explore these issues. Particularly because it concerned what I view as a social-justice and feminist issue, this inquiry was a way for me to examine my role in the subjugation and/or empowerment of FTPWs. Because systemic factors mitigate this subjugation, as one cog in the adult education machine, I can raise awareness and effect change

within that system. I will later discuss how my teaching practice has changed as a result of this inquiry and what I plan to do to address this issue in the future.

### *The Saliency of Familial Responsibility*

The importance of family was another emerging theme that gave me insights into issues of immigration in Canada and my role as an educator in a multicultural/multinational classroom. Although these findings are based on the perspectives of four people and therefore have limited transferability, I still found it poignant that all four participants were focused on finding work to support their families. I was surprised by the force of particularly the younger participants' sense of familial responsibility in that their primary goal in finding work was to give back to their parents and siblings. Having moved out of my parents' house as soon as I could, although I am grateful for their years of support, it has never occurred to me to give back to them financially after I graduated from university and entered the workforce. The participants' views of familial responsibility were very different from my own and yet were very compelling, and I have great respect for their drive to support and improve the lives of their families.

The literature on possible selves and identity described this sense of interdependence and familial responsibility as collectivist in nature rather than individualist (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Singelis, 1994). Collectivism has been described as a cultural trait of many non-Eurowestern societies; for example, Africa (Ogbu, 2004; Triandis, 1995) and Latin America (Massie, 2009). As they build future selves, individuals who have constructed their selves in a collectivist society depend on their interactions and relations with others to a greater degree

than individualists do (Triandis, 1995). Therefore the findings of this research have given me, a person raised in a primarily individualist culture, much to ponder regarding notions of familial responsibility, daughterhood, and motherhood. This was particularly significant and salient because my first child, a daughter, is due to be born three weeks after the scheduled defence of this thesis. Just as my family is expanding, this research has helped to expand my constructions of family; in the context of my study I could rephrase this by saying that this study has helped to develop and expand my family-related possible selves. This also relates to an expanded view of the importance of immigration to Canada. As I discussed in chapter 3, immigration offers many social benefits; in my view, heterogeneous constructions of family and familial responsibility are one such example that can enrich and strengthen the cultural fabric of Canadian society.

### Changes to My Teaching Practice

The second objective of this research was to explore how upgrading programs such as the one in which I work might support and enhance the possible selves of a segment of my students, FTPWs. Again, I offer the caveat that this discussion is based on the perspectives of four individuals; therefore, I will focus on how my teaching practice has changed and will change as a result of these interviews. The three areas in which my views on my work as an educator have changed include the saliency of stories and storying, of assumptions about immigrants and immigration, and of communities and community building.

*The Saliency of Storying*

One of the most poignant lessons that I have learned through this entire process is the importance of taking the time to hear my students' stories. Let us briefly return to Ryan, the student I described in chapter 1. Prior to reading his application, I had thought of Ryan as overly intense about his grades. He would argue with me about each and every mark below 100%, a habit that I had found rather annoying. Because I had not taken the time to find out more about him, I hastily ascribed the category of overachiever to Ryan and his emotional reactions, which was a form of dismissal because it superficially explained his behaviour (i.e., he was overly driven to achieve good grades). More important, it legitimized my irritable response to it and thereby removed any responsibility from me to learn more about his situation. After reading his application, however, my perception of Ryan shifted. I then understood that every mark below 100% was such an important issue to him because he viewed it as a step away from his goals of reestablishing his career. To take the liberty of applying the findings of this study to Ryan's situation, good grades brought him closer to employment (a hoped-for self) and thus allowed him to fulfill his familial duties (another hoped-for self), which were the reasons that he brought his wife and young son to Canada in the first place.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, Ryan's story was important for me as an educator for reasons greater than to attain a deeper understanding of him as an individual student, and I began to ask the other immigrant students for their stories. In turn, I developed a deeper understanding of what had brought them to

my classroom and motivated them to succeed. In many ways this research project was a continuation of this learning process. The stories that NB, RR, MR, and SD shared with me have also resonated with me as an educator; this research has given me the time to get to know four incredible women, their goals, and how adult upgrading or education is related to their hopes and dreams for the future. Moreover, as I will discuss later, this research has spawned more questions in my quest to learn more about the nature of my students.

In my opinion, to be an educator is to be a facilitator of success; this research has taught me that one of the strategies by which I can facilitate success is to take the time to get to know my adult students. I can see now how their life journeys might impact their ability to succeed in my classroom; therefore, in learning more about them as individuals, I can better plan to meet their individual and collective needs. Although I am now on maternity leave, when I return to the classroom in January 2011, I plan to introduce myself to my new classes by saying, "I am honoured to be your teacher, and I look forward to getting to know you all." I will then develop activities that help me to gain more insight into their life stories.

The saliency of learning these students' stories highlights broader implications for adult education research and practice. First, the stories of immigrant women as learners are critical to collect data on their needs (Mohab, 1999). This is particularly important when these stories typically do not appear in dominant narratives, as is the case for racialized women (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Lee, 1993; Ng, 1993; Raghuram & Kofman, 2004). However, as Razack

(1993) emphasized, from a feminist theoretical perspective, the stories of women, particularly racialized women, are an important agent of social change in addressing underlying the racism and sexism that subjugate their lives. Therefore, not only is storying important at the level of the individual learner, but it is also a mechanism to address sexism or other social justice issues, including the compromisation of FTPWs in Canada.

### The Saliency of Assumptions Regarding Immigration

My reexamination of Ryan's story in the previous section also illustrates a second lesson that I have learned from this research: the importance of challenging assumptions. In the context of this manuscript *assumptions* refers to my own personal and professional assumptions about immigration and immigrants.

Prior to this inquiry I had not spent much time thinking about immigration and was unaware that I held many views that could be considered 'Eurocentric' (i.e., the assumption that Eurowestern ways of knowing and being are superior). For example, in recruiting participants, I did not expect individuals from Western countries because my earliest construction of an immigrant woman was a racialized, non-Western individual whose first language was not English. When I interviewed the women, they would often surprise me with statements that fell outside of my construction of "them." For example, when I asked a *hijab*-wearing Muslim about the role of religion in her goals for the future, I was surprised when she replied, "No, no, no. I have four brother and three sisters, all are very qualified in education-wise. And we also are religious, but never religious play a

part in my education and in the goal." Each time that I felt this sense of surprise, I took careful note because it was exactly because of moments like those that I embarked on this study.

As a result, this study has changed and challenged my views. These changes also highlight the importance of taking the time to learn my students' stories, because the assumptions that I have discussed in this section were challenged as a direct result of getting to know the participants during the research process. This shift in perspective was embodied in a recent conversation with a colleague about my research. After I explained the difficulties that foreign-trained professionals face in accessing the labour market, my colleague then asked me a simple but poignant question: "Well, isn't it just because their educational credentials aren't as good as ours?" Prior to this research I would have viewed this question as neutral and academic; however, I am now conscious that these assumptions embody and reinforce the violence of Eurocentrism. This individual would not consider himself a racist (nor would I), and yet his question originated from discriminatory and oppressive assumptions about immigrants, as embodied in his tacit belief that non-Eurowestern educational credentials are—and must be—inferior. I will therefore try to be more conscious of my role in either challenging or reinforcing Eurocentric metanarratives both inside and outside of the classroom.

Such a practice is important in the field of education because challenging assumptions about immigration, particularly Eurocentric assumptions, is an essential practice in what Kumashiro (2001) referred to as *anti-oppressive*

*education*. According to Kumashiro, different forms of oppression, including the racism, classism, and sexism inherent in Eurocentrism, are enacted in the classroom in many ways. And, as my example in the previous paragraph highlights, this oppression can be subtly reproduced in a practice as simple as asking a question. Therefore, in challenging these assumptions, educators such as myself are challenging oppressive systems such as the ones that result in the compromisation of FTPWs.

### *The Saliency of Community Building*

A third area in which my teaching practice has changed is also a result of hearing the stories of the women in my study: I am now more conscious of the importance of building communities within my classroom. If we return to RR's lack of confidence in her interactions with her Canadian classmates (see chapter 4), I was not aware of the isolation that she felt during her time in my classroom even though she sat near the front and interacted with me daily. It troubled me that she could have this experience and that I was completely unaware of her loneliness and isolation. I acknowledge that not all of the participants felt this isolation, but RR very clearly described the impact of these feelings on her initial experiences in the classroom—in *my* classroom. As a result of this lesson that I have learned from the research, I will utilize the strategies that I discussed in chapter 4 to address this isolation, including asking my immigrant students about their backgrounds and immigration journeys and offering them referrals to immigrant student services at my workplace for support and community building.

However, as I discussed in chapter 4, efforts to support the unique learning needs of FTPWs must go farther than the level of the teacher. Queeny (2000) suggested that building learning communities and community networks contributes to student success in programs that offer continuing professional education. This is because supportive social networks are "an important dimension of marginalized women's participation in community-based adult education programs" (Prins et al., 2009, p. 335). Although Prins et al. were referring largely to informal education programming, formal adult education programs such as upgrading can also offer opportunities to build social networks to meet these students' needs (Alfred, 2009). As I have already argued, by supporting these communities to meet the needs of FTPWs, adult education and adult educators can empower these women to achieve their hopes and dreams (Albertini, 2009).

**Arising Questions**

The previous two sections have described how my understanding of immigration and of the FTPWs in my classroom has expanded and how my teaching practice has changed as a result of this study. I will now discuss the questions that arose for me as considerations for future research and reflection.

This study focused on one segment of my classroom: FTPWs. It might also be fitting to describe my sample as a segment of a segment because the four participants are heterogeneous individuals with unique life stories and immigration journeys. Although they had many things in common, it is impossible to view them as representing the same voice, and I would therefore

like to interview more FTPWs in upgrading to compare their experiences to those

that I have reported in this study. How might FTPWs from Eurowestern and/or

individualistic societies compare to the women I interviewed in my inquiry?

Moreover, because my research was limited to two postsecondary institutes, I

wonder how the experiences of foreign-trained professionals in other local

upgrading programs would compare to those of the participants in this study. In

particular, I would like to spend more time reflecting on the differences between

upgrading programs that cater to immigrants and programs that have no particular

focus on immigrants.

A second series of questions arose, not from what the participants said to

me, but from what they did not say, a concept that Britzman (2006) would call

*not-learning*. Although the women described the difficulties that they experienced

with their immigration, I was intrigued by the lack of expressed grief over their

loss of credentials and careers. Were they really that accepting of these losses?

Could it be that it was too difficult to describe? Or was it perhaps because my

research questions did not adequately address the issue?

Another area of not-learning arose from the married women's narratives.

They spoke at great length about their responsibilities and duties towards their

children, but their husbands were noticeably absent. Why? What is there to learn

from this not-learning?

In viewing my sample as a segment of a segment, many other questions

have arisen concerning the other types of students in my classroom. How different

are the possible selves of my participants from those of male foreign-trained

professionals? Would foreign-trained professional men express the same levels of acceptance of their loss of careers that the women did? Would they have had the same sense of duty towards their families? Would their spouses also be relatively absent from their narratives? Furthermore, how different might the narratives of immigrants (female and male) who do not have foreign postsecondary educational credentials be? From Canadian-born students? Would Canadian-born individuals express the same sense of duty to their families? I found possible selves to be a useful heuristic device that elicited meaningful information about the effect of adult upgrading on the participants' hoped-for selves (i.e., goals), and the methodology and methods that I used in this study could be employed in many different ways to examine the diverse nature of the upgrading classroom.

Finally, in my view of this study as a personal and professional exploration, a third line of questioning that arose concerns my role as the teacher. The study focused on the experiences of the participants in upgrading; however, because I embarked on this journey to learn more about what I as an educator could do to support these students, I would like to examine further the nature of the relationship between student and teacher in this context. How important is the teacher in helping his or her diverse students reach their hoped-for selves? The nature of research is that, in addition to what the researcher learns, more avenues for learning are revealed. This was certainly the case in this study; although I will have completed my master's degree by the time my maternity leave is finished and I return to the classroom, I will certainly continue the questioning and re-searching that this inquiry has catalyzed.

**Conclusion**

I will begin my conclusion with a quotation that resonated with the reason

that studies such as mine are important:

> Research in cross-cultural contexts provides us with understanding,
> knowledge, and insights into the lives of people who have different
> experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. This type of knowledge often
> cannot be neatly compressed into tidy tables or figures. Rather, it is a
> means of helping us to better understand the complexity of human
> experience and our potentiality for growth and learning. (Brigham &
> Gouthro, 2006, p. 89)

This quotation highlights the significance of three areas of my study: its topic,

context, and theoretical perspectives.

Topically, it is important to engage in cross-cultural research because our

society is and will continue to be comprised of people with many different

backgrounds and perspectives. My participants are representative of a significant

proportion of Canada's population; their experiences with labour-market barriers

highlight the need to find solutions to help them to overcome these barriers to be

able to meet their goals for the future (i.e., hoped-for selves). This is important not

only for these individuals, but also for Canada because it enables the

maximization of immigration-related economic and social benefits that I

discussed in chapter 1.

This leads to my study's contextual significance of adult upgrading as a

segment of adult education: Immigration has changed all Canadian classrooms

(adult and otherwise). As a result, teachers and teaching practices must adapt to

the changing nature of the Canadian classroom. Because many immigrants use the

various facets of adult education to overcome the labour-market barriers that they

face (of which adult upgrading is just one example), studies such as mine are important to help immigrants and Canadian society to meet expectations for the future.

Thus my study also has theoretical significance. The messy, convoluted issue of immigration is telling of the "complexity of human experience" (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006, p. 89). Research on immigration therefore requires many different approaches. The lenses and theoretical perspectives that I used in this qualitative research project, including constructivism, a feminist theoretical perspective, the theoretical construct of possible selves, and a focus on social justice, have been useful as I worked through one issue that I have faced as an adult educator in a cross-cultural setting. I will keep these in mind as I continue my reflective teaching practices.

In chapter 1, I located myself in this inquiry by describing a series of diverse intersections in my life from which my research objectives and questions emerged. I now recognize that the multitude of titles that I use to describe my identity represent my many possible selves. By engaging in the process of this research, I have learned that these intersections are closer to the nature of my study than I first realized. The complexity of the human experience itself is a series of diverse intersections, as are my classroom and the relationships and communities that we develop within it. By navigating these intersections within myself and the classroom, my understanding of this complexity and my relationship to it have deepened. Furthermore, my possible selves—particularly

those related to my constructions of family and familial duties—have been

expanded, developed, and enhanced. I am grateful for this experience.

Sincerely,


Jocelyn Crocker

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**APPENDIX A:**

**CANADIAN IMMIGRATION CLASSES**

*Economic Class Immigrants*

Economic class immigrants include principal applicants, their spouses and dependents. As has been the case since the 1967 *Immigration Act*, the principal applicants of the economic class are "selected for suitability for the Canadian labour force based on an assessment of their skills" (Statistics Canada, 2003b, p. 9). This assessment of principal applicants is based on a points system that rewards age, education, work experience, intended occupation, knowledge of English or French, and adaptability (Iredale, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2003b). Additional points may be rewarded if the principal applicant has pre-arranged employment in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Within this class, spouses and dependent children are not assessed for suitability for the Canadian labour market (Statistics Canada, 2003b).

Immigrants admitted under the economic class include skilled worker, business immigrants, provincial or territorial nominees, and live-in caregivers (Statistics Canada, 2003b). The Federal Skilled Worker Program uses the points system to select for immigrants with the education and work experience that will help them to become economically established in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Business immigrants are selected on the basis of their "ability to create jobs for themselves and other Canadian residents, contribute capital to the Canadian economy and stimulate economic activity" (CIC, 2008a, p. 17), and can fall into three categories: entrepreneurs, self-employed persons, or investors with capital or business management experience. Under the Provincial Nomination Program, territories or provinces can nominate individuals s permanent residents "to address specific labour market and economic development needs" (p. 13). The live-in caregiver program allows individuals residing in Canada to "employ qualified foreign workers in their private residence when there are not enough Canadians and permanent residents to fill the available positions" (p. 18). Successful applicants are granted temporary resident status and a work permit, and are eligible to apply for permanent resident status after two years (CIC, 2008a).

*Canadian Experience Class Immigrants*

In 2008, Bill C-50 was passed to amend the IRPA in order to "provide more flexibility in processing and managing applications, stop the growth of the backlog and improve our ability to attract people to Canada" (CIC, 2008a, p. 5). This created the new Canadian experience class, which enables qualifying temporary foreign workers and international students with Canadian work experience to apply for permanent residence from within the country (CIC, 2008a). This amendment is intended to make the immigration system "more

responsive to Canada's labour market by helping retain those temporary foreign workers and international students who have demonstrated their ability to succeed in Canada" (p. 5).

*Family Class Immigrants*

Immigrants admitted under the family class are "close relatives (spouses, dependent children, parents and grandparents) sponsored by a permanent resident or citizen of Canada who is at least 18 years of age" (Statistics Canada, 2003b, p. 9). The sponsored immigrant is permitted to be accompanied by his or her spouse and dependent children (Statistics Canada, 2003b). The sponsor must commit to support these relatives or family member(s) to help them settle in Canada for a period ranging from three to ten years (Statistics Canada, 2003b).

*Protected Persons*

Those admitted to Canada as protected persons include government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees, protected persons in Canada, and their dependents (CIC, 2008a). Refugees can be sponsored from abroad by the government or private groups, or admitted after claiming refugee status after their arrival in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Those sponsored from abroad can be individuals recognized as "Convention refugees on the basis of the 1951 Geneva Convention or individuals being re-settled for humanitarian reasons" (Statistics Canada, 2003b). However, refugee claimants only come under Canada's protection after he or she becomes a Convention refugee (Statistics Canada, 2003b). A 'Convention refugee' is an individual who can prove a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (CIC, 2009, p. 55). Permanent resident status may be granted to individuals for humanitarian and/or compassionate reasons, or for public policy reasons (CIC, 2008a).

**APPENDIX B:**

**RECRUITMENT POSTER**

---

**DO YOU HAVE A DEGREE FROM OUTSIDE CANADA? ARE YOU ENROLED IN UPGRADING OR HAVE YOU TAKEN UPGRADING SINCE 2008?**

---

Female participants needed for research on immigration and high school upgrading.
We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the influence of high school upgrading on the future goals of foreign-trained professional women.

As a participant in this study, you would be interviewed by a researcher two times to talk about your experiences in high school upgrading. Each interview will take 30-45 minutes. The entire research project will require a maximum of 2 hours of your time.

You will benefit from this research by exploring your goals for the future and specific steps on how to reach these goals. This research will also help raise awareness about the barriers and challenges facing foreign-trained professionals as they try to find employment in Canada.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact Jocelyn Crocker at (780) 707-4943 or
jcrocker@ualberta.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta, [*Institute A*], and [*Institute B*].

High school upgrading study  780-707-4943  jcrocker@ualberta.ca

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**APPENDIX C:**

**INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORMS**

Dear _____,

You are invited to be in a research project called "The Influence of Adult Upgrading on the Possible Selves of Foreign-Trained Professional Women." This project is recruiting 5-15 foreign-trained professional women who have finished at least one semester of high school upgrading at [*Institute A*] or [*Institute B*] since August 2008. "Foreign-trained professionals" refers to people who have university degrees or training from countries outside of Canada.

The researcher is Jocelyn Crocker, a Masters of Education student with the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta as well as an instructor with College Preparation and Biological Sciences at [*Institute B*]. The findings from this project will be used in Jocelyn's Masters thesis, research articles, research reports, and presentations at academic conferences

This study is being conducted because many foreign-trained professional women have trouble getting a job after they immigrate. This research is meant to explore how high school upgrading might help foreign-trained professionals to re-establish their careers in Canada. You will benefit from this research by exploring your goals for the future and specific steps on how to reach these goals. This research will benefit society because it will raise awareness about the barriers and challenges facing foreign-trained professional women as they try to find employment in Canada.

You are being asked to attend three meetings at a time and place that you choose.

1) A 30-45 minute tape recorded interview that will focus on your goals for the future
2) A 30-45 minute tape recorded interview that will focus on your experiences of being in high school upgrading
3) A 5 minute telephone conversation where you will check the research findings to make sure your interview has been accurately represented

At the beginning of each meeting, you will be asked if you have any the research and/or your participation in the research; each meeting will not continue until Jocelyn has answered any of your questions to your satisfaction.

Your identity will be kept confidential at all times. Your name will never be used in any transcripts or reports and readers will not be able to identify you in any way. You will be given a copy of the analysis so that you can make sure what is said is true before any research findings are submitted or published.

Because this can be an emotional topic, these meetings might be stressful or might bring up difficult memories. The researcher will be able to connect you with free support services or counsellors if you need them. There may be unforeseen side effects from this research—you will be notified if any further risks become apparent during the study.

You are free to withdraw from the study without consequence up to two weeks after your last meeting with Jocelyn. If you choose to withdraw from the research, please notify Jocelyn by mail (E106; 11762 106 St, Edmonton, T5G 2R1), email (jcrocker@ualberta.ca) or in person stating that you do not want continue with the research.

You have the following rights:
- You can say no and not participate in the research.
- You can drop out of the research before or during any of the interviews.
- You can say no to answering individual questions in the interview without jeopardizing the interview or the research
- You can decide to take your interview out of the research up to two weeks after the last time you meet with the researcher.
- Jocelyn will not put your name beside anything you say in the interview or discuss what you say to anyone else except her Masters supervisor.
- Your interview transcript will be stored in a safe and secure place.
- You can report any conflict of interest to [*Institute B*] or the University of Alberta.
- You can get a copy of anything published by this project through Jocelyn.

The data collected during this research will be stored on Jocelyn's password protected computer and/or locked filing cabinet in her locked office at [*Institute B*]. The data will be kept in this secure location for 5 years and then erased and/or shredded.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact Jocelyn Crocker at jcrocker@ualberta.ca or (780) 707-4943, and/or Jocelyn Crocker's Masters supervisor Dr. Norma Nocente at (780) 492-3676 or norma.nocente@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751. This study has also been reviewed and approved by the [*Institute B*] Ethics Review Board. To report a conflict of interest or any concerns, you may also contact Dr. Randy W. Dreger, Chair of [*Institute B*]Research Ethics Board, at 491-3098. Dr. Dreger has no direct involvement with this project.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Crocker

**NOTE**: This letter was identical to the letter given to the participants from Institute A with the exception of the last paragraph, which read:

> The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751. This study has also been reviewed and approved by the [*Institute A*] Ethics Review Board.

## INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

### The Possible Selves of Foreign-Trained Professional Women

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

I consent to participating in the following research activities (please initial only those that you agree with):

<u>Initials</u>

I will participate in one 5 minute telephone conversation to explain
the purpose of the research.                                                    _____

I will participate in two 30-45 minute interviews and agree for them to
be tape recorded and transcribed.                                              _____

I will participate in one 5 minute telephone conversation following the interviews
to check the findings of the research.                                         _____

I have read and understand the purpose of the research and how I will be involved in the research. I also understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time.


_____          _____
Signature of Participant                            Name of Participant


_____          _____
Jocelyn Crocker                                     Date
jcrocker@ualberta.ca (780) 707-4943

**Additional Informed Consent Form Required by Institute B's REB**

Title of Project: The Influence of Adult Upgrading on the Possible Selves of Foreign-Trained Professional Women
Principal Investigator: Jocelyn Crocker, Masters student with the University of Alberta
Contact: (780) 471-7660; jcrocker@ualberta.ca

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? | Yes | No |
| Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study? | Yes | No |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request? | Yes | No |
| Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand who will have access to your information? | Yes | No |

This study was explained to me by: _____

I agree to take part in this study:

_____     _____     _____
Signature of Research Participant     Date     Witness


_____          _____
Printed Name     Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.


_____          _____
Signature of Investigator     Date

The information sheet must be attached to this consent form and a copy of both forms given to the participant.

**APPENDIX D:**

**GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Meeting #1** (30-45 minutes): Tape-recorded interview about your future goals

- What university or college-level education do you have?
- What was your job or career before you immigrated to Canada? Has this changed since you came to Canada?
- What point are you at in the immigration process?
- What do you plan to do after you were finished with [*upgrading*]?
- What do you expect to be like as a person after you were finished with [*upgrading*]?
- Did you do anything while in [*upgrading*]work towards these goals? If yes, what? If no, why not?
- Of the things you would like to be right now, which are the two that are the most important?
- How capable do you feel of reaching these two goals?
- Do you think these goals will come true?
- Is there anything you do NOT want to be after you are finished with [*upgrading*]?
- Is there anything you do NOT want to be after you are finished with [*upgrading*]?
- Have you done anything in the past year to avoid being this? If yes, what? If no, why not?
- Were your personal goals different before you immigrated to Canada?
- Did immigrating to Canada change your personal goals for the future?
- Would you say you feel optimistic about reaching your goals?
- Would you say motherhood or family has influenced your goals for the future?
- Would you say competition has influenced your goals for the future?
- Would you say that religion has influenced your goals for the future?
- Has being an immigrant had any influence on your hopes and fears for the future?

**Meeting #2** (30-45 minutes): Tape-recorded interview about if and how being in adult upgrading has influenced your future goals.
- Did you plan to go to [*upgrading*] when you first came to Canada?
- Why did you decide to go to [*upgrading*]?
- Did you have your education assessed by IQAS before coming to [*upgrading*]?
- Tell me what it is like for you to be in [*upgrading*]?
- What is it like for you to be in immigrant student in [*upgrading*]?
- How has being an immigrant influenced your relationships with your classmates?
- Do you feel as though you are in the "right place" in [*upgrading*]?

- What were your personal goals before you were in [*upgrading*]?
- Are your personal goals now different than they were before you were in [*upgrading*]?
- How has being in [*upgrading*] made you feel about your career path?
- Have you had any people working for [*Institute B*] or [*upgrading*] who influenced or changed your hopes and/or fears for the future? If yes, what did they do?
- Have you had any [*upgrading*] classmates that influenced or changed your hopes and/or fears for the future? If yes, what did they do?
- Did any of your experiences in [*upgrading*] take you away from your hopes and dreams for the future?
- How do you think [*upgrading*] could have better helped you achieve your goals for the future?

**Telephone Meeting #3** (5-10 minutes): We will go over the transcripts and the findings of Meeting #1 and #2 to make sure what you have said is accurately represented. You will also be asked if you know of anyone else who has completed adult upgrading in the last year who might be interested in participating in this research.

# APPENDIX E:

# SUPPORT SERVICES

**Immigrant Support Services**
- **Changing Together, A Centre for Immigrant Women** (3rd Floor, 10010-105 Street, 780-421-0175): life skills counselling, pre-employment support, ESL classes & support
- **Edmonton Immigrant Services Association** (#201, 10720-113 Street, 780-474-8445): translation & interpretation service, ESL & citizenship classes, support agency referrals
- **Jewish Family Services** (#202, 10339-124 Street, 780-454-1194): counselling, advocacy, resettlement support, grief/bereavement support, & holocaust survivor support.
- **Mennonite Centre for Newcomers** (11713-82 Street, 780-424-7736): English language classes, settlement services, housing support, employment/career counselling, & basic computer classes.

**Free Support Services in Edmonton**
- **The Distress Line** (780-482-4357): telephone counselling 24 hours/day, 7 days/week
- **The Support Network** (#400, 10025 106 Street, 780-482-0198): walk-in counselling
- **Sexual Assault Centre** (#205, 14964-121A Avenue, 780-423-4102, 24-hour crisis line 780-423-4121): counselling for sexual assault or abuse.
- **Legal Family Crisis Clinic** (780-421-1999): free legal consultation/information

**Institute A Services**
- **Assessment Services** (#125, Main Building, 780-644-6095): academic assessments & standardized testing including TOEIC & GED
- **Counselling Services** (#324, Main Building, 780-644-5800): free professional & confidential counselling
- **Health Services** (#109, Main Building, 780-644-6155): Nurses available for health/lifestyle counselling, medical & community referrals, support for pregnant students, vision/hearing/TB testing, immunizations
- **Learning Support Services** (5th floor, Main Building, 780-644-6055): supports for students with physical & learning disabilities including academic counselling, classroom help, adaptive technology.
- **Student Career and Employment Centre** (#A121, Main Building, (780) 644-6160): career & employment counselling
- **Tutorial Services** (5th floor, Main Building, 780-644-5864): extra help with class material, writing assignments, & homework.

**Institute B Services**
- **Student Counselling Centre** (#O117, 780-378-6135): academic, career, & personal counselling.
- **Health Services** (#O119, 780-471-8733): Nurses available for health/lifestyle counselling, medical & community referrals, immunizations
- **Housing Services** (780-471-8855): Support for finding housing & daycare facilities
- **Services for Students with Disabilities** (W111PB, HP Centre, 780-378-6133): supports for students with physical & learning disabilities including academic counselling & classroom help.
- **Tutorial Centre** (#A133, 780-378-6133): Support for class material & homework.