

“Remember, remember always that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

“We asked for workers. We got people instead.”

-Max Frisch

**University of Alberta**

**Skilled Worker Immigrants' Pre-Migration Occupation Re-Entry Experiences in  
Canada**

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Babak and Roya, who have made numerous sacrifices so I could pursue my dream of a doctorate degree. I will forever be thankful for your continued love, support, and encouragement.

*Sepas gozaram.*

## Abstract

Skilled worker immigrants, who are professionals that migrate to Canada for employment purposes, account for a significant proportion of newcomers to Canada each year. Upon arriving in Canada, they quickly learn that the education and experiences obtained in their countries of origin are of little to no value. Research on skilled worker immigrants has focused on their reactions to unemployment or underemployment, employer discrimination, emotional distress, physical illness or injury, and taking survival jobs for financial reasons. To date, no studies have been conducted examining the experiences of skilled worker immigrants who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada. The purpose of this qualitative interpretive inquiry study was to explore the career transition experiences of an ethnically mixed sample of skilled worker immigrants who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada over the course of their settlement process, to better understand the factors that contributed to their resiliency.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten skilled worker immigrants (5 males, 5 females) from a wide range of professions who overcame career challenges in the Canadian labour market and secured jobs in their fields of training from their countries of origin. Since interpretive inquiry is an emergent research design where the researcher selects data representation methods that best capture participants' experiences, narrative analysis and analysis of narratives were utilized. Chronological narratives of participants' long-term career trajectories revealed they experienced multiple challenges and barriers, including

identity regression, career boredom, cognitive dissonance related to receiving low financial compensation for their skills during periods of underemployment, uncertainty about how to present themselves to Canadian employers, and difficulties adapting to Canadian workplace communication norms. Participants refused mediocrity, perceived underemployment as temporary, utilized time management skills to facilitate re-credentialing, and engaged in professional networking. They utilized creative methods to re-enter their pre-migration careers, including adaptive flexibility, ethno-cultural community avoidance, making career and family compromises, and learning self-promotion/self-advocacy. Implications for counsellors wanting to learn about how to assist skilled workers with career decision-making, as well as policy makers wanting to create systemic changes to better assist skilled worker immigrants, are discussed.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Canada is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, with a population speaking a variety of languages, and representing multiple countries of origin, cultures, religious backgrounds, and customs. Immigration has been a major factor in changing the composition of Canadian society to become increasingly pluralistic. In 2011, Canada accepted approximately 248,660 newcomers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012a). The ethnic origin of 31% of the total population reflects groups other than French, British, or Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2006a). There has been a considerable amount of immigration to Canada over the past 30 years, particularly of immigrants from visible minority groups, representing 75% of the immigrant population from 2001 until 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006b).

Canada's immigration policy reflects its commitment to both promoting and sustaining economic development (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010a; Department of Justice Canada, 2001). Immigration applications from educated professionals in foreign countries are reviewed year-round by the federal government to strategically select newcomers to Canada who can meet labour market needs and respond to critical labour shortages. In 2010, approximately 67% of newcomers entering Canada were economic immigrants, with the majority of them being skilled workers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Skilled workers are professionals who migrate to Canada for employment purposes.

Canada's immigration points system for selecting skilled worker immigrants leads them to expect that they will obtain employment commensurate with their education and experience after their arrival (Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010; Oreopoulos, 2009; Reitz, 2001). The realities they often face involve barriers such as a lack of foreign educational qualification recognition and employer discrimination, and unemployment and underemployment (Arthur & Merali, 2005; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009; Oreopoulos; Reitz). Many have to retrain in their areas of expertise to secure suitable employment in Canada (Lerner & Menahem, 2003).

Presently, very little is understood about the short and long-term career transition experiences of skilled workers who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada. The majority of existing studies on skilled worker immigrants have tended to focus on their employment rates (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009; Fuller & Vosko, 2008; Reitz, 2001), earnings compared to their Canadian counterparts (Bauder, 2003; McDonald & Worswick, 1998; Reitz), and timeframes for recovery of pre-migration socioeconomic status (Baker, Arsenault, & Gallant, 1994; Health Canada, 1999; Li & Dong, 2007). Other studies have focused on skilled worker immigrants' reactions in response to unemployment and underemployment, specifically emotional distress (Baker et al.; Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Khan & Watson, 2005; Merali, 2008), physical illness or injury (Lassetter & Callister, 2009; Lee, Rodin, Devins, & Weiss, 2001; Merali; Smith, Chen, & Mustard, 2009), and taking survival jobs for financial reasons (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson; Lee et al.; Merali) at a

single point in time. Furthermore, existing studies do not inform career counsellors about how to assist skilled worker immigrants to successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada, or to guide them in their career decision-making at different points in their resettlement process.

### Purpose of Study and Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the career transition experiences of a mixed occupational sample of skilled worker immigrants who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration professions in Canada, in order to understand how they have overcome persistent employment barriers. The study will inform career counsellors about how to facilitate immigrant professionals' career decision-making and support them in obtaining employment commensurate with their prior education and training.

Presented first is the introduction, which provides the context for this research by reviewing the Canadian immigration categories, reasons for migration, labour market immigration, the points system under which immigrant professionals were selected for entry into Canada and the expectations it generates, and the recent changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program. The literature review that follows provides a critical overview of skilled workers' experiences of unemployment and underemployment, major career transitions, and sociological, behavioural, cognitive, and career development theories applicable to their experiences. These topics are subsequently integrated, leading to a statement of the problem and research questions. The methods chapter describes the paradigm informing the research, participation criteria, the interview

process, and the evaluation criteria that was employed in this study. The subsequent results chapter presents individual chronological interview narratives for each of the ten participants. The integration chapter that follows identifies key themes emerging from the interviews related to the career trajectories of the participants, how they experienced career challenges, and the factors that enabled them to overcome occupational barriers in Canada and successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupations. The final discussion chapter places the research findings in the context of the existing literature and outlines future directions for research, practice, and public policy.

### Canadian Immigration Categories

Citizenship and Immigration Canada establishes the categories of immigration under Canada's immigration policy contained in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). The objectives of the three existing immigration categories generally correspond with Canada's economic development interests, humanitarian goals, and provisions for family reunification. The first category, the economic category, comprises those immigrants who are perceived to possess the resources or skills to be successful in business or the labour market. Typically, these individuals must demonstrate the potential for financial stability in Canada through self-employment, investments, skilled work, or entrepreneurship. The live-in caregiver program is part of the economic category. This program has been established for the provision of domestic work in the service of children and families. It is designed to meet Canadian labour shortages in specific occupational areas, such as caring for

children, the elderly, or people with disabilities in private households. Live-in caregivers must reside in the private home where they work in Canada and are eligible to apply for permanent residence after two years of employment (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). It is commonly believed that immigrants from the economic category move to Canada voluntarily and have adequately prepared themselves for the transition (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). In 2010, approximately 52.8% of immigrants migrated to Canada under the economic class (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011), up from 45.8% in 2008 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009a).

The second category, the humanitarian category, encompasses refugees who are individuals forced to leave their country of origin based on a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (United Nations, 1951, p. 16). These individuals often leave their countries of origin involuntarily and have little, if any, time to prepare for moving to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). Approximately 8.7% of immigrants migrated to Canada under the humanitarian class in 2010 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010b).

The final category is the family class category. This category allows the close relatives of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to join their family members in Canada. The family member who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident must provide financial support to their relatives during their initial period of settlement, to address their basic needs in the areas of food, shelter, health and

dental care, and integration into Canadian society (e.g., cost of classes to learn English as a second language, job finding programs, etc.). Moreover, the sponsored family members may not seek financial assistance from the government (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2010b), approximately 33.5% of immigrants migrated to Canada under the family class in 2010. It should be noted that the immigration application percentages do not add up to 100% because 5% of immigrants specified 'other' as the category under which they migrated to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration).

#### Reasons for Migration

The reasons for immigration within each of these categories may be explained by three factors: (a) voluntariness, (b) permanence, and (c) mobility (Berry, 1997, 2007). Individuals immigrating under the economic and family class categories and the live-in caregiver program generally enter Canada voluntarily in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families, with the intention of permanent residence. They are assumed to be able to prepare themselves for the transition and anticipate career or life changes they will experience. Refugees migrate involuntarily as a result of perilous personal or political circumstances in their countries of origin. They may fantasize about an eventual return to their countries of origin similar to some immigrants, making them potentially mobile again. However, the human rights violations and adverse conditions they would likely face in their home countries often prevent them from having the option of returning (Einhorn, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008). Involuntary migration is typically

characterized by push factors in the country of origin, such as fear of political persecution, war, and threats to safety, while voluntary migration is influenced by pull factors in the host country, such as educational and occupational opportunities, as well as security for one's family (Boyd, 1989). The different paths to immigration can have significant effects on an individual's immigration experiences, such as a person's degree of acculturation or adaptation to Canadian society, experience of transition into the Canadian labour market, and family adaptation (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002).

The seemingly voluntary nature of migration for immigrants does not mean that they will not be faced with adjustment issues, as they are faced with learning a new language, adapting to a new cultural milieu, integrating into a novel labour force, and interacting with host society systems that may operate differently from those in their countries of origin (Berry, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2008). For example, the education system, health care system, justice system, and public transportation system may operate differently in the host society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002; Sue & Sue). Varying degrees of ambivalence exist within individuals and between family members regarding the decision to migrate, thus blurring the distinction between immigrants and refugees (Arthur & Merali, 2005).

### Canada's Commitment to Labour Market Immigration

The economic category is Canada's largest immigration category, reflecting the nation's commitment to sustaining Canada's economy. Since 2006, the federal government has implemented substantial changes to Canada's

immigration system in order to make it more responsive and flexible to changing labour market needs. One of these changes includes the expansion of the economic category, which now includes: (a) skilled workers and professionals; (b) provincial nominees; (c) a special sub-category for sponsorship of family members of economic immigrants; (d) Québec-selected skilled workers; (e) the Canadian Experience Class; and (f) investors, entrepreneurs, and self-employed people (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008).

Individuals wanting to migrate to Canada under the skilled workers and professionals category are selected as permanent residents based on a points system and six selection factors, which include: age, level and type of education, knowledge of English and/or French, experience, adaptability, and arranged employment in Canada. Skilled workers and professionals must demonstrate proof of funds to migrate to and settle in Canada, as the government will not provide them with financial assistance upon arrival. Skilled workers and professionals are selected as permanent residents based on their ability to become economically established in Canada. Québec-selected skilled workers possess the education, skills, and work experience needed to make an immediate economic contribution to the province of Québec and establish themselves successfully as permanent residents in Canada. In 1991, the Canada-Québec Accord on Immigration was created which gave full responsibility for the selection of economic immigrants to Québec. In turn, the province of Québec is fully responsible for reception, cultural, linguistic, and economic integration services for immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008a).

Temporary foreign workers with a minimum of two years of full-time skilled work experience and foreign graduates from Canadian post-secondary institutions with a minimum of one year full-time skilled work experience in Canada may apply for permanent residence in Canada under the Canadian Experience Class. It is assumed that these individuals possess the qualities (e.g., knowledge of English and/or French, qualifying work experience, familiarity with Canadian society) required to make a successful transition from temporary to permanent residence (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008a).

Investors, entrepreneurs, and self-employed individuals comprise the three classes of immigrants sought after by the Business Immigration Program in order to support the development of the Canadian economy. These individuals are expected to make a \$400,000 investment or to own and manage businesses in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008a). Individuals wanting to migrate to Canada under the Provincial Nominee Program must be nominated by a Canadian province or territory. These individuals should possess the education, work experience, and skills required to make an immediate economic contribution to the province or territory that nominates them. Applications are based on immigration needs and the applicant's genuine intention to settle in the province they wish to be nominated for (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

In 2010, out of the approximately 52.8% of permanent residents who had applied to immigrate to Canada under the economic class, 33.7% applied as skilled workers as principal applicants (52% includes their spouse and dependents). Approximately 9.6% of principal applicants attained permanent

residency as provincial/territorial nominees (16.6% includes their spouse and dependents), 1.7% of principal applicants attained permanent residency under the Canadian experience class (1.0% includes their spouse and dependents), 5.3% of principal applicants attained permanent residency as live-in caregivers (4.6% includes their spouse and dependents), 2.2% of principal applicants attained permanent residency as investors (6.3% includes their spouse and dependents), 0.2% of principal applicants attained permanent residency as entrepreneurs (0.6% includes their spouse and dependents), and 0.1% of principal applicants attained permanent residency based on self-employment (0.2% includes their spouse and dependents; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010b, 2010c). The above statistics suggest that skilled workers represent the greatest proportion of economic class immigrants, and that highly educated workers are increasingly sought after in order to promote economic growth (Picot, 2004).

### Immigration Application Process

The application process for migrating to Canada differs according to the immigration category under which the prospective immigrant applies and where the application is made (i.e., within or outside of Canada). Applicants, regardless of the location in which the application is made, are required to submit several documents, including an application for permanent residence form, a background declaration form, family information form, medical and criminal background checks, and, if they choose to utilize the services of an immigration lawyer or representative, a use of representative form (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009b). Additional documentation is required for each immigration category. For

example, an individual applying to immigrate under the economic category as a skilled worker must complete a Schedule 3 form, which requests details regarding level of education, proficiency in English and French, work experience, offer of employment in Canada (if applicable), and amount of unencumbered, transferable, and available funds for immigration and resettlement in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009c).

Regardless of the category under which an individual applies for immigration, s/he is required to pay an application fee in Canadian funds. The amount differs according to the category under which a prospective immigrant applies. For example, the principal applicant under the skilled worker category is required to pay a \$550.00 application fee, along with a fee for any accompanying family members, which are scaled by Citizenship and Immigration Canada depending on their age and relationship to the principal applicant (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009d). Once the application is received by Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Case Processing Centres (CPCs) within Canada or Canadian visa offices abroad and all application and processing fees have been paid, the prospective immigrant's application is ready to be reviewed. Application finalization (i.e., rejection or acceptance) times depend on the location from which the application is made. For applications made outside of Canada, the length of time it takes to finalize applications may be different at different visa offices throughout the world. For example, the most recent available data suggested that on average, skilled worker applications received in Europe took approximately 42 months to become finalized, while applications originating in

Africa and the Middle East took approximately 77 months to adjudicate and finalize (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009e). It is clear that applying to immigrate to Canada is a lengthy, complicated, and costly process.

### The Points System

Part of the application process for prospective skilled workers and professionals applying under the economic class is qualification under the points system. The points system was implemented in 1967 in order to reduce subjectivity and prejudice in identification and selection of independent immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Six selection factors are considered in determining the number of points applicants receive, up to a maximum number of points in each category. The selection factors include: education (maximum 25 points), ability in English and/or French (maximum 24 points), work experience (maximum 21 points), age (maximum 10 points), arranged employment in Canada (maximum 10 points), and adaptability (maximum 10 points) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). To be eligible for permanent residence in Canada based on an economic immigration application, applicants must obtain a minimum of 67 points under the points system. Prospective migrants may assess their qualifications online using the skilled worker self-assessment test from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to help them determine their eligibility for immigration to Canada as a skilled worker (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). The qualifying process in the points system leads immigrants going through it to expect to be able to obtain

secure employment in Canada that is consistent with their professional qualifications and experiences.

In terms of education, a greater number of points are awarded based on not only having higher levels of post-secondary education, but on possessing specific types of educational qualifications linked to labour market needs. For example, degrees in nursing and other allied health professions receive higher points ratings. In terms of age, the points system awards the greatest number of points to the age categories that correspond to maximal lengths of employability and perceived employment contributions. The highest number of points is awarded to those individuals between the ages of 21-49.

#### Recent Changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program

At the time of the researcher's candidacy examinations (2009), the points system was one of the key selection tools used in the assessment of skilled worker immigrants' qualifications. Major changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program have been implemented at the time of the dissertation defense. Specifically, the points system was eradicated and replaced with the Action Plan for Faster Immigration, which aims to decrease application backlogs in the Federal Skilled Worker Program, reduce wait times, and better meet labour market needs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). The program applies to all new federal skilled worker applications received on or after February 27, 2008. Applications made prior to this date were processed according to the rules that were in effect at that time (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

According to the Action Plan for Faster Immigration, applications are only eligible for processing if they include an offer of arranged employment, are from a skilled worker who possesses a minimum of one year work experience under one or more of the 38 occupations listed in the newly revised National Occupation Classification or are submitted by a foreign national living legally in Canada for a minimum of one year as an international student or temporary foreign worker (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b)

Prior to the implementation of this program, Citizenship and Immigration Canada was obligated to process every immigration application it received, despite the creation of large application backlogs in popular immigration categories. For example, in 2008, there was a backlog of over 900,000 applications in the federal skilled worker category requiring six years for processing (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008b). The Canadian Parliament approved changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Department of Justice Canada, 2001) removing the obligation to process all applications Citizenship and Immigration Canada receives, and authorizing the Minister to issue instructions to immigration officers regarding which applications are eligible for processing, based on the federal government's goals for immigration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). In 2010, the backlog of applicants who applied prior to the implementation of the Action Plan for Faster Immigration was reduced to 335,000. As a result of this decrease in backlog and in response to Canada's post-recession economic needs, Canada admitted 280,636 immigrants in 2010, the highest number of immigrants admitted in over 50

years, of which two thirds were economic immigrants and their dependents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011).

The measures taken by implementing the Action Plan for Faster Immigration reduced the processing time of applications from skilled worker immigrants, but still did not account for the high number of professional migrants who were not gainfully employed in their pre-migration occupations in Canada. In 2012, the federal government announced that skilled worker immigrants (with the exception of those who applied to migrate to Québec) who submitted an application on or after July 1, 2011, would be assessed for eligibility according to new criteria (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b).

For an application to be considered eligible for processing under the newly revised Federal Skilled Worker Program, applicants must now submit the results of their official language proficiency test along with their application in order to be considered eligible to migrate to Canada under one of the following three categories: (a) Applicants in possession of a valid offer of arranged employment, (b) Applicants with one year of full-time, continuous employment or equivalent part-time paid work experience in the last ten years in one 29 pre-determined eligible occupations listed under the National Occupation Classification list, or (c) International students enrolled in a PhD program in Canada who have completed a minimum of two years of study, are in good academic standing at the time of their application, and are not recipients of an award requiring them to return to their home country to apply their knowledge and skills, or who graduated from a PhD program in Canada no more than 12 months before the date their application

is received and did not receive an award which required them to return to their country of origin (or did, but satisfied the terms of the award; Citizenship and Immigration Canada). Individuals wishing to migrate to Québec are required to follow a separate selection process before their application is finalized by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009f). The points system, which was a central feature of the Federal Skilled Worker Program prior to 2011, was abolished (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

As of July 1, 2011, a maximum of 10,000 federal skilled worker applications were considered for processing over the following 12 months in 29 pre-determined eligible occupations listed under the National Occupation Classification list. Within this limit, a maximum of 500 federal skilled worker applications per eligible occupation under the National Occupation Classification list were considered for processing while PhD applications were subjected to a separate annual limit of 1,000 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012c). Individuals who do not meet the new eligibility criteria of the Federal Skilled Worker Program will be notified, in writing, and will be issued a refund of their processing fee. As of July 1, 2012, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2012b) was no longer accepting applications for the Federal Skilled Worker Program for an indeterminate period of time in order to allow time for the new criteria to be properly implemented.

The participants in this research study immigrated to Canada under the points system without any arranged employment in Canada as is the expectation

of the newly revised policy. Thousands of skilled workers entered Canada every year over the last few decades based on the points system and experienced persistent occupational barriers. Given the fact that it took the participants up to 11 years to re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada, the majority of skilled workers who entered Canada even in the last few years, will likely be in a similar position as the participants in this study for up to the next decade. Therefore, the findings of this study will continue to be applicable to the experiences of skilled workers in Canada for many years to come and can inform how career counsellors can assist this group with their occupational barriers and challenges.

The new policy does not mean that those skilled worker immigrants who migrate to Canada after July 1, 2011, will not experience significant challenges re-entering their pre-migration occupations. Even though these individuals possess an arranged offer of employment, they will still face many of the same challenges that skilled worker immigrants who migrated to Canada under the points system prior to 2011 face, such as lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, financial challenges, limited linguistic proficiency, discrimination, and a lack of knowledge regarding Canadian norms for self-presentation, assertiveness, and self-advocacy.

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review that follows describes the experiences of skilled worker immigrants after their arrival in Canada, including the major challenges they face in the Canadian labour market and in their adaptation to a new social and cultural context. Merton's (1938, 1968) theory of social structure and anomie, one of the most popular sociological theories, is reviewed in order to understand how social conditions in Canada produce anomie and how that anomie affects skilled worker immigrants' chances of re-entering their pre-migration occupation. The theory of learned helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978) and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957, 1964) are outlined as vehicles for understanding the affective and cognitive impacts of skilled workers' post-migration experiences of unemployment and underemployment. The majority of early career development theories presented in the literature were suitable for white, middle-class individuals, and have minimized or neglected contextual factors that would impact immigrants settling in a new country. However, two of these theories, namely Holland's (1959, 1997) trait-factor theory of career development and Super's (1969, 1990) life-span, life-space career development theory are reviewed to shed light on factors affecting skilled workers' career transitions and career decision-making to inform how counsellors can assist them in their settlement process. Among the recent theories that provide a framework for understanding the career development processes of immigrants with an emphasis on the role of the individual and contextual factors in career development are the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett,

1994) and the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

These latter theories are also reviewed in order to provide insight on how to guide skilled worker immigrants in their career decision-making at different points in their resettlement process. Shortcomings and gaps in existing research and theoretical frameworks are highlighted in the statement of the problem section that concludes the literature review, and the purpose of the study and research questions are subsequently presented.

The majority of applicants eligible for permanent residence in Canada based on economic immigration possess high levels of education; in 2001, 54% of immigrants who had arrived in Canada within the last five years possessed a university degree as compared to less than 30% of the non-immigrant population (Picot, 2004). Such high levels of education would allow these individuals to earn a very high score in the education category of the immigration points system. Furthermore, immigrant men and women have lower rates of participation in the labour force and lower levels of earnings in Canada (Reitz, 2001). Therefore, immigrants receive fewer returns on their education. Canada's immigration points system implies that their education and work experience attained in their country of origin will be recognized in Canada, but many of them discover that they must start over in order to achieve comparable levels of employment and income with their similarly-trained Canadian-born counterparts (Girard & Bauder, 2005). Therefore, there is often a major discrepancy between skilled workers' expectations about their working life in Canada and the realities they face in the Canadian labour market.

### Skilled Workers' Experiences of Unemployment and Underemployment

The economic fears of the Canadian-born population lead some to believe that immigrants seize their jobs (Palmer, 1996). Immigrants who settle in smaller communities have greater labour force participation rates and earn higher incomes than immigrants who settle in larger gateway cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver (Bauder, 2003). However, professional regulatory bodies that do not recognize immigrant professionals' educational credentials often leave them with little choice but to settle in Canada's largest gateway cities (i.e., Toronto and Vancouver) where survival job opportunities are greater in number and ethnic and social networks are better developed (Arthur & Merali, 2005). Haan's (2007) study examining the relationship between residence in Canada's largest gateway cities (Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal) and economic well-being demonstrated that, for the most part, although immigrants fare worse than native-born Canadians in gateway cities, they do experience marginally higher earnings than their non-gateway immigrant counterparts. Income and unemployment rates are higher for immigrants in gateway cities than they are for native-born Canadians; however, the gateway/non-gateway disparity is minimal. Levels of employment mismatch are substantially higher in gateway cities, compared to both the gateway city native-born population, and non-gateway immigrants. Furthermore, results demonstrated only marginal improvements to economic well-being would result from an increase in non-gateway immigration, and that other variables, such as skin colour or race, appear to be more closely linked to labour market success.

The process of selection and admission of immigrants may fall behind changes in the labour force, which is supported by the lengthy application finalization times for skilled worker applicants applying from Europe or African and Middle Eastern countries (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). As a result, their skills may be less in demand or may become obsolete, which further decreases their chances of securing employment at the level for which their education and training has prepared them (Hayfron, 2006). For example, the economic recession of 2008-2010 and its adverse impact on the business sector may place immigrants who have been successful in the points system based on education in managerial occupations at a significant disadvantage after their entry into Canada.

In a global economy, the attraction and retention of immigrants largely depends on attracting skilled workers. Although immigrants bring considerable human capital to Canada, they continue to face difficulties entering the labour market, resulting in unemployment or underemployment. In the largest study of immigrant employment success in Canada, Reitz (2001) analyzed Canadian census data over a 25-year period from 1970 to 1995 and found a downward trend in immigrant employment status and earnings. This suggests that the barriers immigrants face increase over time. Reitz found that immigrants do not enjoy the advantage of higher education for income potential and employability that exists for individuals born in Canada. Higher levels of education increase the earning potential of native-born Canadians, but not that of immigrants. Other empirical studies support the disparity of earnings over time between immigrants and the

Canadian-born population (McDonald & Worswick, 1998). Besides a lack of recognition of foreign educational qualifications, these findings may partially be due to factors such as discrimination based on accented speech, race, or religious background (Mattu, 2002; Murdie, 2002).

Many highly skilled immigrants are perceived to be less competent by employers due to cultural and language differences (Purkiss, Perewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006). In a study of newcomers' settlement experiences in Alberta, 14% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination in their search for employment and 17% reported experiencing racism or discrimination by service providers, such as ESL teachers, public service members, and agency staff (Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, 1999). Another study examining perceived barriers and paths to success for Latin American immigrant professionals who completed their Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in Canada revealed that while none of the participants revealed examples of overt discrimination, 75% described a general sense of differential treatment due to unreasonable assumptions regarding inadequate language skills, decreased performance levels that are associated with accents, and a perceived lack of Canadian work experience, even if Canadian work experience did not appear to be critical for a specific job (Hakak et al., 2010).

Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals who speak with non-majority accents are frequently rated lower on criteria related to intelligence, aptitude, and social standing (Carlson & McHenry, 2006) and that these

judgments do not take into account job-relevant characteristics and skills (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Oliveri, 2009). A study by Kazemipur and Halli (2000) found that a greater proportion of immigrants, particularly visible minorities, have experienced poverty compared to the Canadian-born population. Discrimination, language barriers, and the lack of recognition of foreign credentials continue to be the most common challenges for immigrants as they seek employment (Arthur, Merali, & Djuraskovic, 2010; Immigrant Women, 2007; Jones & Lewis, 2011).

Visible minority skilled worker immigrants with non-European sounding names are likely to face considerable employer discrimination. Oreopoulos (2009) sent 6000 fictitious resumes with Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, and English names in response to online job postings across multiple employment sectors between April and November 2008 in the Greater Toronto area. The investigator randomized the location the fictitious applicants received their undergraduate degree, whether their employment experience was gained in Toronto or Mumbai (or another foreign city), and whether they indicated being fluent in multiple languages. The results demonstrated that applicants with non-ethnic names (i.e., English-named applicants) and with Canadian education and experience received 40% more call backs compared to applicants with Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani names possessing foreign education and experience (10.8%, 12.1%, and 11.0%, respectively). Employers valued work experience acquired in Canada more than foreign work experience, which was demonstrated in an 11% increase in callback rates. Among the applicants with ethnic names who listed four to six years of Canadian experience, there were no changes to the attainment of an interview request

whether their degree was from Canada or whether they had acquired additional educational qualifications in Canada. Oreopoulos's findings of employer discrimination against ethnic names are supported by Bertrand and Mullainathan's (2004) study which found that resumes with English-sounding names distributed to blue-collar jobs in Chicago and Boston received 50% more call-backs than an identical resume with African-sounding names.

Hersch's (2011) study on the effects of skin colour on immigrant earnings revealed that light-skinned immigrants earned more than comparable dark-skinned immigrants. Utilizing data from the Adult Sample of the New Immigrant Survey 2003 (NIS 2003) on a sample of 8573 adult immigrants to the United States who achieved legal status in 2003, the design of the Adult Sample comprised four strata: spouses of American citizens, diversity-visa principals, employment-visa principals, and all other visa types. The author controlled for country of birth, English language proficiency, occupation in source country, education, years of legal permanent residence in the United States, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and for extensive current labour market characteristics that may be themselves be influenced by discrimination. Findings indicated that the lightest-skinned immigrants earned, on average, 16-23% more than comparable immigrants who were darker-skinned. Results also indicated that the effects of darker skin colour on employment earnings do not diminish over time. The results of this study are consistent with other studies that have found skin colour discrimination in the workforce amongst legal American immigrants (Hall, 2008; Hersch, 2008; Loury, 2009).

Language plays an integral role in the adjustment process in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008). Under the points system, language ability in English and/or French earns a maximum of 24 points, which denotes the importance of language ability in successful adaptation and integration in Canadian society. While 96% of economic-class migrants report having some knowledge of either English or French (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004), they tend to have varying levels of proficiency and many are not fluent in either of the official languages of Canada. While second-language programs offered through settlement agencies or educational settings may provide basic language skills, they often do not provide language training in an immigrant's field of employment, thus preventing them from learning industry-specific vocabulary required to succeed in the Canadian labour force. Moreover, these second-language programs are not suitable replacements for learning a language through development in a specific culture (Arthur & Merali, 2005), making second language learning particularly challenging when it occurs in adult life. Lack of language skills is a significant barrier in accessing employment and educational opportunities and is likely to heighten the loss of economic and social status (Arthur et al., 2010). Moreover, feelings of loss of ethnic and cultural identity and longing for one's country of origin may be triggered while learning a new language (Bemak, Chung, & Bornemann, 1996).

Due to a combination of challenges related to foreign qualification recognition, language issues, and discrimination, a recent national study on quality of life across Canadian regions found that new immigrants between the

ages of 25 and 54 are four times more likely to be unemployed compared to the Canadian-born population (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009) and that, over time, many immigrants do not achieve comparable levels of earnings with similarly-trained individuals born in Canada (McDonald & Worswick, 1998). In an earlier study, it was reported that it takes seven years for immigrants to recover their pre-migration socioeconomic status in Canada (Health Canada, 1999). However, statistics related to average family incomes of immigrants after immigration to Canada as compared to family incomes in their countries of origin may be misleading. It is very plausible that multiple family members may have needed to become employed to contribute to the same level of family income that a sole breadwinner may have generated in the country of origin where his or her education and experience secured a comfortable standard of living for the family. Therefore, even when immigrants recover their socioeconomic status sometime after immigration, this may not suggest an improvement in their quality of life to match pre-migration levels, or to equate to the standard of living of the Canadian-born.

In a phenomenological study examining the resettlement experiences of 20 culturally isolated new immigrants and refugees of different ethnic origins in Moncton, New Brunswick, participants described experiencing considerable anxiety learning English, finding suitable employment, and building new social networks. Participants struggled to come to terms with the losses they had sustained, notably a loss of occupational status and lowered socio-economic status compared to their earnings in their countries of origin (Baker et al., 1994).

Many immigrants are forced to work in low-paying jobs in unhealthy environments (e.g., sweatshops, meat packing warehouses) due to impending financial needs, which increase the risk of physical and mental health problems. Lee et al. (2001) examined the experiences of illness, meaning and help-seeking behaviour among 50 first-generation Chinese immigrants in Canada with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Participants described stories of lost status, shattered dreams, and threats to family honour as a result of unemployment or underemployment. Participants' physical, emotional, and spiritual resources were depleted as they struggled to overcome the loss of status and the shame of unrecognized professional credentials while working physically demanding, low-status jobs. The downward social and economic mobility experienced by these participants appears to have played a substantial role in contributing to their distress, as well as shaping their symptoms of chronic fatigue and weakness. The development of these symptoms would further detract from their employability contributing to a self-perpetuating cycle.

In a qualitative study examining the health impacts of under/unemployment among skilled worker immigrants living in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, participants indicated that their mental health was most adversely affected due to lack of income, family pressures, loss of employment-related skills, and loss of social status. Physical health was perceived to be affected by employment circumstances through strenuous working conditions and high levels of stress. Concerns regarding physical and mental health were also extended to participants' family members (Dean and Wilson, 2009).

Merali (2008) describes the predicament of highly educated and underemployed factory workers through a case incident approach. She elucidates the common experience of disability and further lack of employability, as well as the shift from independence to dependence this often causes for males who were previously the primary breadwinners in the family. Impacts on marital role reversals are also described, disrupting pre-migration family dynamics. Role negotiation between spouses represents a difficult challenge for many immigrant families whereby the traditional role of the husband as the primary breadwinner changes due to the wife and possibly children having to obtain employment in response to the male's unemployment or underemployment (Dion & Dion, 2001; Khan & Watson, 2005; Merali).

In a grounded theory study examining the career development and decision-making of first and second generation Iranians in Canada, Aghakhani (2007) found that none of the five first-generation Iranian-Canadian participants secured employment at a comparable level in Canada for which their education and training prepared them in Iran. These participants had optimistic expectations about better employment opportunities and financial security, yet experienced many losses, such as educational, economic, and occupational status, culture, family, and friends. None of the participants were ever employed in their pre-migration occupations in Canada. All five participants have never worked in their pre-migration occupations in Canada and, instead, chose occupations outside of their field of study due to the impending financial needs of their families.

Khan and Watson (2005) discovered similar occupational losses in their grounded theory study examining the personal stresses and quality of life of seven Pakistani immigrant women between the ages of 28 and 44 in Canada. Five out of the seven participants were working professionals in Pakistan prior to migrating to Canada and the other two were homemakers. After migrating to Canada, only one of the women was able to secure employment, while six out of seven of their husbands were underemployed. Despite high pre-migration hopes, the immigration process for these women resulted in a number of emotional, social, economic, and cultural consequences that affected their identity, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect. Participants expressed their disappointment with the Canadian immigration system, believing they had been cheated by the points system that provided them with false hopes of a better quality of life. Their feelings of loss were further intensified by perceived discrimination from employers, their husbands' unemployment and underemployment, and their own unemployment. The coping mechanisms utilized by these women included social support, prayer (all participants were practicing Muslims), plans of upgrading their education in Canada, and thoughts of returning to Pakistan once they obtained Canadian citizenship.

#### *Decredentialization, Academic Upgrading and Retraining*

Vocational identity change poses one of the most significant challenges for immigrant professional workers who were already well-established in their careers in their countries of origin (Chen, 2008). Occupational status is considered to be the most important characteristic for identification purposes across many

cultures (Chen). Employment provides a significant benchmark for measuring the success of immigrant settlement (McIsaac, 2003) and has considerable influence on the successful adaptation and psychological well-being of immigrants (Man, 2004; Yakushko et al., 2008). For immigrants, better career transitions give way to improved transitional experiences in their social and personal lives in the host country (Chen, 2006). The reality, however, does not reflect this premise. The majority of immigrants will lose the vocational identity and professional status they possessed in their countries of origin upon migrating to a new country (Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Decredentialization, a process in which an immigrant's human capital and skills are formally or informally devalued (Lerner & Menahem, 2003), is a widespread problem in many countries. Decredentialization may be formal when the professional credentials of an immigrant are not recognized by the host society. Law and medicine are two professions that are best known for demanding recredentializing among immigrants, although other professions require a recredentializing process, such as engineering, teaching, and paramedical professionals (Lerner & Menahem; Schmidt, Young, & Mandzuk, 2010).

Even if no formal entry barriers into a profession exist in the host country, the credentials possessed by immigrants lose their value over time as a result of gate keeping by organizations exercising cultural and normative controls (Collins, 1979; Richmond, 1984). Decredentializing has been a long-standing issue in Canada in preventing career entry and mobility among skilled worker immigrants (Bauder, 2003; Dolin & Young, 2004). A recent Statistics Canada (2007) study

estimates that over half of the recent immigrants in Canada did not end up working in the field for which their education and work experiences trained them in their countries of origin. Many skilled worker immigrants come to realize that they are unable to participate fully in Canadian society as a result of the decredentializing process (Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2006). The Conference Board of Canada (2001) highlighted this lack of recognition of foreign credentials of immigrants as part of a “learning recognition gap” (p. i). They maintain that if the learning recognition gap, which also affects individuals with prior learning gained through work and training and individuals transferring between post-secondary learning institutions, were eliminated, it would result in Canadians having an additional \$4.1 billion–\$5.9 billion in income annually. This would result in approximately 540,000 Canadians gaining an average of \$8,000–\$12,000 annually from improved credential recognition. Despite these prospective gains, a solution has not been established (Bauder, 2003; Chen 2008). Part of the complexity of this issue is that standards of practice across various professions differ between Western and non-Western nations. For example, types of medications or treatments used for various maladies differ in Eastern and Western medical practice, raising questions about the equivalency of training of physicians from abroad and Canadian physicians.

The pursuit of re-credentialing, which is the process by which the credentials held by skilled immigrant workers are transformed into other credentials through government programs and academic upgrading (Lerner & Menahem, 2003), is not easy for the majority of skilled worker immigrants.

Impending financial needs, time constraints, and supporting a family make it very challenging for skilled worker immigrants to pursue retraining and re-qualification (Lee & Westwood, 1996). It is difficult to seek re-certification of their credentials from the Canadian regulatory bodies without completely redoing their degrees (Chen, 2008). These losses may lead to a variety of psychological difficulties, including feelings of bitterness, frustration, anger, worthlessness, and hopelessness (Chen, 2006). Skilled worker immigrants soon come to the realization that the system that deemed their credentials and experience as sufficient for migration to Canada are now considered insufficient for them to seek employment in their professions in Canada (Tang, Oatley, & Toner, 2007).

Existing studies suggest that female skilled worker immigrants face considerably more disadvantages when it comes to the pursuit of re-credentialing compared to their male counterparts. For example, in some traditional Asian cultures, there are expectations for women to embody deference, personal sacrifice, and acceptance of suffering. As a result, women may be relegated to looking after their home and children, which provides them with little opportunity to pursue academic upgrading and retraining (Tang et al., 2007). Often, what few financial resources these families possess are expended on their husbands' re-credentialing process (Ng et al., 2006), leaving the wives with decreased opportunities to pursue their own re-credentialing in order to become gainfully employed in their pre-migration occupation (Khan & Watson, 2005).

Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004) examined the re-credentialing experiences of 28 immigrant teachers in British Columbia with diverse

educational, professional, and personal backgrounds who were required to redo some or all of their professional training for re-entry into the teaching profession. While the majority of participants complied with the British Columbia College of Teachers' (BCCT) requirements to recertify, some (unsuccessfully) appealed this decision. For those participants that completed the re-credentialing process, the majority were able to secure employment in the teaching field (e.g., full-time teachers, teachers on call, or teaching positions in private schools, colleges, or universities), even though the majority of these positions were not permanent full-time positions. Five participants chose not to re-enter teaching as they were concerned about their English language competence, length and cost of the recertification programs, and poor expectations of employment upon completion of the recertification process. Despite the majority of participants' eventual integration into the Canadian labour force in their pre-migration occupations, they described the recertification process as frustrating, humiliating, and impeding their integration into Canadian society. Some participants described a perceived loss of status among family members in their countries of origin, as well as their ethnic community in British Columbia. Participants also recalled experiencing a negation of their professional identity through the recertification process. While the recertification process was a significant financial and emotional challenge, the participants agreed that it provided them with valuable experience in Canadian culture and pedagogical practices.

Some regulated professions, such as teaching, have sought creative and innovative ways to facilitate access of skilled worker immigrants to their

profession in Canada (Schmidt et al., 2010; Young, & Mandzuk, 2010). The University of Manitoba's Internationally Educated Teachers (IET) Pilot Program is one of several programs that have been established across Canada reflecting an initial recognition by government, Faculties of Education, and school systems of the importance of facilitating the access of internationally educated teachers to their profession in Canada. The need for such a program was facilitated by the profound mismatch between the profile of the teaching profession and the diversity of students taught, and the lack of linguistic proficiency for those IETs who speak English as an additional language (Amin 2001; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 2006).

Recognizing the multiple challenges that IETs face, such as decredentialization, academic upgrading and retraining, this bridging program is offered on a part-time basis due to multiple family and work obligations that many IETs normally juggle (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2010). This program provided participants with the following: (1) additional university coursework required for provisional or permanent Manitoba certification, including an orientation to the Manitoba curriculum and employment search skills, (2) in-school teaching placements incorporating mentoring by experienced teachers in Winnipeg schools, (3) English language development, and (4) professional development opportunities. The successes and challenges of this program revealed that an effective IET bridging program must include advocacy and advisory components, collaboration, and flexibility. Among the successes of the University of Manitoba's bridging program include the

linguistic, cultural, and professional skills and experiences IETS can offer to the Canadian teaching profession, the enrichment that IETs can provide post-secondary Faculties of Education by contributing to a diverse and inclusive environment in which all teachers must work cross-linguistically and cross-culturally as part of their preparation to become teachers, and providing a model for other regulated professions considering implementing bridging programs for skilled worker immigrants seeking to re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada. Some of the challenges of sustaining such a bridging program for IETs include financial challenges, a reluctance from some Faculties to add such programs into well-established teacher preparation programs, resistance from some parts of the school system to value the unique characteristics of IETS, and resistance from some government departments to fund and support the integration of teachers into the Canadian workforce.

In a phenomenological study examining the recertification training experiences of 12 international medical graduates (IMGs) from a variety of countries and fields of specialty within medicine, Wong and Lohfeld (2008) revealed four themes portraying participants' recertification training experiences: Training entry barriers, loss, disorientation, and adaptation. Participants described the admission process to IMG training positions as impersonal, logistically difficult, and stressful due to the ambiguous selection criteria and lack of feedback. The losses expressed by participants were both professional (loss of professional identity and status, as well as professional devaluation) and personal (e.g., loss of personal identity, belonging, financial autonomy, and ability to fulfill

familial roles). The disorientation that participants experienced in their professional and personal lives revolved primarily around their conduct with staff supervisors and peers. Confusion also arose over the contextual areas of practice, such as the organizational features of the Canadian medical system, the scope of practice, the use of medical technology and therapies, doctor–patient and inter-professional relationships, and legal and ethical issues. Participants described engaging a number of coping mechanisms in order to deal with the challenges of recertification, including attempting to blend in with their Canadian-born colleagues, maintaining a positive and hopeful attitude despite the financial and emotional challenges of recertification, seeking support from other IMGs as well as designated faculty members assigned to oversee their training, and spending sufficient time in their training program.

#### Major Transitions Facing Skilled Worker Immigrants

The experiences of skilled worker immigrants suggest that the nature of the economic category selection process and their experiences after entry into Canada prompt them into an abrupt career transition. Career transition is a period during which an individual objectively assumes a different role and/or subjectively changes orientation to an occupational or life role (Latack, 1984; Louis, 1980). Career transitions often require a reorientation of attitudes, identity, goals, and occupational routines (Ashforth & Saks, 1995), especially for new immigrants as they are facing a transition involving choosing between a survival job or starting over in the hopes of re-attaining gainful employment in their pre-migration occupation (Arthur & Merali, 2005). It is clear that the socioeconomic

gap between recent immigrants to Canada and the Canadian-born population is growing wider and that many immigrants will have lower rates of labour force participation and lower levels of earnings when compared to the national average (Hum & Simpson, 2005). The existence of these patterns has also been supported by cross-sectional studies in Canada (Abbot & Beach, 1993; Meng, 1987). Borjas' (1994) findings in the United States also demonstrate the disparity in earnings of recent immigrants compared to immigrants who have resided in the United States for several years and how their earnings do not catch up or overtake the earnings of the American-born population over time.

In addition to working through a major, unanticipated career transition, skilled worker immigrants are also faced with the challenge of acculturating into a new socio-cultural environment, and managing stressors related to differential rates of family members' adaptation, language learning, and effects of racism and discrimination (Arthur et al., 2010; Lassetter & Callister, 2009; Suto, 2009). A culturally plural society such as Canada includes a variety of individuals from different ethnic and cultural groups within a shared political and social framework (Skelton & Allen, 1999). Culture is defined as an active set of implicit and explicit rules addressing norms, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours established by groups in order to increase their survival; these rules are harboured differently by individuals within the group and are transmitted across generations with the potential for change across time (Matsumoto, 2000). Acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that occur as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups (Berry, 2005; Sam, 2006). Four types of acculturation

strategies have been described: Separation (high retention of one's ethnic culture and rejection of the dominant culture), marginalization (low retention of one's ethnic culture as well as the dominant culture and an ambivalent cultural identity), assimilation (low retention of one's ethnic culture and high immersion into the dominant culture), and integration (high retention of one's ethnic culture and high interaction with the dominant culture). The integration style of acculturation represents a stance of biculturalism (Berry, 2006).

Immigrants' experiences attempting to integrate into the Canadian labour force may interact with and affect their acculturation strategies and experiences. For example, those who perceive discrimination in the pursuit of employment and in their interactions with other members of the host society may opt for separation. In contrast, those who are able to secure positions in the Canadian labour force may have the opportunity for more cross-cultural interaction that moves them toward an integration strategy. Differential acculturation strategies among family members may also contribute to either positive experiences, such as harmonious family relationships, or to negative experiences, such as family discord (Baptiste, 1993; Sue & Sue, 2008). The following sections review sociological, psychological, and career theories that can assist in understanding the predicament of skilled worker immigrants after their arrival in Canada and their possible responses.

#### Merton's Sociological Theory of Social Structure and Anomie

Robert Merton's (1938) seminal work on social structure and anomie provides insight into the social context experienced by skilled worker immigrants

in Canada. Merton's theory is one of the most influential sociological theories (Featherstone & Deflem, 2003) and has influenced disciplines such as criminology and economics and, to a lesser extent, psychology. Merton first published his theory in 1938 in the United States, an era in which legally sanctioned racism imposed a heavy burden on Blacks, Natives, Asians, Mexicans, Jews, Irish, and Eastern and Southern Europeans. Whites were privileged by law in matters such as immigration, literacy, citizenship, land acquisition, voting rights, and criminal procedures. During this time, biological theories of deviant and criminal behaviour were commonplace and used to explain and justify harsh judicial sentences for non-White individuals in the United States. Merton believed that biological explanations of deviant behaviour were inadequate in explaining the social realities of his time. His theory provides a window into the social conditions that produce anomie and unemployment or underemployment (but not criminal activity) and how that anomie is experienced at the individual level by skilled worker immigrants who have not achieved a comparable level of occupational and economic success compared to their Canadian-born and educated counterparts.

Originally formulated by the French Sociologist Émile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1893), anomie is a condition of relative normlessness within a group or society. Durkheim was clear to point out that anomie was not a condition found within an individual, but rather a condition found within a society. Influenced by Durkheim, Merton changed the concept and referred to anomie as the apparent lack of fit between the culture's norms about what constitutes success in life

(goals) and the appropriate ways to achieve those goals (means) (Merton, 1938). In its broadest sense, Merton's concept of anomie is concerned with the unequal emphasis that exists between cultural goals and the institutionalized means of attaining those goals. More narrowly defined, however, anomie is said to exist when the "cultural exaggeration of the success-goal leads men to withdraw emotional support from the rules" (Merton 1968, p. 190). While Merton's theory does not individualize the problem of anomie, it does address the social conditions that produce anomie and how that anomie is experienced at the individual level.

According to Merton (1968), the most important features of an individual's environment involves a cultural structure, which is an organized set of normative goals, values, purposes, and interests governing behaviour common to members of a group or society, and a social structure, which defines, controls, and regulates the acceptable modes of achieving these goals. The social structure strains the cultural values, making the achievement of a specified end result readily possible for individuals occupying certain statuses or positions within a society and difficult or impossible for others. The social structure may be thought of as either an open door or a barrier to the manifestation of cultural mandates (Merton).

Any extreme emphasis on a goal – whether it be the accumulation of monetary wealth, athletic championships, or scientific productivity – will weaken conformity to the institutional norms governing behaviour designed to achieve a particular goal, especially among the socially disadvantaged (Merton, 1938). Contemporary Canadian culture's goal of monetary success is one such goal that

illustrates anomie. While the pursuit of acquisition is common to individuals from all cultures, the upward movement on the economic ladder in Canada is based on the assumption that economic affluence and social ascent are goals that all individuals in Canadian society strive for. The nature of this cultural doctrine is a socially-defined expectation, and not biologically driven. Furthermore, it is assumed that monetary success is a goal appropriate for all individuals within Canadian society, irrespective of their beginnings or current position in life. In fact, not all individuals within a society espousing monetary success accept this goal and assimilate it into their personal value structure (Merton, 1968).

The rags-to-riches stories propagated in the media perpetuate the cultural theme that not only is economic success possible for everybody, but that poverty can sometimes be an advantage because it pushes individuals from humble beginnings to work harder in order to succeed. For example, Robert Herjavic, a Canadian who immigrated from a small village in Croatia at the age of three, readily shares his rags-to-riches story in the form of television programs, internet blogs, and books. His message, as well as that of many successful entrepreneurs, contains themes of educational achievement, passion, drive, and hard work. The latter is illustrated in the following quote: “I have a belief that it's never too hard, it's never impossible, and it can always be done. Everybody can do more” (Taylor, 2010).

Herjavic’s message leads to a secondary theme that success or failure are personal qualities and that other variables, such as chance, opportunity, citizenship, etc., do not affect an individual’s ability to achieve the goal of

monetary success. When an individual attains financial success, it is because of his/her efforts; however, when s/he fails, not only does s/he lag behind in the race to success, but s/he does not possess the capacities and moral stamina required for success (Merton, 1968). Thus, it can be said that Canadian culture stipulates the following mandates: (a) Everybody should strive for the same goal of attaining financial success since this goal is available to everybody living in Canada, (b) Failure, if a possibility, should remain temporary, and (c) Genuine failure is the result of a lack of ambition and not of a lack of access to institutional norms governing behaviour and, ultimately, financial success. Such a narrow definition of success negatively impacts the self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000) as well as the emotional and physical health (Lee et al., 2001) of skilled worker immigrants who are unable to meet Canadian society's standards of success by utilizing institutionalized methods of career advancement.

Merton (1968) stated that individual adaptation to anomic conditions is manifested in five ways: 1) Conformity, the most common form of adaptation, whereby an individual accepts and strives to obtain the cultural goal by the most conventional and legitimate means available to him/her; 2) Innovation, whereby an individual accepts the goal, but utilizes less conventional means to attain this goal; 3) Retreatism, also referred to as the escapist strategy, involves the rejection of the goal and the means to achieve the goal due to the individual's perceptions of success being impractical and impossible to attain; 4) Rebellion, a relatively uncommon adaptation style involving the rejection and active substitution of both the goal and the means of society, replacing these ideas with more irrational

objectives; and 5) Ritualism, which involves the legitimate pursuit of the cultural goal by following institutionalized norms despite the fact that the goal has been modified or rejected.

While no studies have been conducted examining how skilled worker immigrants in Canada experience anomic conditions from a sociological perspective, it may be postulated that the majority of skilled worker immigrants accept the Canadian goals of occupational and economic success during the initial settlement period in Canada. However, the social structure (i.e., professional regulatory bodies and employers) prevents skilled worker immigrants from obtaining employment commensurate with their education and experience. While some may conform to the institutionalized methods of pursuing monetary success by re-credentialing (Hakak et al., 2010; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006; Wong & Lohfeld, 2008), the majority of skilled worker immigrants either choose not to or are unable to do so, despite their best intentions. Consequently, they may experience anomie through retreatism by abandoning the goal, and means, of attaining monetary success. Aghakhani's (2007) grounded theory study revealed that the first-generation Iranian-Canadian participants changed their goal of economic success to economic survival when they realized that employment in their pre-migration occupations was not a realistic possibility due to unrecognized foreign credentials or experiences.

The cultural goal of achieving success exerts pressure on an individual to succeed, preferably by utilizing fair methods if at all possible (e.g., completing a university degree, gaining relevant work experience, working hard in their place

of employment in order to secure promotions, etc.) or by dishonest means if necessary (e.g., organizing monopolies, appropriating resources, crushing competitors, etc.). While it is erroneous to assume that skilled worker immigrants who do not achieve monetary success will utilize unscrupulous or illegal methods in order to move up the economic ladder, Merton's theory highlights the unequal emphasis that exists for skilled worker immigrants between cultural goals and the institutionalized means of attaining these goals as compared to their Canadian-born counterparts. For example, immigrants are more likely to encounter situations in which opportunities they wish to pursue are unattainable based on what is perceived to be arbitrary and unjust institutional arrangements, such as professional regulatory bodies not recognizing foreign credentials and experiences. While Merton (1938) stated that the stress of attaining financial success invites increased anxiety, hostility, and antisocial behavior, it can also produce cognitive dissonance and learned helplessness.

### Cognitive and Behavioural Theories Applicable to the Immigration Experience

#### *Cognitive Dissonance Theory*

Festinger's (1957, 1964) seminal work on cognitive dissonance also offers some insight about the predicament of skilled workers. Festinger's theory is one of the most influential and extensively studied in social psychology. According to cognitive dissonance theory, individuals are motivated to achieve and maintain consistency among their cognitions (i.e., thoughts, attitudes, beliefs). When there is inconsistency, it is postulated that individuals experience cognitive dissonance, which is a mental state characterized by intense psychological discomfort,

ambivalence, anxiety, and rumination that triggers an impulse to take some overt or covert action to resolve the feelings of incongruence. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour, it is likely that the attitude will change to accommodate the behaviour. Two factors affect the strength of the dissonance: the number of dissonant beliefs and the importance attached to each belief (Festinger).

According to Festinger (1957), there are a few primary ways to reduce dissonance: (a) add more consonant (i.e., consistent or compatible) beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, and (b) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs. For example, the cognitions, “I am highly educated and employable because I have a master’s degree in engineering” and “I cannot get a job in my field in Canada” are dissonant. An underemployed skilled worker immigrant could reduce dissonance by changing, “I am highly educated and employable because I have a master’s degree in engineering” to “Although I possess a master’s degree, I need to upgrade my skills to work in Canada, because Canada has a different training standard for engineers.” Adding this consonant cognition justifies or rationalizes the inconsistency between the two focal dissonant cognitions. Dissonance produced by the same initial set of cognitions might also be reduced by adding such cognitions as, “I have to work 18 hours a day, seven days a week, to support my family, so there is no time to pursue upgrading.” As another example, the same underemployed skilled worker immigrant might reduce the importance of the initial dissonant beliefs by substituting the latter

belief with “I can find employment in a different field” or “the sacrifices I am making will benefit my children.”

The current life position of many educated, skilled worker immigrants is inconsistent with their former status in their countries of origin. These individuals are likely to experience cognitive dissonance as they try to justify why they are unable to attain the economic and occupational success they were led to believe they would attain in Canada. The psychological discomfort associated with the cognitive dissonance may even take the form of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety (Lee et al., 2001). The loss of status and the shame of unrecognized professional credentials, as well as the downward social and economic mobility experienced by many immigrants play a substantial role in contributing to their psychological upheaval, including cognitive dissonance (Baker et al., 1994; Lee et al.).

While cognitive dissonance theory may be useful in helping us to understand how immigrants may go about reducing dissonant cognitions, it does not provide strategies that counsellors working with unemployed or underemployed skilled workers can employ to assist them in dealing with their abrupt and involuntary career transitions. Furthermore, cognitive theories related to dissonance and depression tend to emphasize changing individual thoughts and beliefs as the primary vehicle for improving psychological functioning (Beck, 1987, 1995). These theories assume that the person’s appraisal of the problem is the problem that needs to be changed (Beck). In contrast, skilled workers’ perceptions of their post-migration employment situation are likely to be accurate

and realistic appraisals of their circumstances. In light of the limited existing research on skilled workers, it is still unclear how they come to evaluate their situations, and the specific cognitions and factors that shape their decision-making processes about whether to remain underemployed or to attempt to re-train in their pre-migration occupations.

### *Learned Helplessness Theory*

Seligman's (1974) seminal work on learned helplessness is one of the most influential and extensively studied theories in behavioural psychology, with applications made in clinical psychology in order to explain mental illnesses such as depressive disorders. This theory also provides some insights into the predicament of skilled worker immigrants. Learned helplessness began as a learning theory formulated to explain the behaviour of dogs who received inescapable electric shocks who appeared to lose the ability and motivation to respond in an effective way to painful stimulation (Abramson et al., 1978).

The fundamental premise of learned helplessness theory is that an individual's passivity and sense of being unable to act on and control his/her own life is acquired through unpleasant experiences that they have tried (unsuccessfully) to control, leading to a sense of diminished self-efficacy and resignation. The theory was subsequently revised to include a cognitive component that included attribution, which is the explanation an individual has for his/her behaviour, combining both cognitive and learning elements (Abramson et al., 1978). If an individual has experienced failure, he/she will try to attribute the failure to a cause. The formulation is based on answers to three questions: (a)

Are the reasons for failure believed to be internal (personal) or external (environmentally caused)? (b) Is the problem believed to be stable or unstable? (c) How global or specific is the inability to succeed perceived to be? The attributional revision of learned helplessness theory proposes that the way in which an individual explains failure will determine its subsequent effects. Global attributions (“I never do anything right”) increase the generality of the effects of failure; attributions to stable factors make them long term (“I never interview well”); attribution of failure to internal characteristics is more likely to decrease self-esteem (“I’m worthless”), particularly if the personal fault is also global and persistent (Abramson et al.).

According to learned helplessness theory, people experience negative emotionality and despondency when they attribute negative life events to stable and global causes (Abramson et al., 1978). Helplessness can be reversed and prevented by experience with first-hand success, which may modify an existing attribution along the global-specific dimension (Abramson et al.). Based on their experiences in the Canadian labour market, unemployed and underemployed immigrants may come to expect failure in entering their pre-migration occupations due to factors outside of their control, such as language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign credentials, economic recession, and employer discrimination (Arthur & Merali, 2005; Dolin & Young, 2004; Foster, 2008; Oreopoulos, 2009). If the attributions they make lead them to believe that they will never be able to overcome these major barriers, a sense of despondency or helplessness may result. Given the systemic nature of immigrants’ unemployment

and underemployment, counsellors are at a disadvantage because the systemic barriers immigrants face cannot be changed nor removed, thus preventing counsellors from being able to directly generate a success experience for skilled workers. In a number of studies of skilled worker immigrants described in the previous section, none to very few were employed in their pre-migration occupations after entry into Canada (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson, 2005; Lee et al., 2001; Merali, 2008; Reitz, 2001).

Counsellors may be tempted to reverse the helplessness that skilled workers experience as they remain unemployed or underemployed by eliminating distorted automatic cognitions (Beck, 1987), irrational beliefs (Beck, 1995), or adhering to standards of rational disputation (Ellis & Dryden, 1997). Cheatham et al. (2002) have critiqued the focus of psychology and counselling on changing the person, versus changing an individual's life situation. They argue for the need for psychologists to act as advocates for social justice and environmental change to address triggering situational factors for immigrants' distress (Cheatham et al.). Cognitive-behavioural interventions are a prime example of psychotherapeutic interventions that focus on changing the individual and often lack the contextual and storied information that constructivist psychotherapeutic interventions provide (Neimeyer, 1995).

Influenced by postmodernism, which advocates for epistemological pluralism, multiple belief systems, and a lack of adherence to ontological realism, constructivist approaches in career counselling encourage holistic understandings of career, the inseparability of career and life (Patton & McMahon, 2006), and

meaning-making rather than correcting a presumed deficit or dysfunction in a client's thoughts, behaviour, or affect (Neimeyer, 1995). When working with skilled worker immigrants, a counsellor informed by constructivist psychotherapies (Neimeyer) would approach career issues by emphasizing the counselling relationship, the counselling process (Patton & McMahon, 2006), and the use of language, such as those found in narrative approaches (White, 1989).

The importance of Rogers' (1957) necessary conditions for counselling, encompassing genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding, are instrumental in constructivist approaches to career counselling. Flexibility is another characteristic that a counsellor should encompass, which entails being creative, imaginative, and willing to be open to new situations (Amundson, 1998). The skilled worker immigrant's situation may be novel to many counsellors who have little no experience working with immigrant populations. The career counselling process shifts from fixing the skilled worker immigrant's presenting issue to providing him/her an opportunity to tell his/her story and, in doing so, develop new stories of optimism, confidence, and hope (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Language becomes a critical element in the career counselling process. For example, Peavy (1992) advocated the term 'fruitfulness' to replace the term 'outcomes' in that the career counselling process "...should provide a re-construing or changed outlook on some aspect of life" (p. 221). The process of a skilled worker immigrant re-authoring his/her story becomes important, particularly if s/he has been considering academic re-upgrading or re-training in the pre-migration profession. As narratives are told and retold,

authored and re-authored, skilled worker immigrants are able to reflectively examine what they are doing and what they are becoming. Decision-making is based on individuals' understanding of who they are in terms of meaning rather than in terms of category, occupation, or role (Gibson, 2004).

### Career Development Theories Applicable to Skilled Workers

#### *Holland's Trait-Factor Theory*

Holland's (1959) trait-factor theory of occupational interests and choice is the most extensively studied career theory to date (Zunker, 2002). According to his theory, the development of preferences for certain activities result from the interaction between cultural and personal forces, which include biological heredity, social class, peers, and the physical environment (Holland, 1992). These preferences become interests which, in turn, enable individuals to develop competencies. An individual will develop a personal disposition leading him/her to perceive, think, and act in ways that reflect his/her interests and competencies. Underlying Holland's theory is the assumption that vocational interests are only one aspect of personality which is revealed by an individual's choice in school subjects, leisure activities, hobbies, and avocational interests (Holland, 1985). According to Holland, personality types are deemed active rather than passive because individuals actively choose or avoid specific activities or environments. Self-exploration and environmental exploration have been identified as critical dimensions in Holland's theory (Jordaan, 1963).

Holland's theory categorizes occupational interests and personality types into six broad personality types: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A),

Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). As a result, Holland's type theory is frequently referred to as the RIASEC model (Holland, 1985) and is represented diagrammatically by a hexagon depicting the relationships between the personality or occupational types. Holland theorized that these personality types are related to needs and that an individual's type is indicative of his/her most important needs. Furthermore, an individual is inclined to seek out work environments that are compatible with his/her values and attitudes and that allows him/her to use his/her abilities and skills. It is thought that individuals in similar jobs will have similar personalities.

The interaction between an individual and his/her work environment determines factors such as stability, job satisfaction, and achievement. These outcomes, according to Holland (1992), may be predicted based on knowledge of personality types and the degree of fit with an individual's environment. These personality types may be arranged according to dominant combinations (i.e., the first three letters of the individual's personality type). Holland utilizes the hexagon as a diagnostic system to demonstrate that relationships between and within types and environments may be ordered according to the hexagonal model. The hexagonal model helps to illustrate several "secondary assumptions" (Holland, 1992, p. 4) that are fundamental to his work, namely that of consistency, differentiation, and congruence.

*Consistency*, referring to the degree of relatedness within the personality types, is achieved when integration of interests, values, and traits within these personality types are compatible with an individual's work environment, thus

increasing chances of career success (Holland, 1992). Consistency is best illustrated using the first two letters of the three-letter code. Diagrammatically, types that are adjacent on the hexagon (e.g., RA) have more in common than types that are opposite to one another (e.g., AC). Individuals, therefore, demonstrate high consistency when the first two letters of their three-letter Holland code adjoin on the hexagon, such as in the case of an enterprising social (ES) profile; medium consistency when the first two letters of the code are separated by a letter on the hexagon, as in the case of a conventional social (CS) profile; and low consistency when two letters on the hexagon separate the first two letters of the code, as in the case of an enterprising investigative (EI) profile. Individuals with inconsistent types (i.e., Non-adjacent are opposite codes on the hexagon) may have difficulty finding employment that accommodates all aspects of their personality.

*Differentiation*, another fundamental concept in Holland's trait factor theory of career development, refers to how well crystallized an individual's interests are. An individual with a clearly defined type is regarded as well-differentiated, whereas an individual who fits several types is regarded as undifferentiated. When differentiation is lacking, that is, when an individual's personality types are not clearly defined, difficulties in career decision-making will be experienced.

Finally, *congruence* refers to the degree of fit between the individual's work environment and personality. This is represented by a three letter code for the personality and work environment, such as in the case of an artistic type

working in an artistic environment. Individuals search for work environments that will allow them to express their attitudes and values, exercise their abilities and skills, and assume agreeable roles (Holland, 1992).

Although extensive empirical and theoretical investigations have explored the use and relevance of Holland's theory (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1994; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996), considerably less attention has been devoted to investigating the implications from a multicultural perspective (Brown, 1987; Mobley & Slaney, 1998; Patton & McMahon, 2006). While more recent refinements in Holland's theory have emphasized that an individual's heredity and interactions with his/her environment contribute to the development of personality type and that vocational predictions for an individual improve when contextual variables, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and chance are taken into account (Holland, 1992), the theory still does not specify how these factors can be applied to individuals from non-majority populations, including skilled worker immigrants. It is important to acknowledge that while skilled worker immigrants may have partly chosen their professions in their countries of origin based on interests, competencies, and preferences, other culturally specific determinants of occupational choice unspecified in Holland's theory may have factored into their career decision-making, such as increased marriage prospects, maintaining family honour, or social appearances. Once skilled worker immigrants have migrated to Canada and realized that re-entering their pre-migration occupations is unlikely, personal preference may be compromised due to family or financial security demands (Aghakhani, 2007), thus raising questions

regarding Holland's concept of congruence between personality and occupational characteristics.

The occupational landscape of Canada remains largely unequal, which has implications for the context and content of specific occupations (Fouad & Mohler, 2004). For example, immigrants are overrepresented in low-paying, menial jobs and underrepresented in a variety of professional occupations, such as engineering, medicine, and teaching. Matching for an individual's interests assumes a degree of stability in the labour market, which renders the usefulness of Holland's theory questionable given the current labour market conditions in Canada. Applying to immigrate to Canada is a lengthy, complicated, and costly process. During the time in which applicants are awaiting the decision regarding their visas, their skills may become outdated or obsolete. The volatility of many occupational environments, together with the increased pressure on skilled worker immigrants to change and adapt to their circumstances, makes "...trying to place an evolving person into the changing work environment .... like trying to hit a butterfly with a boomerang" (Holland, 1992, p. 263). Holland's theory provides little guidance for counselors working with unemployed and underemployed immigrant professionals in Canada given the narrow population for which it was developed and the limited nature of its theoretical assumptions. While Holland's theory acknowledges contextual variables, the application of this theory relies heavily on measurement of individual traits and matching processes. While Holland's theory focuses on the factors that influence career choice, Donald Super's (1969, 1990) theory of career development described below emphasizes

the changing meaning of career in people's lives over the course of the life span, and how different individuals may assign primacy to various life roles in which career and employment may or may not be salient.

*Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory*

Donald Super (1969, 1990) proposed a comprehensive career development theory over the course of 40 years that captured the evolving nature of occupational pursuits over one's lifetime. In Super's life-span, life-space theory of career development, life-span represents the career development process throughout one's life and stages of vocational development are applied to specific life stages (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Life-space refers to the roles that individuals acquire throughout their lives while recognizing the context of their life (Patton & McMahon). The life-span, life-space approach to career development is depicted by Super's "life-career rainbow" (p. 57), which illustrates life stages and corresponding ages, life roles, personal determinants, and situational, historical, and socioeconomic determinants. Super's theory suggests that career development is a lifelong, evolving process despite the tendency for career development to be viewed as static (Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991). His theory advocates for career interventions to take into account people's primary life roles and factors such as health status, financial considerations, and available employment options.

Super's (1992) theory has been influenced by developmental psychology, specifically by Buehler's (1933) life stage theory, and self-concept theory (Carter, 1940; Rogers, 1957). The five career development stages include: growth,

exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement, all of which correspond with the life stages and approximate ages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age (Super, 1990). These career development stages provide a framework for vocational attitudes and behaviour as evidenced through Super's five career developmental tasks of crystallization, specification, implementation, stabilization, and consolidation (Zunker, 2002).

The growth stage (birth to age 14 or 15) is characterized by exploration and development of capacity, interests, attitudes, and needs associated with self-concept. During this stage, children attend school, develop interests and awareness of their abilities and work habits, identify with role models, and start becoming future-oriented (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). It involves three career development tasks. The first is crystallization, which is the formulation of a career goal on the basis of career information and awareness of one's values and interests (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Specification, which is the next task, involves the initial selection of a specific career while the final task, implementation, involves first completing the academic training and later pursuing the vocational training required for entering employment (Zunker, 2002).

The exploratory stage (occurring anytime between the ages of 15 and 24) is characterized by the narrowing of career choices and the development of a vocational identity (Super, 1992). The establishment stage (ages 25 to 44) involves securing some initial employment and is illustrated by the career development stage of stabilization, which involves becoming familiar with culture

of the organization and using one's skills to demonstrate an appropriate match to one's position. Once an individual is stabilized in his/her occupation, the next task is to consolidate his/her position within the organization by seeking higher levels of responsibility through advancement and promotion opportunities, or choosing to pursue further education (Super).

Maintenance (ages 45 to 64) is portrayed by "preserving the place one has made in the world of work" (Super, 1992, p. 44). It is important to note that prior to this stage, an individual may evaluate his/her occupation and decide to change the organization in which he/she works or occupation altogether. Should this occur, the individual goes through a minicycle involving the stages of exploration and establishment. An individual who does not change an occupation or the organization of work seeks to keep up with the industry through innovation. Disengagement (ages 65 and over), the final career development stage, is illustrated by reduction of workload, retirement planning, and eventual retirement. For immigrants, career changes may occur on an involuntary basis rather than a voluntary basis after immigration, prompting them into the maintenance stage where they need to re-explore occupational options and possibly re-train for other careers. Therefore, this stage in Super's theory can capture immigrants' career transition experiences. The process of disengagement may not occur at the usually anticipated time for immigrants due to long-term underemployment and its effect on family financial resources for retirement.

Super believed that individuals live in multiple-role environments encompassing work, education, family, and community roles that vary with

respect to their demands on and significance for different individuals and within different developmental periods (Herr, 1997). Specifically, these nine key roles include: (a) son or daughter, (b) student, (c) leisurite, (d) citizen, (e) worker, (e) spouse, (f) homemaker, (g) parent, and (h) pensioner (Super & Šverko, 1995). Through the interaction of these different life roles, two individuals who hold similar jobs attach different meanings to their occupations. Life structure, which is the salience individuals assign to their own combination of life roles, is a concept used to suggest that people differ in the degree of importance they place on work. There are difficulties associated in achieving successful life role participation, such as conflicting life role demands (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). This is one of the most common concerns presented to career counsellors. Super's theory highlights this concern by focusing on the way in which individuals structure life roles (Super et al., 1996).

The incorporation of multiple life roles in Super's theory is particularly applicable to the immigrant experience and their career transition/re-entry process. Spending considerable amounts of time and resources to pursue re-credentialing takes an immigrant back to a previous role (i.e., from worker to student) and may require them to neglect other roles, such as spouse, homemaker, leisurite, and parent. Therefore, the specific importance immigrants attach to each life role after arrival in Canada may be a critical factor in their decision to pursue options other than their pre-migration occupation. For example, some studies have found that immigrants prefer to focus on the parental role to educate their children in order to provide socio-economic mobility for the family rather than focusing on their own

occupational achievement after immigration (Aghakhani, 2007; Akhavan, Bildt, & Wamala, 2007). Many other immigrants must work long hours in poorly paid jobs in order to support their families and cannot pursue their ideal role (e.g., spouse, parent, leisurite, pensioner).

Super believed that the development of occupational self-concept is part of life stage development, which provides a framework for vocational attitudes and behaviour (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and that occupational choice is an attempt to implement self-concept. The self, which is the “socialized organizer of his or her experience” (Super, 1990, p. 221), is a key concept in Super’s theory; it is the self that processes the life-span, life-space information. Occupational self-concept, which refers to the personal meaning that an individual ascribes to his/her traits (Patton & McMahon), develops over time through experiences, mental and physical growth, one’s environment, and observations of one’s work environment (Zunker, 2002). The implementation of one’s self-concept involves an individual choosing an occupation that matches the image he/she has of him/herself. Occupational satisfaction is related to the extent to which one’s self-concept is implemented (Patton & McMahon). The evolution of careers over time led Super to coin the term “emergent career decision-making” (Super, p. 201) to refer to “the process where successive career decisions by people are sharper and finer and may be different at different times in their lives” (Patton & McMahon, p. 56). This aspect of the theory has important implications for skilled worker immigrants. It is possible that upon entry into Canada, they may make different decisions about how to respond to unemployment and underemployment than

they may make at a later stage in their settlement process. For example, although re-training to enter one's pre-migration field in Canada may not be feasible for immigrants with young children, these individuals may choose to re-train after the children reach school-age, accepting their underemployment as only a short-term predicament.

Depending on whether immigrants consider their unemployment or underemployment to be short or long term, their self-concept may be affected by their post-migration employment challenges. Prior to arrival in Canada, a professional immigrant may have formed a strong occupational self-concept and have come here seeking career advancement. The implementation of one's self-concept involves an individual choosing an occupation that matches the image he/she has of oneself. When a professional immigrant is unable to work in the field of study, the implementation of his/her occupational self-concept does not match the self-image. Furthermore, family members, members of their community, and family and friends in their host country are likely to know about their downward social and economic mobility, leading to further feelings of shame and embarrassment (Arthur & Merali, 2005).

Counsellors utilizing Super's theory of career development attempt to facilitate clients' career decision-making process based on their life stage, valued life roles and life constraints, and occupational options in the short and long term. Hence, their interventions are likely to be consistent with contextual factors impacting a skilled worker's experiences. The recognition of contextual factors in immigrants' career decision-making in this approach would enable clients to feel

understood by the counsellor and facilitate rapport-building. The strength of the client-counsellor therapeutic alliance has been identified as a critical variable in therapeutic success (Ahn & Wampold, 2001), accounting for 26% of the variance in counselling outcomes (Horvath & Symonds, 1991). Consistency of interventions with clients' life contexts has also been identified to define best practices for counselling culturally different clients and immigrant clients, as application of mainstream counselling theories to these populations without adaptation rarely yields positive results (Atkinson, Bui, & Mori, 2001).

### *Social Cognitive Career Theory*

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994) is a recent theory that provides a framework for understanding distinct patterns in the career development of immigrants. Stemming from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, SCCT hypothesizes that positive career development is dependent on an individual's experiences that result from interactions between personal and environmental factors (Lent et al., 2000). An emphasis is placed on the role of proximal and distant factors that may serve as facilitators or as barriers of an individual's career development. SCCT underscores the role of an individual's abilities, self-efficacy, past performance, and outcome expectancies in the development of interests, educational and vocational choices, and educational and vocational persistence.

SCCT underlines the importance of self-efficacy, which is defined as judgments or self-appraisals about one's personal abilities in the development of one's interest and subsequent educational and career goals (Lent, Brown, &

Hackett, 2002). For example, an individual who has low self-efficacy related to his/her mathematical abilities is likely to have less interest in pursuing mathematically-related educational or career goals. On the other hand, an individual who has high self-efficacy regarding his/her mathematical abilities is more likely to consider mathematically-related educational or career goals. Additionally, SCCT emphasizes the role of an individual's outcome expectancies on educational and career goal formation. Outcome expectancies may be thought of as an individual's beliefs about probable outcomes of a specific action. For example, an individual who believes that if they pursue an interest in composing music, the probable outcome would be low paying, hard to find jobs, then that individual's outcome expectancy will affect their pursuit of the required education and subsequent pursuit of music composition. As a result, an individual's self-efficacy and outcome expectancies work together to influence and determine their interests and education and career pursuits.

Some of the unique contributions of SCCT include an emphasis on the influences of person inputs along with contextual factors (Lent et al., 2000). Included among person inputs are individual characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and ability level, whereas contextual factors include availability of opportunities for developing learning experiences which lead to a positive sense of self-efficacy and outcome expectation. SCCT also emphasizes the key role of the contextual influences that are proximal to choice behaviour during the process of a person's career development based on their self-efficacy and outcome

expectations. Discrimination and political events, for example, may be viewed as contextual moderators of an individual's career development process.

SCCT has been recognized for its emphasis on the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, as well as personal (e.g., gender, ethnicity, genetic endowment) and contextual factors (e.g., political events, racism) (Lent & Brown, 1996). Moreover, SCCT has been utilized for its relevant application to the educational and career needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Sharf, 2002; Ward & Bingham, 1997). Research using SCCT with American-born minorities have supported its use in understanding the career development of diverse populations (Hackett, Betz, Casas, & Rocha-Singh, 1992). These studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy and outcome expectations of individuals from marginalized groups are related to different background and contextual factors as well as to academic and career functioning.

Similar to Multicultural Counselling and Therapy (Cheatham et al., 2002; Sue & Sue, 2008), which takes into account an individual's worldview, beliefs, experiences, and context, SCCT is especially valuable in understanding the career development processes of recent immigrants. Their confidence in securing employment and advancing in a career path of their own choice is significantly influenced by both personal and contextual factors. Studies have demonstrated that personal factors, such as optimism, language skills, and availability of supports are associated with more positive outcomes for immigrants (Arthur & Merali, 2005). Moreover, SCCT has demonstrated that performance attainment

and persistence at overcoming obstacles are particularly useful personal factors in successful adaptation of immigrants (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Performance is influenced by self-efficacy, ability, personal goals, and outcomes expectations while ability is affected directly and indirectly by performance through outcome expectations. Career development difficulties emerge when individuals prematurely foreclose on career options due to inaccurate self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, or a combination of both, and when they prematurely foreclose the consideration of future career options due to barriers they perceive as overwhelming (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Professional immigrants in Canada have already chosen their educational and career paths in their countries of origin and many have acquired professional experience and expertise in their respective fields. Many are led to believe through the Canadian immigration points system that their education and work experience attained in their country of origin will be recognized in Canada. When the realities of the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, language barriers, and employer discrimination become evident, their self-efficacy may change, affecting their short and long-term decision-making.

Within the SCCT framework, contextual factors greatly affect the career development of immigrants. Contextual factors such as immigration stressors, acculturation, and discrimination have a substantial impact on an individual's self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Immigration is a highly stressful experience that influences immigrants' functioning and sense of well-being, even "...among the most motivated and well prepared individuals...in most receptive

circumstances” (Rumbaut, 1991, p. 56). Immigrants may experience loneliness, loss of self-esteem, post-traumatic stress, loss, and strain and fatigue from physical, emotional, and cognitive overload (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005).

The acculturative stress experienced by immigrants is not only limited to the acquisition of the host country’s dominant language (Sam, 2006). While some researchers believe that low career success is related to low intercultural competence for skills such as multitasking that are highly valued in Western countries (Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998), the professional regulatory bodies often do not recognize immigrant professionals’ educational credentials. Further, understanding cultural norms in terms of social interactions, work attitudes, and other social and work customs are necessary for not only securing employment, but for seeking out promotions and finding career paths in the settlement country that are consistent with the individual’s interests and skills. The inability to achieve a comparable standard of career success may result in a loss of connection to one’s culture, resulting in isolation from their immigrant community and, by extension, sources of support and networking opportunities (Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

One of the most influential contextual factors to be considered when examining the career development of immigrants within the framework of SCCT is the issue of discrimination. SCCT is one of the few career development theories that explicitly emphasizes the role of systemic factors on an individual’s career development process (Ward & Bingham, 1997). Immigrants in Canada are likely to experience multiple sources of social oppression, including sexism, racism, and

discrimination in the job and housing markets (Arthur & Merali, 2005). Some native-born Canadians continue to harbour negative stereotypes of immigrants and believe that immigrants seize their jobs (Palmer, 1996). Some researchers still narrowly conceptualize immigrants as oppressed and helpless (Darvishpour, 2002) and disregard their resilience, resourcefulness, strengths, and community networks (Cole, Espin, & Rothblum, 1992). Services for recent immigrants are limited and often require the use of interpreters, which may not always be available. Furthermore, assessment instruments that are used with native-born individuals have not been validated with these populations (Yakushko, 2009). These systemic forces of discrimination play a powerful role in shaping immigrants' career identity, mental health, and access to resources. Recognition of these influences is critical for counsellors who work with immigrants. However, the theory does not inform counsellors about how to implement effective interventions to address systemic barriers and problems that immigrants face after moving to Canada. Cheatham et al. (2002) emphasize the need for counsellors to address systemic factors directly through educational and advocacy efforts.

### *Systems Theory Framework*

The Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) is a recent composite theory that incorporates a number of influences that have been neglected in earlier career development research, representing a comprehensive theoretical framework that is both dynamic and systematic. It is a reaction to the analytic, positivistic worldview of career development, seeking to

incorporate different theories as being parts of a whole while searching for relationships and patterns between variables as they are related to the individual (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). Patton and McMahon sought to create a theory that would recognize the contributions of all career development theories, as well as the contributions of other disciplines (e.g., sociology, economics) to career development theory and practice, while still being applicable to a range of cultural groups and settings, career counseling (McMahon, 2005), qualitative assessment processes (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004), and multicultural counseling (Arthur & McMahon). They highlight that for non-White racial and ethnic groups, most career theories remains based on faulty assumptions with several irrelevant concepts highlighted along with the exclusion of important contextual career determinants (Leong & Hartung, 2000).

The STF seeks to identify two general components of career theory: content and process. Content influences focus on variables applicable to the individual and his or her context while process influences examine the interaction between the individual and the contextual system, including any changes made over time, as well as the role of chance in the career development process. Process influences are recursive in nature, referring to processes occurring both within and between the individual and the contextual system. The STF provides a mechanism for engaging with clients from groups of people who have traditionally been ignored in career development theory and provides a mechanism for exploring the impact of traditionally overlooked influences, such as ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, and health. Although the individual is central within the STF, it may

be modified to accommodate individuals whose career development occurs within either individualistic or collectivist cultures (Arthur & McMahon, 2005).

Culture is an important influence in career development and transitions for many individuals from non-Western backgrounds. The concept of career holds different meanings across various ethnic groups as a function of their economic, historical, sociocultural, and political experiences (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). For many ethnic groups, their perspectives about career decision-making and work are different from those belonging to the dominant culture in North America. In Aghakhani's (2007) grounded theory study examining the career development and decision-making of first and second generation Iranians in Canada, all participants described the importance of occupational prestige in Iranian culture and how this impacts an individual's social status within their cultural group. Some participants described a greater number of marriage prospects and business contacts as potential benefits of obtaining specific titles (e.g., doctor.) or pursuing certain occupations (e.g., physician, engineer, lawyer). The majority of second-generation participants described their parents' wishes for them to pursue higher status occupations as a means of achieving job security. While the majority of the participants did not adhere to occupational prestige, some participants admitted choosing their educational path and occupation based on the elevated status it would afford them within their ethnic community. The STF contains aspects of culture that are relevant for all individuals, notably cultural dimensions and the multiple cultural identities related to each individuals' life roles (Arthur & McMahon, 2005).

The STF has the potential to increase the explanatory power of a number of diverse and complex interacting influences on career development (McMahon, 2002; Wiesenbergs & Aghakhani, 2007). Depicted as a circular model, the STF emphasizes the nonlinear nature of an individual's career development process. The individual is considered as a system in and of itself, with various intrapersonal influences affecting their career development. Some of these intrapersonal influences, such as gender, interests, beliefs, values, aptitudes, personality, self-concept, and self-efficacy, have been studied in great detail while other influences such as health, disability, physical attributes, world-of-work knowledge, and sexual orientation have not. Other notable key influences specified in the STF include environmental-societal influences, such as family, peers, education institutions, workplace, community groups, and media. By making these influences more explicit, it is hoped that career researchers and practitioners will begin to put these influences in the forefront of their work.

The STF is particularly relevant in explicating the occupational barriers professional immigrants often face. Given the complexity of influences depicted in the STF, an individual's career development will not always be planned, logical, or predictable. Unexpected or chance events, such as illness or accidents, generated within the broader system but not anticipated by an individual, may profoundly influence career development (McMahon, 2005). It is widely assumed that choices and options are available to individuals without some kind of social discrimination present to distort individual characteristics (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Research has highlighted the differential representation of immigrants in

certain occupations (Reitz, 2001) and higher unemployment rates for immigrants compared to the non-immigrant population (Lee et al., 2001). Also, key aspects of this theory, such as world of work knowledge and transferability of this knowledge across national contexts, as well as family and peer influences on career transitions, are particularly relevant to immigrants' experiences. For example, there has been a shift from the traditional career, whereby individuals follow a progressive, predictable path towards a pinnacle of prestige, power, and income within an organization (Arthur, 1994) to the boundaryless career, which is an independent, individually driven career concept characterized by flexibility, marketable skills, networking, and lifelong learning. The boundaryless career assumes that organizations are no longer able or willing to offer employees progressive careers and job stability in exchange for commitment and loyalty (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). For a skilled worker immigrant who was employed in a career that afforded them stability and career achievement in his/her country of origin, the idea of a boundaryless career, along with the demise of rigid job structures and hierarchical career paths, may be frightening and not at all what s/he wanted by deciding to migrate to Canada. It is unlikely that the majority of skilled worker immigrants would have access to this knowledge prior to migrating to Canada.

Within the STF, individuals are viewed as experts in their own lives and are assumed to possess the competencies, skills, abilities, values, and beliefs that will assist them in achieving a preferred future (Morgan, 2000). Professional immigrants' decision to migrate to Canada in search of better occupational and

economic opportunities reflects this premise, yet once they arrive in Canada, they realize that they are unlikely to secure employment at the level for which their education and training has prepared them. The search for meaning through one's occupation becomes secondary as immigrants struggle to survive economically.

Focusing on the individual within the context of the entire system is the focus of career counseling (Peavy, 1998). Within the STF, such a focus requires counsellors to engage with their clients to elicit stories about the impact of the clients' systems of influence and meaning ascribed to them (McMahon, 2005). Even though research has demonstrated that the therapeutic alliance is the most important factor in favourable client outcomes (Ahn & Wampold, 2001), empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) will not assist the immigrant client in securing employment at the level for which their education and training has prepared them. The immigrant client, already discouraged by perhaps years of unemployment or underemployment, will become frustrated with counselling if the focus is on the therapeutic alliance at the expense of helping them with what they feel is important (e.g., strategies for seeking gainful employment, developing work-related intercultural competence). Moreover, psychological services as they exist in the West are not shared by cultures that do not have the same cultural and historical background (Tol, Jordans, Regmi, & Sharma, 2005). Those immigrants who seek counselling in Canada often do so as a last resort after exhausting other forms of help-seeking behaviour appropriate within their cultural framework (Waxler-Morrison, Anderson, Richardson, & Chambers, 2005).

Immigrants who are frustrated with their lack of participation in gainful employment will not feel like active agents who influence their surrounding contexts, as the STF stipulates (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Other factors, such as occupational prestige, are considered important factors in marriage proposals among many ethnic groups. A skilled worker who migrates to Canada and faces difficulties entering the labour market will decrease their chances of finding a spouse as occupational prestige and economic security are important factors in a marriage proposal in many non-Western cultures. The STF (Patton & McMahon), like other career development theories, does not explain the transition of immigrating to a new country, how immigrants cope with occupational and economic loss, and what counsellors can do to help this population.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although skilled worker immigrants bring considerable human capital to Canada and are led to believe they will secure employment in the host society by the qualifying process they go through according to the points system, they continue to face difficulties entering the labour market (Khan & Watson, 2005; Picot, 2004; Reitz, 2001). Higher levels of education increase the earning potential of native-born Canadians, but not those of immigrants (McDonald & Worswick, 1998). In addition to unemployment and underemployment, skilled worker immigrants face language difficulties (Stewart et al., 2008), racism and employer discrimination (Arthur & Merali, 2005; Hakak et al., 2010; Oreopoulos, 2009), acculturation (Berry, 2006), re-credentialing difficulties (Lerner &

Menahem, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2010), and stressors related to differential rates of family members' adaptation (Sue & Sue, 2008).

From a sociological standpoint, anomic conditions in Canada are produced when skilled worker immigrants are unable to achieve the Canadian cultural goal of monetary success by utilizing existing institutionalized means that are readily available to their Canadian-born counterparts. This may lead skilled worker immigrants to experience a state of cognitive dissonance for many years, characterized by intense psychological discomfort, anxiety, ambivalence, and rumination (Festinger, 1964) which impacts their decision-making regarding re-entering their pre-migration occupation in Canada. Multiple confrontations with occupational barriers may also produce a state of learned helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978). Holland's (1959, 1992, 1997) trait-factor theory of occupational interests and choice suggests that the ways in which preferences for certain occupations emerge is the result of the interaction between personal and cultural factors, including biological heredity, social class, peers, and the physical environment. Super's (1969) life-span, life-space theory of career development further suggests that how immigrants react to the lack of recognition of their foreign educational qualifications and experiences of unemployment and underemployment may vary with their life stage, age, the importance they attach to certain life roles, and core values they hold related to occupational achievement and prestige. Lent et al.'s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory suggests that a combination of self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, systemic influences, and proximal and distant factors may serve either as facilitators or as barriers of an

individual's career development. Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006) recognizes the individual's role as the expert of their own life and highlights the multiple personal and contextual factors that influence an individual's career development, notably when unexpected or chance events occur. Taken together, the theories reviewed also suggest that skilled worker immigrants may make different career decisions in relation to their situation at different times in their resettlement process, such as immediately upon their arrival to Canada, and later on after children enter school, and face multiple challenges during the settlement process that are likely to impact their career decisions and trajectories.

Existing studies on skilled worker immigrants in Canada have tended to focus on their employment rates (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009; Reitz, 2001), earnings compared to their Canadian counterparts (Bauder, 2003; McDonald & Worswick, 1998; Reitz), and timeframes for recovery of pre-migration socioeconomic status (Baker et al., 1994; Health Canada, 1999). They have also focused on their reactions in response to unemployment and underemployment, specifically emotional distress (Baker et al.; Khan & Watson, 2005; Merali, 2008), physical illness or injury (Lee et al., 2001; Merali), and taking survival jobs for financial reasons (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson; Lee et al.; Merali) at a single point in time. These studies, as well as the existing theories reviewed in this proposal, do not inform career counsellors about how to assist skilled worker immigrants to be successful in re-entering their pre-

migration occupations in Canada, or to guide them in their career decision-making at different points in their resettlement process.

The process of re-credentialing or academic upgrading exists to create opportunities for pre-migration occupation re-entry in Canada (Lerner & Menahem, 2003). In two Canadian studies, skilled worker immigrants expressed being in a process of planning for academic upgrading to attempt to obtain jobs in their field of prior learning (Khan & Watson, 2005; Ng et al., 2006). These studies also found that family and gender roles influenced the skilled workers' opportunities for re-credentialing (Khan & Watson; Ng et al.). A few studies have examined skilled workers' re-credentialing experiences in education and the medical profession, highlighting the financial and social costs involved in this process and the perceived devaluation of training obtained in the country of origin, despite greater employment opportunities in Canada (Beynon et al., 2004; Wong & Lohfeld, 2008).

No studies have examined the short and long-term career transition experiences of skilled workers who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada. Focusing on this group can capture the evolution of skilled workers' cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses to facing employment barriers in Canada, as well as illustrate the processes and factors that facilitate eventually overcoming these barriers. Since skilled workers who enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada are likely to have initially faced problems with foreign credential recognition, unemployment, underemployment, or employer discrimination, their experiences can be

particularly informative for career counsellors wanting to learn about how to enable skilled workers experiencing cognitive dissonance or learned helplessness with career decision-making.

#### *Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

This study of understanding skilled worker immigrants' pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences may be understood as an interpretive inquiry. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the career transition experiences of an ethnically mixed sample of skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada over the course of their resettlement process. The guiding research questions are: (a) What kinds of career/academic changes and challenges have immigrant professionals who have found jobs in their fields gone through since the time they came to Canada? (b) How did they experience, respond to, and overcome the challenges they faced? (c) What factors, issues, or life circumstances do immigrant professionals take into account when making decisions about pursuing re-entry into their pre-migration professions versus accepting employment outside of their fields of training?

## CHAPTER THREE METHOD

This chapter describes the constructivist paradigm underlying this study, including the key concepts of interpretive inquiry. Next, a description of the participants in this study as well as the selection criteria and recruitment strategy utilized are provided, followed by a detailed description and rationale regarding the general interview process and data analysis and representation methods. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the study methodology according to criteria used in qualitative research.

### Constructivist Paradigm

A paradigm is a basic belief system that guides the researcher ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigms underlying qualitative research are based on the utility and persuasiveness of the research findings rather than absolute logic or proof (Guba & Lincoln). The choice of a paradigm is based on the researcher's beliefs regarding the following three questions: (a) Ontologically, what is the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it? (b) Epistemologically, what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? (c) Methodologically, how does the investigator go about finding out whatever it is that he or she believes can be known? (Guba & Lincoln).

The assumptions of the constructivist paradigm are consistent with the researcher's assumptions about the reality of skilled worker immigrants.

Ontologically, the constructivist paradigm assumes ontological relativism as opposed to ontological realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Realities are local and

specific in nature yet may be shared across groups and cultures (Crotty, 1998). These constructions should be evaluated on their sophistication and how informed they are rather than on the basis of their absolute truth (Guba & Lincoln). Reality, according to constructivists, "...lies beyond the reach of our most ambitious theories, whether personal or scientific, forever denying us as human beings the security of justifying our beliefs, faiths, and ideologies by simple recourse to 'objective circumstances' outside ourselves" (Neimeyer, 1995b, p. 3). With respect to skilled worker immigrants, many stereotypes about their experiences in the Canadian labour market exist. For example, it is a commonly held belief that skilled worker immigrants are all unemployed or underemployed outside of their pre-migration occupations. While this is true for the majority of skilled worker immigrants in Canada (Arthur & Merali, 2005), a small percentage of skilled workers have been successful in re-entering their pre-migration occupation. The realities of skilled worker immigrants employed in their pre-migration occupations may vary from the realities of skilled worker immigrants who are unable to re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada. Also, the importance that individual skilled worker immigrants attach to various life roles and tasks in making short and long-term career decisions and how they cognitively appraise career options and barriers may also vary with their unique immigration circumstances and sociocultural contexts. The constructivist paradigm assumes that subjective experience is what can be known rather than concentrating on the collection of facts.

With respect to epistemology and methodology, the constructivist paradigm assumes that the researcher and participants are interactively connected in order to elicit a shared understanding of the participants' subjective experiences. This collaborative process allows the researcher to expose and transform their understandings of the topic of inquiry, thus allowing for new interpretations and information to emerge through consensus and dialogue with the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher strives to acquire a more informed and sophisticated evaluation of the participants' experiences. This becomes especially salient when inquiring about the factors that have facilitated the successful pre-migration occupation re-entry of skilled worker immigrants, a group that has been neglected in the literature to date. Their perspectives have not been acknowledged and taken into account, which makes it even more critical for the researcher to allow for an open exploration of their personal and professional experiences in order to search for learnings or commonalities that enhance or change the researcher's impressions of skilled worker immigrants' challenges, opportunities, and coping strategies for overcoming employment obstacles.

### Interpretive Inquiry

This study utilized an interpretive inquiry within the constructivist paradigm. Conducting an interpretive inquiry requires an understanding of hermeneutics, which is the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding in human contexts (Packer & Addison, 1989) which aims to uncover intended or expressed meaning in order to establish a co-understanding (McLeod, 2000).

Hermeneutics as a social science emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Biblical

scholarship in an effort to interpret the meaning of scriptural texts (Crotty, 1998; Prasad, 2005). Hermeneutics assumes that all texts are created within a socio-cultural and historical context. If the reader shares a similar background with the individual who wrote the text, it is presumed he or she would understand the text. However, when there are social, cultural, and historical/temporal differences between the reader and the text, interpretation becomes necessary (McLeod).

In a hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher aims to draw out the research interview process and transcribe research participants' perspectives of the phenomena under study (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Text is not only the product of the author, but also contains the author's broader cultural milieu, making it necessary to understand the wider culture in which the text was produced. A person's attempt to understand anything, whether verbal, Biblical text, language, or events is built upon the framework of his or her historical background or culture along with the associated values, beliefs, norms, and traditions (Gadamer, 1989; McLeod, 2000). The product of one's history (i.e., his or her values, beliefs, norms, prejudices, etc.) comprises his/her *forestructure* (Prasad, 2005; Packer & Addison, 1989) or the lens through which he/she perceives and interprets the world (Ellis, 1998). One's forestructure represents the starting point in understanding, interpretations, and interactions with texts. All initial acts of interpretation are influenced by this forestructure (Packer & Addison). All understanding occurs within a horizon of past, present and future (Smith, 2010) and represents a blending of the historical understandings of the researcher and the participant (McLeod). The development of a co-understanding and co-creation

of meaning are deepened as a result of this blending of the interpreter and the text (Gadamer).

Three key themes in a good interpretive inquiry have been essential in hermeneutics since the work of Schleiermacher in 1819 (as cited in Ellis, 2006): The creative character of interpretation, the importance of part-whole relationships or working holistically, and the fundamental role of language. These three themes will be discussed using Ellis's (1998, 2006) work as the basis for interpretation.

The creative character of interpretation involves the intent to discover the meaning behind a participant's expressions. To understand this meaning, the researcher must commit himself or herself to learn about the complexity and wholeness of the participant's experience (Crotty, 1998). The coherence of the interpretation is best illustrated when the researcher utilizes all of his/her knowledge and observations about the participant. In this study of skilled worker immigrants, it is essential that the researcher attends to a variety of factors, including participants' emotional reactions (positive or negative) to being employed, initially being underemployed/or unemployed in their pre-migration occupation, family composition, the salience of various life roles (e.g., parent, spouse, student, worker), occupational self-concept, and cognitive appraisal of career barriers.

Working holistically within the hermeneutic tradition requires an understanding of the hermeneutic circle, which involves an understanding of one aspect of the topic under study and its relationship to other aspects and to the

entity as a whole. The hermeneutic circle is a recurrent spiral of understanding (Prasad, 2005) involving a forward and backward arc (Packer & Addison, 1989). The forward arc involves the researcher utilizing his/her forestructure to make sense of pre-understandings and prejudices that frame how he/she views the initial interpretations. The backward arc involves the deliberate re-examination and re-evaluation of the initial interpretation for the purpose of seeing what went unseen before (e.g., contradictions, confirmations, gaps, or inconsistencies). The researcher may uncover inadequacies in his/her pre-understandings during this process and a deeper, rich understanding is attained. A researcher does not aim to discover a single, correct, or “accurate” interpretation, but rather an interpretation that is as comprehensive and coherent as possible (McLeod, 2000).

When a researcher is deciding on a topic of inquiry, this decision should be based on genuine curiosity or previous experiences that have stimulated the researcher’s engagement or interest with the topic (Packer & Addison, 1989). The researcher may already possess certain pre-understandings about the topic, all of which may be challenged as the researcher continues with the inquiry. The interpretive inquiry should begin with an entry question that is simple, open, genuine, conveys humility and genuine engagement, and acknowledges the researcher’s limitations of understanding to allow for opportunities for any preconceptions to be expanded or disconfirmed (Ellis, 1998).

The process of interpretive inquiry can be viewed as a looping spiral involving the reworking of a single data set with new understandings and questions accumulated in previous loops (Packer & Addison, 1989). Each loop in

the hermeneutic circle may represent a different research activity, such as data collection or interpretation, or the researcher's attempt to move closer to what he/she hopes to understand. Each loop influences the direction for the subsequent loop of the inquiry; the researcher may move forward or backward in the hermeneutic circle. As the spiral of the hermeneutic circle unfolds, the researcher continues to explore different conceptual frameworks. The end goal is to articulate the most coherent and comprehensive account of what the researcher is seeking to understand (McLeod, 2000).

Knowledge, according to Gadamer (1989) is the product of human activity that is created rather than found. When the researcher is no longer surprised by the data, he or she is either unable to see what there is to uncover or the way in which the researcher is approaching the problem does not allow for new information to emerge (McLeod, 2000). The forward and backward arc of the hermeneutic circle invites a shared understanding of participants' experiences to emerge from interactions between the researcher and participants. In this study, specifically, the researcher needs to constantly remain open to the perspectives of skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations and the possible diversity in their experiences depending on gender, age, ethnicity, profession, financial status, family composition, life roles, and cognitive and behavioural responses to career options and barriers. Hermeneutical principles are well suited to the proposed research as they acknowledge the influence of participant and researcher forestructure (Ellis, 2009) and recognize that individuals make sense of

their experiences in terms of their own unique historical and cultural worldviews (McLeod; Neimeyer, 1995a).

Language is an important element in the construction of understanding and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Language is the avenue through which individuals communicate and the basis of understanding. It is through language that the prejudices of an individual's point of view may be broadened. Given that language and understanding are linked, no fixed or final understanding of others is possible, as there can be no final or fixed language to express our understanding (Potter, 2003). Understanding is temporal because as prejudices and language change, so do the interpretations that are made. Any interpretations made by a researcher reflect a specific time and place in history and the influence of a social community (McLeod, 2000). Researchers must pay careful attention to the language they use, as well as the language of their participants, as it "...provides a window into the discourses of communities in which participants live and from which they derive meaning." (Ellis, 2006, p. 117). The skilled worker immigrants who participated in this study had different lifestyles in their countries of origin, as well as different pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences in Canada. Those skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations may use different language or self-descriptors in communicating their subjective experiences and their meanings compared to skilled worker immigrants who are not employed in their pre-migration occupations. Also, their descriptors for their career decision-making process may reflect their cognitive appraisals of their career choices and barriers at different points in time or stages of their

resettlement, for example, upon their initial entry into Canada and ten years after their arrival. The researcher will attend to and respect the various idiosyncratic languages of all participants and will ensure that any semantic ambiguity will be minimized through thoughtful and open questions and discussions (Eisner, 2003).

### Key Role of the Researcher

In an interpretive inquiry, the researcher's position towards the topic of inquiry or pre-understandings about the topic needs to be explored and made explicit in the first part of the hermeneutic circle. The researcher then engages in dialogue with the research participants in an attempt to expand these pre-understandings while remaining open to transformative learning. According to Boostrom (1994), researchers will go through six stages as the research proceeds. These stages involve both the interview and data interpretation and analysis processes. Stage one is the Observer as Videocamera, involving the researcher attending to general participant descriptions and outwardly random surface qualities of the topic. Stage two involves the Observer as Playgoer. The observer is beginning to acquire a storied understanding of the participants and sees them as characters in a play. The researcher becomes an Evaluator in stage three where s/he makes judgments and is critical about the participants' actions and disclosures. Stage four as a Subjective Inquirer allows the researcher to look beneath the surface of participants' disclosures and search for representations of meaning and values in their responses. A clearer and simpler understanding begins to emerge in stage five as the researcher is an Insider, where he/she becomes aware of the changes in his or her pre-understandings and initial

understanding of the participants' disclosures. In the final stage, the researcher becomes a Reflective Interpreter who begins to understand the world of the participants and the implications of the findings.

My own initial stance towards this research was shaped by my personal experiences. All of my life, I have been surrounded by skilled worker immigrants who have been unsuccessful in re-entering their pre-migration occupations. My parents are two such individuals who have not worked in their pre-migration occupations since arriving in Canada more than three decades ago, which are engineering (father) and teaching (mother). While they are both successful in their new post-migration professions (accounting and settlement work, respectively), they both still identify themselves with the titles of their pre-migration occupations. When I would ask them about what it has been like not working in their pre-migration professions, they would avoid answering the question directly and, instead, would reply that it was a small price to pay to ensure that their children grew up in a safe country with opportunities they never had growing up in our country of origin. While sincere in their answers, there is still a hint of sadness and disappointment in their eyes after more than three decades of never having worked a day in their pre-migration occupations. I have always wondered what could have enabled them to have the opportunity to re-enter their pre-migration professions in Canada and overcome the barriers they faced.

Personally, I have experienced a few of the challenges of career re-entry as a clinical counsellor when I when I moved from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to my home province after completing all of the requirements of my doctoral

program, except for my dissertation. Immediately after moving to my home province, I applied for several jobs in the mental health field. I did not receive any interview offers. This surprised me as I completed my elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education in Canada and have never had problems finding gainful employment prior to this point. Of course, most hiring managers would not tell me why, but the few who did indicated a preference to hire candidates who completed their graduate training in my home province. Furthermore, because I completed graduate school in a province that licenses psychologists with a master's degree (the majority of provincial psychology regulatory bodies only license psychologists with doctorate degrees), they were unconvinced that I possessed the required knowledge and clinical skills required for the advertised position. This was frustrating for me. Even though I completed my pre-doctoral internship at a site accredited by the Canadian Psychological Association and will be graduating from a doctoral program accredited by the same regulatory body, this was unsatisfactory to these hiring managers. I even received scrutiny from other mental health professionals about my credentials upon meeting them at local conferences and workshops. I could not understand their scrutiny and, at times, judgmental comments because we were graduates of (different) graduate programs accredited by the same regulatory body and wrote the same licensing examinations. After a discouraging email from a hiring manager at a large organization, I reframed the setbacks I was experiencing into an opportunity for me to pursue a dream that I have had from a young age: I opened a private

practice six months after moving back to my home province and have not regretted this decision.

While my experiences of career re-entry in my home province were somewhat frustrating and annoying, they pale in comparison to what skilled worker immigrants experience when they come to Canada and are told the same credentials that allowed them entry into the country are not good enough to secure them employment in their pre-migration profession. I knew that once I completed my doctorate, I would be eligible for many entry-level psychologist positions. Nevertheless, I began to understand what it is like to have one's credentials questioned and, ultimately, rejected – and what I experienced was between different provinces within the same country. I thought about what it would be like for me if I were a clinical counsellor from a different country wanting to work in Canada and how I would most likely be required to re-take several courses and re-do practica and/or an internship. The thoughts bring tears to my eyes. My education and identity as a clinical counsellor is an important part of who I am and where I stand in my community. Despite the minor frustration and annoyances I experienced, I will not forget the feelings of frustration and defensiveness of being dismissed by potential employers and other mental health professionals.

I have also worked with a number of skilled worker immigrants in a counselling and settlement capacity for nine years. As a result of my counselling and personal experiences and exposure to the population of study while growing up, I bring to this research several pre-understandings that are important to

acknowledge as a qualitative researcher. I have seen the effects of decredentialization growing up not just among my parents, but among many of my family friends, and the clients I have worked with for nine years. Yet I have also met and worked with some immigrant professionals throughout my life who have found gainful employment in their pre-migration occupations in Canada. I can recall a woman I met when I was at a medical clinic undergoing a minor procedure. She introduced herself to me as a resident and explained that her work would be carefully supervised by a licensed physician on staff. Normally, I would decline the services of a resident and ask to be treated by a more senior physician. However, there was an aura of humility about her that I had not seen in a resident before, so I agreed to have her conduct the procedure. Throughout the procedure, I joked that for a resident, she seemed to know what she was doing. She laughed and then began to tell me about her life as a physician in a successful practice in her country of origin and how all of that came to an end when political instability forced her to uproot her family to a country she knew nothing about, but was grateful to have found refuge in. I also remember meeting a gentleman from a non-English speaking country when I was hosting a moving sale. We were engaging in idle chit chat when I asked him about his occupation. As his eyes began welling up with tears, he whispered, "I am a pharmacist again." I was so moved that I began to cry. One of my clinical supervisors in graduate school was a clinical psychologist from Central America who faced multiple barriers re-entering the field of psychology in Canada. I recall asking her how she was able to re-enter the field of psychology at our first supervision meeting. She was very

open with her answer and did not sugar-coat anything. I admired her strength, tenacity, and courage, in addition to her great clinical and supervision skills.

These individuals stood out to me because it seemed that they had accomplished what many skilled worker immigrants could not, yet they are not represented in existing research. I wanted to know how they were able to find gainful employment in their pre-migration occupations in a country that regularly devalues foreign credentials and experiences. To date, researchers have not focused on skilled worker immigrants who are employed in their pre-migration occupations in Canada. Focusing on this group who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations would assist other skilled workers and their families to possibly overcome similar barriers, as well as yield information to assist counsellors in helping skilled workers with career planning for success.

### Recruitment and Selection of Participants

#### *Recruitment of Participants*

Participants were recruited from two of Canada's largest gateway cities for immigrant settlement, namely Vancouver and Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2006a). The ethnic composition of the sample reflects the cultural makeup of immigrants settling in these regions (e.g., Central and South American, Asian, Iranian, Filipino, etc.). Every attempt was made to recruit individuals who re-entered a diverse range of occupations or professions after immigrating to Canada to ensure that participants' experiences capture the realities of various types of skilled workers entering Canada (e.g., engineers, teachers, professors, etc.). An attempt was also made to recruit both male and female participants, as previous

research suggests that men and women within family relationships may have different opportunities, barriers, and priorities in relation to re-credentialing (Ng et al., 2006; Tang et al., 2007).

Participants were recruited through advertisements in both professional associations for various occupations and cultural community centres in Vancouver and Edmonton (see Appendix A). Advertisements were also placed in organizations involved in assessing foreign educational credentials in both Vancouver and Edmonton. Interested participants were asked to contact the researcher directly in order to obtain more information about the study. Thirteen individuals initially contacted the researcher expressing interest in participating in the present study. Upon being contacted, the researcher asked a series of questions to ensure each participant met the study criteria. After this initial screening, the total sample size of the study was 10 participants (five male and five female participants). The researcher provided all interested participants who met the inclusion criteria with an electronic or paper copy of an information sheet outlining the purpose and procedures of the study (see Appendix B).

### *Selection Process*

The participants for this study were selected through the process of purposeful sampling, which assumes that the researcher sets out to discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample of participants with whom the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Data was collected from an ethnically mixed sample of ten men and women who met the following criteria: (a) migration to Canada under the skilled worker or independent immigrant (if migration occurred

prior to 2002) categories; (b) 25 years of age or older at the time of migration; (c) residence in Canada for a minimum of five years; (d) successful in re-entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada. The criterion related to age at the time of migration reflects membership in the age category that is awarded the highest number of points in Canada's point system in evaluating skilled workers' immigration applications, and that corresponds to a maximum duration of employability in Canada. The majority of skilled workers entering Canada are age 25 and above (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). The length of residence in Canada requirement reflects the minimum amount of time it may take for skilled workers to go through a process of initially facing employment barriers, possibly being unemployed or underemployed, and subsequently re-credentialing or pursuing academic upgrading to enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada. For some individuals, the process of overcoming career barriers and re-entering their fields of practice may take 20 years or more and may occur at various stages of life, such as after children grow up.

The ten skilled worker immigrant participants represented a range of occupations, source countries, and ethno-cultural communities. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 42 years of age at the time of migration (and 31 to 64 years of age at the time of the research interview) and migrated to Canada from the following countries of origin: Argentina (two participants), Colombia, Iran, Mexico (two participants), Panama, the Philippines (two participants), and the United States. Length of residency in Canada also varied, from six years to 33 years. All participants were literate and fluent in English; thus, nobody requested

nor required the use of an interpreter for the research process. Table 1 on the following page introduces each participant and outlines the information provided above in addition to participants' pre-migration occupations, length of residence in Canada, and the length of time it took each of them to re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada.

Table 1.

*Participant Introductions.*

Participant	Country of Origin	Pre-Migration Occupation	Age at Interview (years)	Age at Migration (years)	Length of Residence in Canada (years)	Length of Time to Re-Enter Pre-Migration Occupation (years)
Helen	Argentina	Psychologist	48	40	8	4
Rodrigo	Mexico	Professional photographer	57	42	15	1.2
Shaya	Argentina	Accountant	36	25	12	4
Natalia	Colombia	Senior administrator	55	42	13	9.5
Glenn	United States	Professor	59	38	21	0
Julia	Philippines	Elementary school teacher	58	25	33	10
Abraham	Philippines	Mechanical engineer	64	31	33	11
Maria	Mexico	Biomedical engineer	31	25	6	4
Mehrdad	Iran	Structural engineer	54	41	13	7
Nester	Panama	Marine engineer	45	37	8	3.5

### Pre-Interview Activity

One of the challenges in acquiring the most valuable information from an interview is creating conditions in which the interviewee is best able to recall, reflect, and analyze significant life experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McLeod, 2000). One way to facilitate participants' recollection and reflection of events is by utilizing a pre-interview activity, which facilitates rapport with participants, establishes what the researcher and participant have in common, and develops a common language/jargon between the researcher and participants (Ellis, 2006). One week prior to the interview, participants were given a selection of pre-interview activities. When the researcher spoke to interested participants over the phone to arrange an interview time, she outlined two pre-interview activity options in order to prepare participants for the interview process. The first choice of an activity was to make three schedules depicting work and family life in: (a) a typical week in the participants' homeland, (b) a typical week in the first few years after arrival in Canada, and (c) a typical week in their present life in Canada. The second choice of an activity was to draw three pictures showing: (a) participants' career identity in their homeland, (b) career identity in the initial phase of resettlement in Canada, and (c) present career identity.

Participants were asked to complete one of these pre-interview activities and were encouraged to utilize any artefacts (e.g., photographs, objects) that are meaningful for them during the pre-interview activity and subsequent interviews. Participants were asked to bring their pre-interview activity to the interview to assist them by providing cues in their discussion of their experiences. The

researcher also brought a copy of participants' pre-interview activity to the interviews if it was completed electronically. Utilizing pre-interview activities allowed the researcher to understand the participant within a context, thus allowing the researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of the participants (Ellis, 2006). Pre-interview activities also allow participants to choose when, how, and what information they wish to share with the researcher. Given that they may have experienced disempowerment in their initial pursuit of employment in Canada (and likely during their adjustment to a new culture) even if they have now re-entered their careers, a pre-interview activity gives them the choice and power to choose which option they would like to complete and which aspects of their experiences they would like to share with the researcher during the interview. A pre-interview activity also allows participants to get to know the researcher by providing an opportunity for discussing what they have in common, a process that is essential to minimizing potential harm (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Finally, a pre-interview activity is outside the limits of language, thus enhancing interpretation of interview data.

Seven out of ten participants completed the pre-interview activity. The participants who completed the pre-interview activity chose to make three schedules depicting work and family life prior to and at different points after their migration. The three participants who did not complete the pre-interview activity cited time factors. All three, however, spontaneously brought up the subject of the pre-interview activity during the interview to reflect on how their career experiences changed before and after migration.

## Study Interviews

### *Purpose and Nature of the Interviews*

Qualitative interviews are deemed to be one of the most powerful tools for understanding the lived experience of participants (Fontana & Frey, 2004). Within the hermeneutic tradition, interviews require an active engagement between the researcher and participant (Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989). An interview is more than simply asking questions and receiving responses; the goal is to create a safe and open dialogue whereby the participant may authentically discuss his or her experiences or meanings. Establishing rapport is of utmost importance for this purpose and it is anticipated that humility, openness, and genuine interest will facilitate the sharing of personally meaningful information (Ellis, 2009). It is important not to limit participants' responses to predetermined concepts or categories (Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999). The interview is an important part in acquiring a storied understanding of the participant (Eisner, 2003). Therefore, open-ended questions were used to elicit thick and in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences and interpretations without limiting their responses. Topics that spontaneously arose during the course of the conversation were further pursued, thereby facilitating a deep reflection and authentic discussion of skilled worker immigrant participants' experiences of pre-migration occupation re-entry in Canada.

### *Interview Process for this Study*

Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one to two hours in length were conducted, with the possibility of a second interview of the same

length to obtain elaboration or clarification of initial interview responses. The researcher conducted all interviews. If a second interview was not required for further elaboration or clarification, the second meeting with the participant focused on communication of emerging themes, patterns, or key dynamics from the interview transcript and to elicit participants' feedback and input regarding the interpretation process to ensure a collaborative understanding of participants' experiences. For those participants who engaged in a second interview with the researcher, this took place in the third meeting. Interviews were conducted at the researcher's offices in Vancouver, Coquitlam, and in a private room at the Education Clinic at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Participants were provided with a consent form (see Appendix C) during the first meeting with the researcher. The contents of this form were verbally explained to all participants. Participants also had the option of providing oral consent, although nobody chose this option.

The interview process began following the informed consent procedures and after the researcher addressed participants' questions or concerns regarding the purpose or process of the study. The researcher also provided opportunities throughout the research process for the participants to ask questions about the purpose and process of the research. Participants were invited to recall, reflect upon, and share their career transition experiences after migrating to Canada, as well as their re-credentialing and/or pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences, which may have been informed by the pre-interview activity they completed. Interview questions should invite participants to share stories or

anecdotes as experience can only be communicated through story (Murray, 2003).

A few guiding discussion questions for different stages of the interview are provided below. The following paragraphs outline the background information that was collected about participants, as well as the interview opening statements and some guiding questions:

I. Background Demographic Information (collected verbally and recorded for each participant)

- Pseudonym
- Gender
- Age
- Country of origin
- Ethnic or cultural background
- Education and occupation of parents
- Year of migration to Canada
- Length of time in Canada
- Marital status
- Children (ages)
- Current living situation (living alone, with family)
- Educational level and occupation in country of origin
- Present employment status (full-time or part-time) and occupation

## II. Pre-Migration Occupation Re-Entry Experiences of Skilled Worker Immigrants

- Tell me about your decision to immigrate to Canada and what you expected your working life here would be like (e.g., how the idea came about, personal hopes about the move, the pre-migration circumstances, what the application process was like).
- Walk me through the career changes and challenges you experienced after you came to Canada until the present time (e.g., unemployment, underemployment, perceived employer discrimination, foreign credential recognition problems, experience of the process of academic upgrading or re-credentialing, etc.). You can draw on your pre-interview activity in sharing your experiences.
- How did not working in your profession and then re-entering your profession impact you? Your family? Your quality of life?
- What were the most important things to you when deciding when was the right time to try to re-enter your profession or pursue academic upgrading versus accepting or staying in a job outside of your field?
- What helped you to overcome the challenges you faced in getting back into your profession in Canada?

Participants were given a small remuneration of \$30.00 for their involvement in the interview process. This compensation was offered based on the fact that time participating in the research interviews may take away from gainful employment, or participants may require reimbursement for transportation

costs to and from the interview locations (distances in Vancouver are particularly lengthy). This monetary amount was selected in order to provide appropriate compensation for their time or transportation needs without being perceived as an incentive for study participation. One participant declined the remuneration. All participants were given a thank you card for their participation which also outlined how to contact the researcher after completion of the interview if they wanted a summary of the study results.

### *Research Journal*

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (McLeod, 2000). All data are mediated through the researcher rather than through a questionnaire, inventory, or data analysis program (Merriam, 1998). The researcher plays an integral role in the data collection and analysis, as well as the construction of knowledge. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for the researcher to be aware of his or her existing preconceptions, understandings and beliefs, and how these factors interact with and mediate the research process.

Given the importance of acknowledging the researcher within the context of the study, a journal was kept throughout the research process. The journal began with an account of pre-understandings, ideas, and comments prior to data collection (McLeod, 2000) as these pre-understandings will influence the initial research process. The researcher continued to journal throughout the course of study in order to: (a) reflect on the research process, (b) maintain a record of acquired insights, (c) jot down questions and curiosities, (d) note possible

interpretations and re-interpretations, (e) detect possible patterns of the work in progress, (f) document the decision-making processes throughout data analysis, and (g) outline the rationale for research decisions (van Manen, 1990). Within the hermeneutic tradition, each interview and stage of data analysis will affect the researcher, shifting his or her understandings, thus ultimately influencing the course of research. The researcher also documented comments, reactions, and reflections regarding the interaction between herself and the participants, reflecting the personal impact of the research process while emphasizing changes in understandings and interpretations as they evolve during the study (Ellis, 1998). The research journal portrays the personal dimensions of the meaning-making process as they unfold during the course of the study (McLeod), and allows others to make well-informed judgments regarding the methodological rigour of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Data Transcription, Analysis and Interpretation Process

#### *Data Recording and Transcription*

The researcher sought permission from participants to record the interviews; all participants consented to have their interview audio-taped. Participants were informed that their names would not be included on the audio recordings and that a pseudonym would be used to represent their interviews. The researcher provided all participants with ample opportunities to ask questions or voice concerns regarding how confidentiality and privacy of their responses would be maintained throughout the course of the study, as well as after the conclusion of the research.

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber from a transcribing company. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the interviews. The researcher subsequently reviewed all of the transcripts along with the audiotapes to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. The audiotapes were stored apart from the transcripts in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. The audiotapes and transcripts will be retained for a period of five years, in accordance with the research guidelines outlined by the University of Alberta, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

### *Analysis Strategy*

Interpretive inquiry is an emergent research design in which the researcher establishes the best way of representing and portraying the nature of the data that is being collected and continually examined (McLeod, 2000). In order to best represent the participants' descriptions of their career transition experiences, the identification and uncovering of salient ideas, patterns, or key dynamics in the data occurred through the evolving process of data analysis. It is important to keep in mind that data collection and data analysis are not mutually exclusive processes in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Data analysis began while the interviewing was still underway and continued as an on-going process throughout the study. This way, the cycle of data collection and analysis will follow the hermeneutic circle (Packer & Addison, 1989). Through immersion in the data and careful and detailed reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, the researcher searched for general impressions, familiar concepts, differences and

contradictions, new ideas, and other areas of further interest that may extend current understandings.

*Narrative Analysis.* Because participants presented varying factors that have facilitated their re-entry into their pre-migration occupations and verbalized these factors through the telling of stories, the researcher determined that the research findings would be best captured by creating a narrative for each participant (Murray, 2003) which would describe his/her unique process of re-entering the pre-migration occupation and how each participant's employment and re-credentialing experiences situate themselves within the broader context of skilled worker immigrants. After extensive contemplation, the researcher decided to create chronological interview narratives utilizing Polkinghorne's (1988, 1995) method of narrative analysis. This is a procedure through which the researcher organizes the elements of the data into a coherent developmental account with a distinct beginning, middle, and end, resulting in a storied explanation that is retrospective and links prior events together to account for how a final outcome might have occurred. Data are synthesized rather than separated into constituent parts (Ellis, 2009). In a narrative analysis, events and actions are related to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot, much like in a story. According to Polkinghorne: "Stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes." (1995, p. 8). The researcher focuses on the temporal and unfolding dimension of

human experience by organizing the data along a before/after continuum (Riessman, 2008).

All participant narratives begin with a brief introduction to the participant, their age at the time of the interview, their current occupation in Canada, location of birth, their education levels and occupation just prior to migration, as well as the education levels and occupations of parents and siblings, and the pre-migration circumstances or context of migration (i.e., “push” versus “pull” factors; Sue & Sue, 2008). The middle portion of the narrative described the circumstances and decisions leading to migration to Canada, the application process, and settlement process. Specifically, the settlement process focused on participants’ career trajectories (namely, the career challenges they faced), how they experienced career challenges, and how they overcame occupational barriers in Canada. The narratives conclude with a description of participants’ lives at the time of the interview. Participation quotations were utilized as much as possible in the narratives in order to capture as much of the story in the participants’ words as possible. Participants selected their own pseudonyms, as well as the pseudonyms for other individuals (e.g., family members) mentioned during the interviews, to maintain cultural appropriateness and anonymity in the context of the narratives.

Deciding what material would and would not be included in the narratives was informed by the emphasis or importance placed on certain disclosures or content by participants themselves (either verbally or behaviourally), literature on skilled worker immigrants’ pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences, and my own reflections and interpretations of participants’ experiences that were

especially meaningful during the interview and data analysis processes. The researcher ensured that she listened carefully to participants' stories as they illustrate human motivation and inform the reader "...how to feel about what happens in the story" (Ellis, 2009, p. 485). During the member checks, participants were reminded that they could request that the researcher remove or modify any content from the narratives that they felt did not reflect their career experiences or that made them feel uncomfortable. The content of the final narratives resonated with participants' personal and career experiences and were judged by them to be authentic accounts of these experiences.

*Analysis of Narratives.* Polkinghorne (1995) states that an analysis of narratives seeks to locate common themes, salient events, and experiences among the stories collected as data. This approach requires several stories rather than a single story as data, whereby the researcher inspects the different stories to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories (Murray, 2003). This paradigmatic type of analysis allows the researcher to locate common conceptual manifestations among the collection of stories gathered as data (Polkinghorne, 1988). An analysis of narrative may involve either a deductive or inductive search, where the former involves concepts that are derived from logical possibilities or previous theory being applied to the data in order to determine whether instances of the concepts may be found, and the latter involves developing concepts from the data rather than imposing previously derived theoretical concepts (Murray; Polkinghorne). Given that no studies have examined the pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences of skilled worker

immigrants in Canada who have been successful in obtaining positions congruent with their training, the researcher decided to utilize an inductive search by developing concepts from the data rather than imposing theoretical concepts obtained from previous studies.

In this study, the researcher utilized a paradigmatic analysis of the data, which is an examination of data in order to identify particulars as instances of general concepts or notions (Polkinghorne, 1995). This is typically done with diachronic data, which contains temporal information regarding the sequential relationship of events (Polkinghorne, 1988). The researcher began the process of the analysis of narratives by reading and re-reading the narratives and the transcripts to look for experiences, salient events, and meaning units and their effects on participants' subsequent decisions and happenings. The researcher aimed to discover commonalities that existed across the narratives. This was uncovered in two ways: (1) Examining the language used to describe specific events and happenings (e.g., word repetitions, key-words-in-contexts); and (2) Identifying core experiences that reflect and represent participants' accounts, despite the fact that they may not have told the story in an ordered and sequential manner (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010) or may have explained these experiences in analogies and metaphors.

Next, the researcher reduced the units of text in the transcripts to a series of core sentences and ideas. The purpose of this step was to interpret and theorize from participants' stories and their meanings. Here, attention was paid to the content (i.e., what is in the story) of the stories versus how the stories were told by

the participants (Polkinghorne, 1995). Once the researcher established a series of core sentences and ideas from each participant, she then conducted a cross-participant analysis to examine similarities and differences. The researcher then reduced the sentences and ideas to categories and noted the relationships among the categories by creating a matrix display in order to detect and keep track of patterns in data (Bazeley, 2009). This type of matrix analysis “...attempts to detect the covariance among concepts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 14). For example, as a result of utilizing a matrix analysis, the researcher noted three main categories illustrating various factors affecting participants’ career trajectories, how they experienced career challenges, and how they overcame these career challenges and successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations.

Lastly, based on the categories inductively derived from the data, the researcher came up with themes that best captured the meaning of the common experiences participants shared. Key themes underlying participants’ disclosures were identified and labelled according to their essential meanings and were exemplified using descriptive passages from the narratives, as well as direct participant quotations from the original transcripts used in the construction of the narratives. The analysis of narratives also captured the sub-themes that represented the diversity of career re-entry experiences among skilled worker immigrant participants. A cross-participant analysis was conducted in order to identify both common elements and unique experiences among the narratives which inform the purpose of the study. My experiences and perspective as the researcher and a clinical counsellor who has worked with professional immigrants

for nine years informed the interpretation of themes in the interviews. For the purposes of this study, the researcher determined that a theme was a common element or experience shared by a minimum of six participants. Theme and sub-theme labels were chosen to reflect a meaningful summary of participants' experience of re-entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada.

### Ethical Issues

Being an ethical researcher involves possessing a combination of awareness, knowledge, and skills (Truscott & Crook, 2004) rather than simply following an Institutional Review Board's (IRB) prescribed standards and procedures (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1998; Magolda & Weems, 2002). This becomes especially important when conducting research with non-majority groups, such as ethnic and cultural minorities, as there are different ethical and methodological issues that need to be considered when working with these populations (Pernice, 1994; Shavarini, 2004). This section reviews ethical issues pertinent to the implementation of the proposed study. It begins with a discussion of general ethical issues and then focuses on issues specific to the immigrant population being studied.

Voluntariness of participation is a criterion for ethical research with human beings (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1998; Truscott & Crook, 2004). Participants' right

to choose whether they would be involved in this study and whether they would continue participation until study completion were upheld in two primary ways.

First, participants were recruited through cultural community organizations or professional associations, rather than through personal networking, preventing perceived relationship obligations from influencing study participation decisions. In studies with immigrants, when recruitment occurs through the researcher's connection or involvement with the immigrant communities under study, cultural emphases on collectivism may lead to perceived coercion to participate (Pernice, 1994).

Second, the researcher did not initiate any follow-up contacts with participants who declined study involvement at any stage of the research process, nor inform the cultural community associations or professional associations where study advertisements were posted about whether specific individuals became involved in the study or not. This prevented study participation from having any repercussions for the potential participants. In addition, the small remuneration that was provided to participants (\$30.00) was for the purpose of compensating them for lost employment time and transportation costs to the research interview, preventing it from being an incentive for study participation. Pernice has emphasized the financial challenges facing immigrants and refugees due to present or previous periods of unemployment and underemployment, making it particularly important to provide some financial compensation for research participation. This is especially if research involvement takes away from time spent in gainful employment.

Protection of research participants' anonymity and confidentiality is also essential in research with human participants (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1998; Truscott & Crook, 2004). At the beginning of the study, after each participant had chosen a pseudonym, a master list linking participants' real names to their pseudonyms was created and kept separately from the audio-tapes and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Only the data with pseudonyms was used throughout the data analysis process, as well as for representing participants' interview disclosures in this dissertation. Pseudonyms will also be used in any publications or presentations that are developed based on the study results. In the follow-up meetings with participants, they were given the opportunity to change or modify any personally identifying information from their interview disclosures to conceal their identities.

A critical factor to consider in any research involving human participants is balancing the potential benefits of the research with any potential harm and informing participants of potential risks prior to study involvement. In recalling and discussing career transition experiences and barriers/challenges, it was possible that some participants could experience emotional distress due to the impact of these experiences on themselves and their families. In order to be prepared for this possibility in advance, the informed consent form made potential participants aware of this possibility. The researcher also provided all participants with a list of free and low-cost culturally appropriate counselling services to

which they can self-refer in the event of any signs of distress (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1998; Magolda & Weems, 2002; Pernice, 1994; Truscott & Crook, 2004).

### Evaluating the Study

The need to critically evaluate the quality and value of qualitative research is well recognized (Ellis, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The evaluation of qualitative data is not standardized and utilizes different evaluation methods compared to what is used in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba). Despite such recognition, little agreement exists regarding measures of evaluating qualitative research (McLeod, 2001). It was critical that the research question was appropriate for qualitative research and well situated in the research literature (Merriam, 2002). As previously noted in the literature review, no studies have examined the short and long-term career transition experiences of skilled workers who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada. The majority of studies have focused on the barriers preventing immigrant professionals from re-entering their pre-migration occupations.

Ellis (1998) proposed several questions for qualitative researchers to answer when they evaluate their study upon and during data analysis and interpretation. Notably, three of these questions are particularly relevant to address and discuss for the purposes of this study. The researcher's responses to these questions are outlined below:

1) Is it plausible and convincing?

The participants in this study experienced major career barriers and challenges for a sustained period of time, sometimes more than a decade, similar to skilled workers who have remained unemployed or underemployment in Canada. This made their experiences completely plausible. The nature and range of these barriers reflected the realities of the Canadian labour market for immigrants with foreign educational qualifications, and individuals who speak with accents, or who come from cultures that diverge from Canadian workplace communication norms. As will become evident from the narratives and themes presented in subsequent chapters, their experiences highlighted that what made them unique was how they perceived these barriers and challenges, how they reacted to them, and the previous life experiences that made them somewhat better prepared to effectively respond to career adversity than skilled workers who continue to work outside of their fields of professional training.

2) Does it fit with other material we know?

The answer to this question is yes and no. The findings relating to the career challenges experienced by the participants in this study that will be described in subsequent chapters have many consistencies with findings of numerous other studies conducted in different Western countries. What has not been documented yet is how skilled worker immigrants overcome career and settlement challenges and successfully re-enter their pre-

migration occupations. This study contributed new discoveries in this area to expand existing knowledge. While the dominant narrative in the literature has been to focus exclusively on what immigrant professionals can't do, it appeared timely to shift the focus on what they can do, and have done, and how government policy can be changed to assist more skilled worker immigrants who have not yet succeeded in re-entering their pre-migration occupations.

3) Does it have the power to change practice?

The findings and understandings that have been generated from this research have direct foreseeable impacts on counselling and career theory and clinical practice. While interviewing participants and analyzing the data, I became acutely aware of the influence and power for theory development and potential clinical practice. Current career counselling theories focus on the initial career entry process, rather than the career re-entry process of immigrants. As a result, they do not inform counsellors struggling to assist skilled worker immigrant clients with career decision-making. The participants in this study exhibited remarkable resiliency and perseverance while facing difficult and sometimes demoralizing circumstances. Their experiences can inform the application of existing career counselling theories to immigrant populations and provide insights for counsellors working with this population about how to foster career resiliency in the Canadian labour market. The participants' narratives and commonly emerging themes may also provide inspiration for other skilled

workers who experience ongoing frustration, yet don't want to give up on their dreams of entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada.

When evaluating research undertaken within a constructivist paradigm, Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose the two sets of criteria encompassing trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is the criterion of how good a qualitative study is based on its transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability. From a positivist approach to evaluating research, ideas describing research reliability and validity have traditionally been utilized. In the current postmodern research era, reliability and validity have been replaced by a variety of terms describing postmodern sensibilities (Merriam, 2002). As a result of the multiplicity and variability of these terms, much confusion has arisen given that a set of universally agreed upon and accepted postmodern evaluation criteria has not been consistently adopted. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I have chosen to recognize the meaning of these terms in the context of the present study while also recognizing the traditional positivist origin of the usage of these terms.

### *Transferability*

Transferability, parallel to external validity in quantitative research, is related to whether or not the research findings may be applied to other contexts (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Guba and Lincoln (1989) assert that the central method for establishing transferability is thick description. The researcher provided a narrative account of each participant's career re-entry story in Canada (Chapter Four) and the emergent themes from the narratives (Chapter Five). These two chapters both contain rich and thick descriptions of participants' career

re-entry experiences. The variation in the sample of participants in terms of their countries of origin, gender, ages at the time of migration, length of time to re-enter their pre-migration careers, and the diversity of their occupations increases the potential range of applications of the results for the lives of other skilled workers in Canada and in other countries with similar policies for foreign-trained professionals. (Merriam, 2009).

### *Dependability*

Dependability, parallel to reliability, refers to whether or not the findings are likely to be consistent over time (Bryman & Teevan). This study involved having successful skilled worker immigrants provide a retrospective longitudinal analysis of their career trajectories over several years since their immigration, sometimes spanning a decade or two. Since participants had many years to acculturate into Canadian society and the Canadian labour market, many years after re-entering their pre-migration careers in Canada to reflect upon their career transitions, and the career transitions were over at the time of the study, the findings based on their interview disclosures are likely to remain consistent over time.

*Triangulation.* Merriam (2002) states that triangulation may also be utilized to ensure dependability by utilizing multiple methods of data collection involving a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis thereby enhancing both data collection and the findings. Pre-interview activities, research interviews, and follow-up meetings with participants for elaboration or modification of initial interview data allowed for multiple sources of data

collection related to participants' pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences in Canada.

### *Credibility*

Credibility, parallel to internal validity, is the degree to which the research findings are congruent with reality (Merriam, 2002) and how well those realities are represented by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln suggest several techniques to improve the credibility of a study, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, negative case analysis, and progressive subjectivity.

One method by which credibility of this study was addressed was through prolonged engagement with the data. The researcher listened to the interviews and read the transcripts multiple times over several months, which allowed for deep and prolonged engagement prior to writing the narratives. During this process, notes were made about emerging themes and key dynamics in each story that are illustrated in the analysis of narratives chapter.

Peer debriefing was utilized by regularly meeting with the researcher's supervisor as well as another doctoral student in counselling psychology to discuss the research process and findings. The researcher's narratives illustrating the career re-entry experiences of the participants, as well as research themes and analysis, were reviewed by the primary supervisor thereby ensuring convincing and sound connections between the data and analysis.

Member checks have been described as "the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239). These involve

allowing participants to provide feedback and input on the representation of their interview data to ensure that the accounts and findings are authentic representations of participants' experiences. Member checks were utilized in this study in the form of participants reviewing and providing feedback for two drafts of the narratives. Their feedback suggested that the chronological stories of their career trajectories in Canada were genuine representations of their career challenges, barriers, coping attempts and resiliency.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend that researchers monitor their progressive subjectivity during the qualitative research process. This was addressed by the researcher maintaining an audit trail of each step in the research process, which included a research journal documenting the researcher's evolution of ideas and decisions made throughout the research process.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability, parallel to replicability, refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative study may be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several methods were utilized in this study to ensure confirmability. Participants were asked to read two drafts of their narrative to ensure that what the researcher had captured was an accurate reflection of what transpired in the interview and how the data were recorded and subsequently interpreted. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that if there is a good fit between what emerged in the interview and how the data were recorded, the study is said to have good confirmability. The narratives included multiple participant quotations that support the themes. Participants were given the opportunity to provide input on the narratives and to

suggest modifications that would increase the degree to which they resonate with participants' experiences. Such a collaborative authorship with the participants was essential to demonstrate that the material presented by the researcher fit for the participants and that the writing and ultimate depiction of their stories were meaningful for them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Ultimately, whether other skilled workers who have been successful in re-entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada can see aspects of themselves and their experiences and barriers in the narratives and emerging themes from this study, will inform the goodness of fit of the research data with the realities of others in the same immigration category of the participants.

### *Authenticity*

Authenticity is concerned with the processes and outcomes of constructivist inquiries rather than the application of methods (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Authenticity criteria include fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The following sections outline how each criterion for authenticity was met in this study.

*Fairness.* Fairness is concerned with the prevention of marginalization by ensuring representation of all perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices in the text (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Traditionally, immigrant voices have been neglected in research (Sue & Sue, 2008). In the current study, the researcher ensured that participants were from a variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds and source countries, represented a variety of occupations, and were of different genders. The

researcher asked participants to read two drafts of their narrative to ensure that these narratives reflected their own unique voices and perspectives on their experiences rather than the researcher's voice. The final narratives were therefore co-constructed with the participants and their feedback was utilized to remain true to their career transition processes.

*Ontological and Educative Authenticities.* Ontological and educative authenticities are concerned with raising the level of awareness of research participants as well as those individuals with whom they come into contact for social or organizational purposes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participants were provided with an opportunity to share their experiences and wisdom in the form of pre-interview activities and research interviews; many articulated a desire to help other skilled worker immigrants struggling to re-enter their pre-migration occupations. The majority of participants expressed interest in the dissemination of the results and asked the researcher how she plans to share the findings. The researcher plans to write a policy brief for immigration decision-makers in the federal government, as well as publish one or more research articles in peer-reviewed journals (one of which targets counsellors working with immigrant populations), and publish a book with participants' stories as the focal point. The researcher has also submitted an abstract to an international qualitative research conference in the hopes of presenting these findings to researchers and practitioners from a variety of disciplines and occupations. These methods of dissemination are intended to reach a broad audience with the aim of not only raising awareness of the challenges skilled worker immigrants face as they

attempt to re-enter their pre-migration occupations, but how members of Canadian society (e.g., counsellors, staff at settlement agencies, educational institutions, professional regulatory bodies, policy makers in the federal government, etc.) can better assist this group.

*Catalytic and Tactical Authenticities.* Catalytic and tactical authenticities encompass action, first, on the part of the research participants and, second, the involvement of the researcher in training participants in specific forms of political and social action should participants desire such training (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Similar to participatory action research (Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton et al., 2003), these types of authenticities are committed to the creation of positive social change, including understanding, documenting, and evaluating the impact of social problems on individuals and communities. The mere act of participation in this study demonstrates that these participants feel strongly about the topic as several articulated that they are hoping to see changes implemented in federal policy and their respective occupations to facilitate the occupational re-entry experiences of professional immigrants. Interested participants were informed that they will receive a copy of an article the researcher will have published about the study of the results, as well as the publication information about the book, should they wish to pass these on to individuals whom they believe would benefit from these materials. These materials could then shape participants' social action efforts.

The next chapter describes the experiences of the participants in this study, by sharing their personal stories. The narratives begin with a description of each

participant's life prior to migration, his/her educational and family background, and factors related to the decision to move to Canada. They then move to discuss the participant's migration process and long-term career trajectory, starting with the first job taken upon entry into the Canadian labour force and culminating in obtaining a position in one's original field of training from the home country. Professional development activities and re-credentialing processes are also described.

## CHAPTER FOUR STUDY NARRATIVES

## Helen

Helen is a 48 year-old counsellor who immigrated to Western Canada from Argentina with her husband and three children in 2003. Helen was born in Uruguay and raised in Argentina by parents of Eastern European descent during the Argentine dictatorship. Helen's mother earned a high school diploma and worked as a notary public and her biological father also had a high school diploma and worked in business. Her step-father earned a high school diploma and worked in printing and publishing. Helen's three sisters, all of whom reside in Argentina, completed high school and work as professionals.

## The "Unconsciousness" of Immigration

Helen was surrounded by many immigrants growing up in Argentina: "I was raised in a community with Jewish, Polish, Russian people. The grandparents around me when I was a child, they spoke Italian or Español, the real Español, or English as well." She grew up hearing, seeing, and observing the life experiences of people of different cultural backgrounds. Being exposed to a large Jewish population provided Helen with opportunities to witness the development of survival skills among those who are faced with very difficult life situations: "How the people who survived in the concentration camps, the few of them, they have some skills to survive." Helen remembered hearing their stories and reflecting on what her own strengths are that she could use to cope in difficult situations, stating "well, you know what, I'm a good listener and keep secret; I'm good with that, so maybe that's my skill and I will do that."

After she completed high school, she decided to pursue her education and career in psychology. Helen successfully completed her master's degree in psychology in Argentina. She then completed "a four year internship program at a large public hospital, and a two year post-graduate diploma in health management." Helen was trained in psychoanalysis, a long-term therapy in which dream interpretation, free association, and analysis of transference and resistance are used to explore an individual's repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties, and internal conflicts. Part of psychoanalytic training involves the clinician undergoing his/her own psychoanalysis, which Helen participated in and found to be a "very positive experience." In Argentina, it is expected that psychologists will continue to participate in their own therapy, which is not the norm in Canada and is something Helen said "I miss in Canada."

Helen enjoyed a comfortable life as a psychologist in Argentina. She worked in the morning "in the psychiatric children's hospital and in the afternoon in my private practice." Her work at the psychiatric hospital for children gave her "the experience to share with marginalized population or diverse population of poverty" while her private practice clientele consisted of "middle class or upper class" people. On Saturdays, she would facilitate training sessions for other staff and provide consultation services. Helen also attended weekly individual and group supervision with other psychologists. Helen lived in a house with her husband and their three children. When she was not working, she "enjoyed spending time with family, friends, and relatives."

Helen “never expected to leave the country. It wasn’t my expectation; it’s not in my family, in the culture of my family.” However, the financial crisis in Argentina was the catalyst that prompted her and her husband to consider immigration. Upon further reflection, Helen noted that the different immigrant groups she was exposed to growing up likely helped to plant a seed to immigrate:

*But coming to Canada, I realize that actually my grandma, who raised me because my mom was a single mother so she worked a lot, and my grandma came from Lithuania, so she was an immigrant. So I think that something about immigration was unconscious but it was always around me.*

Helen spent a considerable amount of time thinking about where her family could migrate to and, despite the fact that she did not speak English (but her husband did), they decided:

*Okay, maybe it’s time to do some cultural experience to live in another society, more stable society, just for a while, to raise the kids. And my kids at that time were, my older daughter was 12, my son was eight and my youngest was two years. And then I look after some places to move with positive immigration policies, and then I found Canada.*

### Exploring Career Options in a New Society

A few months before Helen and her children migrated to Canada, “...my husband came to Canada...to find a home, school for kids and [sporting] class for my older daughter because she was a good athlete in Argentina.” This allowed the family to acquire the basic necessities they would need to begin their new lives in Canada. Helen did not expect to work as a psychologist in Canada. She commented: “...when I came here, I fantasized to go to the film industry to do some tricks like, how it’s called, special effects or something like that. Or I was exploring in SPCA to do something with animals.” It was clear that Helen was contemplating a career change early on during the settlement process:

*When I mention that I will go in for the film industry or I will go in for the SPCA, I'm serious about that, you know. It's like no, it's tricky in my mind. I was convinced if I went for that path, will be worthy anyways because when you are new in a new society you have lots of things to learn.*

Even though Helen fantasized about a career change, her plans were derailed due to settlement needs as well as her husband's encouragement to try to secure employment in her pre-migration field:

*But what happen was I arrive, I started to go to the ESL school right away, to settle my family, to settle myself and I start to do some network contacts, you know, regarding my profession to see what's going on in here. And I start to volunteer and I start to work. I appreciate that my husband was in some sort coaching me, because I remember he was saying something like, "You are on this side of the desk or the other side of the desk. You are customer or you are provider."*

#### *Learning English, Making Friends, and Finding Encouragement*

Shortly after her arrival in Canada, Helen signed up for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. She knew that "if you don't have English, you don't survive." Her husband was the only member of the family who spoke English, but even then, Helen noted that "as my husband said, he thought that – he believed that he knew English until he arrived here and noticed that he didn't." Her children underwent a difficult period as they transitioned to a new academic environment in a language they were not yet fluent in. For example, Helen's son, whom she described as "a nice boy, but he was tough" would:

*...cry every day, the whole day at school, because he didn't speak English at all. And you know, the first week at school is a transition time, so it's like a limbo for the kids. They don't know which teacher will be, you know how the system is here. So nobody notice that he was crying, nobody notice that he didn't speak the language. And so I said, "This is something serious in Canada. If you don't get the language, we've got a problem, Houston. We cannot land, you know, on the moon."*

Helen made it her priority to learn English and described fond memories of befriending other immigrant professionals from a variety of countries in her ESL classes:

*And at the beginning I went to a private school because my husband had some business with [Latin American company] and so he got like a scholarship and was a nice school. And I understood that many people from around the world, they just come for studying English in Vancouver, so I found it pretty amazing. And then I moved to the public school. I went to the [public ESL program] and I got support for my daughter to go to the child care. So I think that language is – I took it like part of communication and I was really grateful for the experience to go to the public school with Asian people and Iranian people and Russian people, you know. We were in the same boat. And well yes, it was tough, it was very tough to be in a school and don't understand. I didn't understand anything what they were saying. But I got my first friends there, from Japan, from China, from Iran...it was like a Unicef poster.*

Helen did not “see other Latin Americans” at the ESL classes; in fact, she “did not want to make friends with other Latin Americans right away” which she believed “helped with my English.” She also met with a counsellor at the ESL school who provided words of encouragement that have remained with her:

*I went to talk with a counsellor at the ESL school, she was an Indo-Canadian counsellor. She was educated in London, as well, I remember. And she said, “You know what? Even you are not speaking English right now; I can guarantee that in a few months you will be on this side of the desk.”*

These words resonated with Helen because “she didn't know about what my husband told me, you know? But she used the same metaphor, the same idea.” Helen took this as a sign that she was meant to continue working in the psychology field, but instead of focusing narrowly on finding a job similar to the one she had in Argentina, she decided, “I will stay here for a while; I'm living,

I'm learning." She began to accept the uncertainty while remaining "open to new experiences."

After completing ESL classes, Helen participated in a professional advancement program to assist with her re-entry efforts in the mental health field. This program was originally "created for the Filipino nurses, but they are taking more professionals." This program included one-to-one employment counselling as well as workshops discussing "networking and resumes. They go with your pace and they are very professional, very respectful. I refer lots of people to that program."

#### *Finding Opportunities: The Importance of Networking*

Soon after completing the professional advancement program, Helen began networking at a variety of places in order to secure employment or a volunteer position that could potentially lead to gainful employment. She attended various workshops targeted for the general public so she could meet the staff members facilitating these workshops and attended study groups which allowed her to meet a variety of professionals, including a sizeable number of professional immigrants:

*At the beginning, I went to different places networking. And for instance, if I went to contact to the liaison workers at the school board, I went to the workshops that they were offering for parents. So it was like, for instance, the first network was [study group]. That was my first place. And then they connected me with a Mexican psychologist.*

What helped Helen with networking was "to establish networks with the same community" meaning the Latin American community in her city. She met

individuals from all over Latin America working in social services and mental health. One of the individuals she met was another Argentinian working in mental health. One day, she casually said to him:

*“You know what? I’m able to write down the, instead of the Good Samaritan, the Good Immigrant’s Manual” I told him. And two months later he called me and said, “You know what? I got funding for write your Good Immigrant’s Manual. So if you wanted to write down your experience or some tips.” So I wrote this for those who arrive. It’s an orientation for the Latino family.*

Helen stressed the diversity and interconnectedness of networking and how it relates to the complexity and multiplicity of her identity:

*Because I said, you know what, I a newcomer. So it’s like the multiplicity of my identity. I think that was helpful for me, to say I’m not just a professional, I’m a woman, I’m a newcomer, I’m an ESL, I’m a parent, I’m a wife, you know? I’m a citizen of this, you know? So I tried to play with these different roles and shortly after I notice that everything was connected. Because when you are in an immigrant land and you are an immigrant, it’s complex. It’s like the whole vision, it’s not like a this or that. No, I’m this, I’m this, I’m mother and wife, I’m woman, I’m friend, I’m – you know? And that helped me, yes.*

Helen’s networking efforts paid off: In 2004, she obtained a volunteer position at a non-profit agency specializing in trauma. She remembered feeling put on the spot during her interview:

*And when I went to [agency], I show my credentials and I remember that the person who was interviewing me ran away and brought three people to the room. I felt like a monkey, you know, or something like that. And they said okay and they said, “You are in.” And it was weird, but I said, ‘Well, this is my mission’.*

Helen was able to utilize her education and clinical experiences by providing clinical services in her mother tongue. The clinical staff soon began consulting with her regarding their challenging clients: “When I started to volunteer doing intakes and I remember having clinical discussions even I was in the position, you

know. The counsellor, the clinical counsellor with the full credentials, asked me questions about what's going on with this client.”

Even though Helen provided consultation to other staff regarding complex cases, she was encountering her own challenges working in the mental health field in Canada. Although Helen's work at the children's psychiatric hospital in Argentina encompassed some short-term interventions, she predominantly utilized longer-term psychological interventions, particularly in her private practice. When she began volunteering at a community mental health agency in Canada, “I found a more cognitive-behavioural approach.” While these brief, time-limited interventions were not completely foreign to Helen, she nonetheless attended workshops to become more proficient in these cognitive-behavioural interventions and consulted with her colleagues when she had questions. Adapting to a different practice model in Canada was not as difficult as Helen had expected; in fact, she said what made it easier was having supervisors who were also professional immigrants trained in a similar model as she had learned in Argentina and, who, like herself, were also required to learn a new practice model:

*My supervisor, she was from Iran and educated in London. But actually, when something is coming from Europe, it was part of my education, my training, so it match perfectly, you know, even the difference. She went to [graduate program] for a while, so you know, we had something in common. And the other supervisor, she was from London, she was a British lady. They help me, they support me in the learning of this new therapy.*

#### Loss of Health and Adjusting Expectations

Helen's health began to suffer from working so hard during her first three years in Canada, between volunteering, completing the professional development

and learning needed to adapt to new ways of practice, and learning better English. Not only was she “overworking day and night,” but she stated that “as an immigrant, you use countless hours for everything. Everything takes three more times longer, you know. And you are not a learning disability but it’s the time that it takes everything. So you take time from your rest, from your social life, from your family life.”

As a result of overworking, prolonged sitting in locked postures for studying and workshops and English learning, and high levels of stress, Helen sustained a serious back injury that required surgical intervention just three years after her arrival in Canada. She was required to stay at the hospital for a few days after her surgery. Her injury and hospital stay made her realize how challenging the adaptation process really was for her in Canada, and that maybe she should lower her expectations: “For me it was like – I found that sometimes not knowing [how things are going to turn out] and your lowest expectations, so it helps in the adaptation process... you don’t know, you don’t know how it works so you don’t know what to expect.” As a result of her back injury, Helen was unable to leave her home for several months. Ironically, her social life improved during her rehabilitation and the injury reminded her that:

*I didn’t have any social life before I broke my back. And when I was stuck at home I start to get visitors, you know? It was funny because I was isolated, I couldn’t move. Some days I just move my eyes, I’m not kidding. And then I got friends, people move around and they start to visiting me. And I have a group of girlfriends since then and that’s how I got a social life in Canada, you know.*

Helen recalled that prior to her back injury, “the most challenging thing for me was missing my country, missing the people, missing the food.” Sustaining

the back injury was a “spiritual experience, you know, with my body and my fullness. I had lots of readings at that time and, well I think that that was my Baptism being an immigrant.” Helen also “took the strength to say, okay these immigrants in Argentina survive knowing that they couldn’t talk with their families again and happen in that way because they died or because the Internet wasn’t there, or the phone. So it will be easier for us, or for me at least.” This was especially true because, as aforementioned, she saw one of her core strengths as being able to keep things to herself or to keep things a secret.

As per her physician’s orders, Helen reduced her working hours and made self-care a higher priority after her rehabilitation. She continued to volunteer at the non-profit agency on a part-time basis. In 2007, a full-time position became available at the agency where she was volunteering “and I applied for it and I got it.” Helen credits not only her volunteer work with the agency, but also “I built good relationships with people and they know that I have experience in the area of trauma from my work as a psychologist in Argentina.”

#### Working as a “Senior” but Feeling Like a “Junior”

Shortly after obtaining her full-time position at the non-profit agency, Helen participated in a two-part clinical workshop. She successfully completed both workshops, but:

*...they are not going to give me the certificate because I don’t have the recognized master’s, you know. And I found that situation twice. And so it’s like the association, the professional association told me, it’s like, “You can work, but you cannot get your credentials recognition.”*

Not being awarded these training certifications meant that Helen's salary was not commensurate with her education and experience:

*I start to feel some sort of resentment when I said I'm working like a senior but I'm getting the payment like a junior. When I heard myself saying that I said, "You know what? We got a problem, Houston. We have to do something about it."*

While Helen was unhappy that her education was not recognized by the provincial professional association, she nonetheless resolved to complete a North American master's degree as "a way of maintenance." She wanted to "keep what I got. I don't want to lose more, you know. And that was my impression, like if I didn't get into this program, this master's, I could lose more." At the time of this interview, Helen continues to take courses on a part-time basis and is "going through this program day by day; that is literally day by day." Helen finds her situation:

*...forces people to do things under the table, you know, because people's going to live anyways. It's not my way, but I know another colleague who open the private office, even they are not under a scope. So I don't know if you can transcribe this or not but these are the tricky things that I found that, the policy makers, they don't realize how they're putting individuals on the edge.*

### Reaching Goals

Today, Helen enjoys working full-time as a counsellor specializing in trauma at the non-profit agency where she volunteered for three years before being hired as full-time staff in 2007. Her work as a counsellor is identical to her work as a psychologist in Argentina, "except I no longer work in the public health system in Canada." Helen is currently attending a part-time Master of Counselling program, which she enjoys. She "is still facilitating a [Latin American networking

group]” from when she first migrated to Canada on a volunteer basis to help other Latin American professional immigrants like herself with the adaptation process. She spends time with her family in the mornings and evenings and one day each weekend. Her children have been given great educational and athletic opportunities in Canada and Helen is proud to say that “my son is fluent in Spanish, English, and French and my daughter is studying French in the university.” Helen’s youngest daughter will be enrolled in a “French-Latin Immersion program” at her junior high school. Her social life is normally quite rich and full, but has been limited at the time of this interview because of the master’s program, which she purposely put off for eight years until her “kids are doing well, my husband is doing well and my back got better.”

Helen still resides in the same Western Canadian city that she, her husband, and their three children migrated to eight years ago. One year after migrating to Canada, the owners of the house from whom Helen and her husband were renting informed them that “they need to sell the house and we wanted to sell the house to you.” After a lot of reflection and discussion, Helen and her husband purchased the house, where they still lived at the time of this interview. “I started to think like is I had the chance to have two lives in the same life,” Helen said. “So I don’t feeling reincarnation or something like that, but it’s a sort of reincarnation. You know it’s like, okay, I have the chance to live a new life in the only life that I’m going to have.”

## Rodrigo

Rodrigo is a 57 year-old graphic designer and professional photographer who immigrated to a Western Canadian city with his wife and son from Mexico in 1996. Rodrigo was born in an urban city in Mexico. His father completed a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and has been self-employed his entire life. While his mother did not complete elementary school, she worked at home and sold clothes. Rodrigo has one sister and one brother, both of whom are professionals with post-secondary education. His sister resides in Mexico while his brother resides in the same Western Canadian city as Rodrigo.

## Contemplating Adventure

In high school, Rodrigo knew he wanted to pursue a career in photography, "but at that time, there were no photography schools in Mexico." When Rodrigo completed high school, "the only thing that I find that was close to [photography] was graphic design because in graphic design they include two or three years of photography. So that was the closest to it so I was thinking I'm going to go for graphic design."

While he was completing his undergraduate degree, the principal of the institution began recruiting senior students like Rodrigo to teach courses. Rodrigo was selected and trained to become an instructor: "As soon as I finished my four years of graphic design, I start to work in the same university teaching photography." Rodrigo taught photography courses at his alma mater for 14 years, which he stated was "a very nice experience." After teaching photography courses

at the university, Rodrigo stated that he “opened my own business as a graphic design and photography with my wife.”

Rodrigo and his family enjoyed a comfortable life in Mexico. When he was self-employed, Rodrigo and his wife “used to wake up and show up any time we want at the office.” At that time, their son was approximately “six or seven months old and...we used to carry [him] with us, he was with us all the time, so we didn’t have him in daycare.” Rodrigo and his wife used to “stay in the office for seven or eight hours.” For lunch, they “used to go to my parents-in-law to have some lunch and then go back to the office.” Sometimes, they would “visit some of the clients” over the lunch hour. The evenings were spent at home “watching TV and caring for our son.” Rodrigo and his wife volunteered for 14 years facilitating parenting skills support groups, which he described as “very rewarding work.”

During this time, Rodrigo and his wife were entertaining the idea of immigrating to a different country. He stated that he and his wife “were just trying to have a different experience, you know, I want to see if I can make it in a different country.” They wanted to challenge themselves by pursuing a different life abroad, so they chose to apply to come to Canada. Rodrigo applied to come to Canada twice as an independent immigrant. He and his wife were offered interviews both times and each time, they declined to attend because they “were living in a different part of the country and because, I mean, we were happy in Mexico.”

Rodrigo's happiness did not last very long. The "economic and political situation start to go very shaky and it was less money and then I was not very happy with that." Rodrigo's graphic design business began to suffer and, as a result, the family found it more and more difficult to obtain the basic necessities of life:

*At some point, I didn't have money to go to the bus or to put some gas in my car, or even to eat. So my life was more about to be worry all the time; I was worry all the time what I'm going to do, what I'm going to do and how I'm going to get money. And my son was like six years old.*

He was "very disappointed and angry" with the political instability in Mexico. After a presidential candidate was murdered prior to the 1994 federal elections, Rodrigo "decided it was time to leave Mexico" for good. Rodrigo contacted the Canadian Embassy in Mexico and learned that the paperwork he had submitted the second time he applied to migrate to Canada could still be used for his new application. He was scheduled for an interview at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico shortly after submitting his new application, which he passed, even though he "didn't speak any English." Rodrigo was told, "You have, like, eight months to go to Canada. If you don't go in eight months, you need to redo the paperwork." After receiving this news, Rodrigo recalled that he was:

*...on the sidewalk with my papers and I was thinking, "What I'm going to do now?" Because I mean it was like something that you are just wondering about, but when you have the papers and they say you have eight to twelve months to go. And then it's real.*

Rodrigo quickly dismissed his worries and "began to sell everything." He was confident that his skills and pre-migration occupational experiences would secure him a well-paying job in Canada:

*I was thinking I'm going, because I have a lot of experience, maybe I can get a good job fast and I'm going make more money and I'm going to get, it's like typical, a house and a car. That was my typical expectations, no, to realize that in maybe two or three years I was thinking about that, we can do that in two or three years.*

Unfortunately for Rodrigo and his family, “it was not like that.”

### Handling Multiple Challenges

#### *Housing*

Rodrigo departed, alone, for the Western Canadian city where he currently resides “a month in advance.” He has a brother in this Western Canadian city, “so then I went to live with him for a month and it was very helpful because he was helping me to find a place to live.” Finding suitable housing was difficult for Rodrigo. Since he did not have a credit history in Canada, he had a very difficult time finding housing and, consequently, had to lie about his length of residence in Canada, as well as his employment:

*It was very hard to find a place because I mean if you don't lie you cannot get a place...we went to many, many places in a month but nobody want to rent me a place because I didn't have any background in Canada. So in the end we lie about this; we said, “Okay” – “You have work?” “Yes, I am working with my brother, I am working for him.” “Oh, that's okay.” “And I just move from a different province so I don't have any bank accounts for here now.” So at the end, I was able to get a basement suite.*

Rodrigo and his family first lived in a basement suite, which he described as “dark and depressing with very small windows.” Basement suites came as a shock to Rodrigo and his wife “because in Mexico, we don't have basements.”

#### *The Canadian School System*

Housing was not the only challenge Rodrigo and his family encountered. Rodrigo's daughter “was born five months after we come to Canada” and just four

days after their arrival in Canada, Rodrigo's seven year-old son, who did not speak any English, started attending elementary school. "My son was very excited. Like my son was seven years old and he was very excited about the adventure," Rodrigo recalled.

Unfortunately, "very soon the adventure started to fall down, fall apart." His son's teacher began "complaining because he said, 'You know your kid doesn't pay attention and he's just trying to talk to the other kids'." Rodrigo found this difficult to believe "as we don't speak English, all of us." Given the difficulties his son experienced adjusting to his new school environment, Rodrigo pulled him out of school. Rodrigo believes the school could have done more to help his son integrate more fully into the school environment:

*At that time, you don't know anything so I would think, 'Oh my kid is misbehaving,' but the problem is that he didn't speak any English. And the teacher, he didn't do anything to – the school just no, they didn't do anything to try to fix those problems because many kids they are immigrants. And they didn't do anything to try to solve those kind of situations.*

### *Loss of Culture*

Prior to migrating to Canada, Rodrigo thought about how the move would impact his cultural identity:

*My great grandfather was born in Mexico and my grandfather as well and my father as well, myself as well. So there are many generations of Mexicans behind me that they were in Mexico. And suddenly in myself I say, 'Okay, now we are going to Canada.'*

Like many immigrants in Canada, Rodrigo wanted to preserve his cultural heritage, but soon became aware that cultural loss was inevitable: "And then we go to Canada and then I lost my culture." Rodrigo was concerned that his children would grow up without being exposed to Mexican culture, but realized that his

kids “don’t care.” According to Rodrigo, his son and daughter are both “one hundred percent Canadian.” He learned that:

*The problem is not them, the problem is me. I am the one who has issues with that. So I am the one that need to deal with those issues...I need to let them to incorporate in the way they need. And then I’m not going to push them to do some things because for them then it doesn’t make sense.*

Rodrigo realized the unique opportunities for his children to incorporate new elements of the Canadian culture into their identity and that these opportunities should be encouraged and not feared.

### *Learning English*

Out of all of the challenges Rodrigo faced during the settlement process, he stated that “English was the main barrier for me;” in fact, he still doesn’t “feel very comfortable with English.” Rodrigo did not speak any English when he arrived in Canada. He enrolled himself in an ESL class at a local community college, of which he spoke highly: “I think the teacher I had was an excellent teacher. I don’t remember her name, but she was a very good teacher. She was very patient with everybody and she was encouraging everybody to learn, and that was very good experience.”

Rodrigo noted that “most of the students in the class were Asian” which forced him to communicate in English. Rodrigo refused to befriend other Latinos initially “because you know what? If I go with Spanish people, we are going to speak Spanish all the time and we’re not going to learn English. So my idea was to learn English first and then go and look for the people who speak Spanish.” Rodrigo also “watched TV and listened to the radio” to improve his English and found that he was “able to understand more on the TV than in the radio, because

on the TV you have the reference of their movements and you have the reference of the things that they are doing. And then it's easy to put together the ideas about the English.”

As Rodrigo was describing his experiences learning English, he mentioned how some individuals would treat him in a child-like manner because he was not yet proficient in English:

*One thing that I learned is that...when you don't speak a language in the right way, the people who speak that language, they see you like a kid, you know, because you cannot express in the same or more elaborate way. So you perceive the other, like maybe, like a child. I mean you don't think like that but you treat the other person like that.*

Despite the challenges of learning English as an adult, Rodrigo is now highly proficient in English. He stated, “I'm proud to speak English because it's a challenge. It's a huge challenge to learn another language.”

#### Finding Opportunities: The Importance of Persistence

Unlike the majority of participants in this study, Rodrigo did not have to face the barrier of unrecognized foreign credentials: “My specific career is just about show a portfolio and show that you know how to do those things and that's it.” Nevertheless, he pointed out that the majority of professional immigrants are not in the same boat as him and are penalized for wanting to re-enter their pre-migration occupations:

*Canada establishes some regulations about who is coming to the country, right? And if they accept a doctor, they need to find a job for the doctor. If they accept an engineer, they need to find a job for that engineer...I think there is economic reason. The economic reason is that Canada needs people for lower jobs, but they can pick whatever they want. They don't want people who doesn't have money so they bring people who has – they have money, because they don't want support them. And then if they want*

*to go into their original profession they need to pay. They're going to make more money, the government is going to make, or somebody's going to make money from them.*

Unlike the majority of professional immigrants, Rodrigo “didn’t need to update anything” as his portfolio is his focal selling point, which he kept up-to-date prior to migrating to Canada. Rodrigo was confident that his skills and pre-migration occupational experiences would secure him a well-paying job, but he was quickly disappointed: “I expected to do better. I think I was very motivated to move to Canada and I was feeling very strong about to make it in Canada. And I think I was expecting more from Canada.”

Due to impending financial needs, Rodrigo was forced to work as a dishwasher in a restaurant, something which he strongly disliked: “You know one thing I hate is doing dishes and then I was doing dishes seven hours a day for months and months.” Working as a dishwasher was the motivating factor for him to find work as a photographer. He did not see a future for himself or his family working as a dishwasher: “Every time that I was doing a pot, a big pot, I was thinking, ‘Oh, but maybe in the future we are going to do this and that,’ and I was always wondering about my future. But I was not doing a lot because of my English.” Rodrigo also sold “my cameras and all my equipment because I didn’t have money to pay the rent.”

Initially, Rodrigo was hired for one afternoon per week, but “the other guy that I was working with, he was from the United States and he did apply as a refugee... they refuse to give him the papers to stay in Canada, so he need to leave the country.” Consequently, Rodrigo was “working there full-time after only two

weeks” and had been given the responsibility of being “in charge of the dishwashing area.” Rodrigo stated that the owners of this restaurant “were very nice. It was a nice experience to work with them” and always treated him with respect. Rodrigo remained cognizant of improving his English and would “sometimes tell my coworkers, ‘You know what, you never tell me, ‘You’re speaking the wrong way,’ when you can say things in this way because then I can learn. But if I’m still making the same mistake and you never say anything to me, then I cannot improve’.” He attributed the lack of assistance to “White people tired of having all these immigrants and trying to explain to them how to speak the right English.”

#### *Waiting for the Right Time*

While Rodrigo was working at this restaurant, he began seeking employment as a photographer. He was becoming more proficient in English and still felt confident about his photography skills and pre-migration occupational experiences. In spite of this, the managers at the places he sought employment were not even willing to meet with him: “They refuse you or they find ways to say, ‘No, we don’t need that’ or ‘You don’t have the skills’ or this or that.” Rodrigo described feeling “upset about these responses,” but believed that “someone would hire me as a photographer. I believed it.”

While working at the restaurant, Rodrigo found an advertisement for a professional photographer in a local newspaper. Despite the unfavourable responses he received from previous companies, Rodrigo applied anyway:

*They were looking for a photographer. But I was living here for four months so I said, "I'm not going to go because my English, I cannot say anything." So just I cut the ad, I keep the ad with me. And then after six months when my English was a little better I went to that office, to that studio, and I said, "I have my portfolio and I want to show it to the manager." And they said yes.*

*And she was very nice, the manager, and she said "Yes, I can see your portfolio." And she said, "Oh, your work is very good. So we have a project that is coming soon, so we got that project, we are going to call you."*

While the manager was impressed and offered him an assignment, this offer did not materialize. Rodrigo, "was calling this woman every two weeks. 'Hey, how are you, what's...?' 'Oh, nothing happening.' 'Okay. I just want to know how are you doing' and every two weeks, every two weeks calling and calling and calling and calling." Rodrigo's persistence paid off: Fourteen months after beginning to work as a dishwasher, the restaurant went into bankruptcy, which he described "was a very good thing for me." Rodrigo stated:

*After maybe two weeks, or one week, [the manager at the photography studio] called me and said, "You know there is a chance to work again one Friday four hours, just once a week." So I don't have anything to do, I say, "Yes, of course." So I went the first Friday for four hours and then she told me, "You know what, I can hire you part time." I said, "Okay, perfect." So I was working then as a photographer after 14 months, 16 months in Canada.*

After four months, Rodrigo was hired "full-time as a photographer."

While Rodrigo was happy to have found employment as a photographer, he was less than enthused about the attitudes and behaviours of some of his colleagues. Rodrigo also described situations whereby former White Canadian colleagues would make disparaging remarks or assumptions about his homeland:

*Sometimes I went with some people of the office to have lunch and we went to have sushi. I was with my sticks eating my rice and they said, "Oh, did you know how to use the sticks?" I said, "Yes." "Oh, good for you. Very good for you." I'm not an idiot, I am from Mexico. I just want*

*to eat. So that made me think that, I mean for some people there is this perception that you are coming from this third world country.*

These derogatory remarks were not limited to his White Canadian colleagues; Rodrigo noticed that when he went out for a meal with his non-White friends, colleagues, or even his family,

*Because you're not White, the people is like – they don't pay attention to you the same way as the White people. And you notice that, because I am sitting here like 20 minutes and this guy's just sitting in there, they are White, and now you're giving them the menus and they are drinking water and what's up with me? So you notice that there are some things like that.*

Rodrigo believes that “many people they think the same way; they have those assumptions all the time” and that it’s not worth “being upset all the time” about the prejudiced people he used to, and sometimes continues, to encounter. Moreover, Rodrigo described “feeling very strong about my knowledge and about my work skills” and that he knew he had something valuable to contribute to Canadian society “even if the others didn’t see it.”

Working as a full-time professional photographer provided Rodrigo and his family with many economic advantages:

*We were able to get more food and we were able to take buses, because since the beginning we were walking everywhere because we didn't have even money for the bus. So we went to go and do some groceries, we used to walk for three kilometres to get the groceries, and come back with my son and everyone, my son and my wife; and my wife pregnant. And then we were able to pay this apartment that was very nice, a lot of light and very nice street, better food. We were able to buy a car and then my wife was able to get a job as well, so things start to work better.*

#### Rodrigo's Life Today

At the time of the interview, Rodrigo was laid off from his job. While he would like to find full-time work as a photographer again, he reported being

“open to new opportunities, maybe some teaching or I start my own company.” Prior to being laid off, Rodrigo “enjoyed very much” his job as a full-time photographer. It only took him 14 months to re-enter his pre-migration occupation. His wife “didn’t want to be a graphic designer anymore” so “she start to go to school to study to be a counsellor, so now she’s a counsellor. And she’s very happy doing that.” Rodrigo enjoys an active social life with “friends from other parts of the world” and spends time with his family regularly. Both of his children are “doing well. I’m proud of them.” Rodrigo still resides in the same Western Canadian city that he, his wife, and young son migrated to and where his daughter was born 15 years ago. Despite the multiple settlement challenges he faced, as well as being laid off and some racism he continues to face, Rodrigo is grateful for the opportunities that Canada has provided him, his wife, and two children.

## Shaya

Shaya is a 37 year-old certified management accountant who immigrated to Western Canada, alone, from Argentina in 1999. Shaya was born in Argentina to parents of Eastern European descent. Her father completed an undergraduate degree in computer science and worked as a university professor. While her mother, a homemaker, did not complete high school, Shaya stated she was a “very literate” and well-read woman.

## Moving for Love

After completing high school, Shaya “went to university right away.” She had “wanted to become a mathematician because I really liked math, but in Argentina, I would have been really poor for the rest of my life.” Instead, Shaya chose to pursue accounting. She did not choose to study “accounting because I liked accounting. Actually, I didn’t even go into accounting, I went into banking and finance and then, I said since I’m here, I should become an accountant and make even more money.”

After completing high school, Shaya began working and simultaneously taking night classes at a post-secondary institution. She began, but did not complete, her undergraduate degree. Her life in Argentina “was pretty good.” She continued: “I had a really good job. I got to travel all throughout the country. And for being a 23 year-old girl, I was being paid very well, travelling all over.” She mentioned that she had a “great social life” and spent regular time with her family. She “was on a high” during this period of her life.

It was during a holiday abroad that Shaya “met a Canadian I fell in love with and he happened to be living in Canada.” They “travelled back and forth” visiting one another for almost one year. When it was “time to get serious, he wouldn’t speak Spanish, he wouldn’t be willing to move down and I said, ‘Well I’m young, I have, and yeah, I’ll go’.” The Canadian city in which her boyfriend lived “looked like a nice place to live, so yeah, I took the plunge.”

Shaya not only “wanted to be with her boyfriend,” who is now her husband, but she also “wanted a better life.” Approximately two years before she migrated to Canada, “Argentina was in turmoil and everyone lost their money.” Shaya stated that Argentina had:

*...about ten years of fake economy. We were living in really high standards and we knew it was impossible. So when the new government took over, they couldn’t sustain it. So suddenly the whole country collapsed and it went into bankruptcy. So they had to seize everyone’s funds. I lived through difficult periods, but not during the default.*

#### Feeling Tongue-Tied

Shaya moved in with her husband when she arrived in Canada. She quickly realized that the language barrier “was going to be a problem.” She spoke “very, very little” English and recalled feeling:

*...really nervous when I would speak. I couldn’t pronounce words. It was very heart-breaking for me being just unable to say something. I would not find the right words or my pronunciation would come out twisted then people wouldn’t understand. My English wasn’t enough to communicate with someone who would devote their attention to me. They wouldn’t understand me. It was very basic, to speak and not being able to do that. I had a terrible accent. It was one of the worst feelings.*

Shaya “would open my husband’s mouth and say, ‘How do you say that sound?’” Shaya felt so self-conscious about her spoken English that she “...actually went to a doctor here. I was crying. I was so depressed. And he said to me, ‘I’m going to

refer you to a speech therapist’.” Shaya completed a speech therapy program, which she stated helped her “speak better and more clearly” and improved her confidence. During this time, she went “to the library and got books and tapes and just learning English that way.” During her first few years in Canada, Shaya:

*Did not want to see any Latin Americans, I did not want to talk to any of them. I was so focused. I kept saying to myself that it would distract me from my goal because I wanted to learn English and it was so hard for me and I wouldn't be able to focus on my English. I do have a lot of Latin American friends now, but back then, it wasn't good for me.”*

After completing the speech therapy program, Shaya felt confident enough to sign up for English classes. She tried to “take some courses and they said I was way too advanced. So they wouldn't take me.” Knowing she was too advanced for even the most advanced ESL class made her “feel great. So pretty much I did it on my own.” Nevertheless, Shaya “took one or two ESL courses and a business writing course” to improve her spoken and written skills. Shaya “took this as a sign” that she could “survive” in an employment situation so she “began to look for a job.”

Shaya stated that “making friends took a long time.” Initially, she did not feel comfortable around her husband's friends “because they were all talking at the same time and I couldn't communicate.” She became “a little more withdrawn and my husband was there for me and he parted ways with his friends to be there for me, so no. I didn't have friends back then.” Shaya acknowledged that this changed when she became more confident.

### Adapting to a Different Set of Norms

After approximately five months in Canada, Shaya began looking for employment. She “did one session at [a settlement agency] to get employment tips.” She subsequently “put my resume out” and received “a lot of phone calls from different companies.” She recalled her first phone call from a potential employer: “I was so excited. I was starting to say things like, ‘Do you know that I’m here? I’m here now. I married a Canadian’ and thought to myself, ‘What am I saying? He doesn’t even care. What am I saying?’ It was not professional at all. Of course, they never called me back.” After this telephone conversation, Shaya admitted to herself that she “didn’t know how to even apply for a job. I honestly didn’t know what to do. So from that moment on, I looked on the internet what to do, what to say, how to behave.”

Shaya’s efforts paid off; after doing her “homework online” she “got two job offers. I got one from a small company that had a subsidiary in [a South American country] and I think because of my Latin American background, they liked me. Also, it was a very small company. And I got a contract for a big company.” Shaya “decided to go for the big company because it was a better opportunity in the future to have worked for a big company and they were going to give me more money,” despite the fact that “it was a very short-term contract. It was three months. But I thought it was the right step because I knew I was not the only one.” Her new contract position “was in accounting,” which was not new for her “and I was goal and very people-oriented and managing million dollar accounts.”

While the company “extended my contract to eight months, I didn’t feel confident at all.” Shaya described this job as “awful. It wasn’t good.” She described not behaving “as it was expected in the corporate world just because I was used to something completely different. The norms were different.” Shaya provided the following example of “something so small” which significantly affected her “self-confidence”:

*I was sick once and I called in. And back home, when you’re sick, you ask someone else to call. You are not the one calling [mimics coughing]. So if you live with your parents, your parents call, your husband, someone else calls. And I got my husband. I was sick and I got my husband to call. And I said, “Please tell them I am not feeling well.” So my husband called and said that. And then I got a talk that if you are the one who is sick, you should be the one calling. And I said I’m really sorry. I just learned that.*

Even something as benign as a “beverage at work caused problems” for Shaya. In Argentina, Shaya stated that “there is a little drink called mate. So everyone, and I worked for foreign companies, so even the foreigners had it. Everybody drinks it. It’s like you with a mug of coffee, they are with the mate.” One day, she “decided to bring the mate with me” to the office where she was working the eight-month contract position. Shaya recalled that her colleagues and supervisor “didn’t think it was appropriate. I’m not sure if they were familiar with it because it’s a green herb or whatever. So I apologized to everyone and I didn’t mean bad. But I was like, ‘Shoot. I should not have done that.’ And it’s something so minor.” Even though this experience didn’t affect Shaya’s “ability to do any work, it did affect my confidence.”

Shaya stated that “it’s these little experiences that can make or break people’s experiences. I mean, no one can understand what you’re saying, you do

things that are considered wrong, and it really affects you and your ability.” Shaya asked her “husband about the rules that I needed to know, so I don’t end up making more mistakes.” The problem, however, was that Shaya “did not know where to begin asking the questions. It’s like, I had to think about every step about work in Argentina and how it would be different here in Canada. Something small like the mate wasn’t something that I thought was a problem, but it actually was.” Shaya began “to observe more at work about the different practices, like the Canadians are very particular about taking their coffee breaks. It’s like you don’t ask them to do anything just before their break because they will tell you no.” She would not “ask anybody at work about my questions, I didn’t want to look stupid or for people to think, ‘Oh, look at her. She doesn’t know anything.’ I was lucky to have my husband to ask these questions.” Shaya emphasized that her “husband’s support was very important, as well as my own family’s constant encouragement” during this time. Their support and encouragement helped her “push forward” whereas for other immigrants who do not have the level of support Shaya had “may say, ‘No, no, no. This is not for me, I can’t do this’.”

### Proving her Worth

After finishing her contract position, Shaya decided she “wanted something better for myself.” She “did not want to waste any more time working in an awful job.” She enrolled to obtain her designation in certified management accounting (CMA) through the provincial regulatory body. This program was a “fast-track program that you had to do full-time. You could not work when you did the fast track. I think you take, like, a year and a half off from work and you

do the whole program.” Her attitude towards going back to school was one of “right here, right now. Now. No time to lose. Right away. The sooner, the better because I knew the more time I would lose, the worse it would be.” Before she could even begin the CMA program, the admissions committee told her they “would only accept thirty percent of my courses from Argentina.” Shaya was required to complete “all of the pre-requisites. There were twenty of them” before beginning the CMA coursework. She emphasized that they accepted approximately “seven or nine” of her pre-requisite courses from Argentina. Shaya continued working while completing her CMA designation as she “took individual lectures and courses” and was not enrolled in this program full-time.

When recalling how she completed her coursework for her CMA designation, Shaya stated that “in the beginning, I took a few courses through correspondence until I felt more comfortable with my English. Because it’s easier when you’re at home, you can work on your assignments by computer and translator, whatever.” Shaya stated that her “spoken English took a lot longer” to improve “than my writing and being able to interpret English from reading.” Shaya stated that she took “some classes, like knitting, just to meet people” and improve her spoken English. Once she felt more “comfortable” with her language skills, she “took lecture courses and did presentations.”

After completing her coursework, Shaya “wrote the exam, passed it, no problem.” She felt “very proud” passing her CMA examinations “in the sense that most Canadians would tell me, ‘Oh. The two exams everyone fails. They, they, the very first time they write it, they fail. Like, eighty percent chance of failing.’”

And I passed it no problem. And it was my second language, so I was like, I was very proud. Yeah. I was very, very proud.” Shortly after completing her CMA designation, Shaya completed “a two year post-graduate program in strategic leadership for two years.”

Shaya networked “a lot” during this time. She was quick to point out that she “didn’t network when I first came to Canada. I did it after, once I finished school. So I met a lot of people. Not initially, I was too shy.” It took Shaya “three years get the confidence I needed for networking.” She “made a few friends and was introduced to their friends.” Shaya also “volunteered at some events and met people that way.” Networking played a key role in Shaya’s job search; she was always looking for ways to meet new people and improve her chances at securing a good job.

After “a few months of searching,” Shaya found a “full-time job as a senior corporate accountant, so it’s pretty much a certified management accountant, just with a different title.” Re-entering her pre-migration occupation felt:

*Great. My husband was very, very, very, very pleased. Because I remember at the beginning, he was supporting me and I always felt like a burden. I mean, he met me as an accountant. He married me as an accountant. Suddenly, I’m nothing. And then I’m an accountant again so I’m the person that he married. I am me again.*

Re-claiming her identity as an accountant also improved “the quality of our life in the sense that we were able to build, start building something together.”

Shaya’s job as a senior corporate accountant provided her “with opportunities to show my talents and my skills. I was able to use what I learned

back home and also what I learned in school here.” She was given “a lot of responsibilities” and enjoyed working in a leadership position. While she stated that her “job can sometimes get boring, I’m working in my field again. I was determined to do it and to show that I could. I’m me again.”

### Excited Once Again

At the time of the interview, Shaya was on maternity leave from her position as a “senior corporate accountant” at a large organization where she had been working for approximately three years. Shaya stated that she is “considering something part-time, my own practice, seeing clients here and there. Or get something part-time.” Even though Shaya labelled the first few years of her life in Canada as a “dark time” during which her “husband was supporting me and I always felt like a burden,” it was clear that Shaya was now “excited about the different options that I have when I’m ready to go back to work.”

## Natalia

Natalia is a 55 year-old community development coordinator who immigrated to Western Canada with her husband and two daughters from Colombia in 1998. Natalia was born and raised in Colombia to parents of Spanish descent. Natalia's mother completed high school and worked in the family business and her father earned an undergraduate degree in business and worked as an accountant. He also held a position in his grandfather's shop, inherited the business, and managed it until passing away. Natalia's six siblings, two of whom reside in Canada and the rest in Colombia, all completed undergraduate degrees in Colombia and work as professionals in their respective fields.

## Working at the Top

Natalia described herself as "a good student" throughout high school and stated that the education she received in Colombia was well-rounded and "intense." She began learning English in high school, receiving "two hours of daily instruction" focusing on reading, writing, and spelling. During her final year of high school, the emphasis was placed "on spoken English." She then participated "in a one year exchange program in the United States" where she was able to improve her English. She completed an undergraduate degree in Colombia in international relations and diplomacy and "also did some continued education courses in communications."

While Natalia was completing her undergraduate degree, she met her boyfriend (who is now her husband). They began dating and their relationship soon became serious. "I was about to go into the master's degree but I met my

husband at the university,” she recalled. “He wanted to go for his master’s and I wanted to go as well.” Natalia decided that she would remain in Colombia while her boyfriend completed his master’s degree in Mexico because she “wouldn’t be able to work or do anything there.” After approximately two years apart, they got married. Eighteen months after their wedding, Natalia’s husband “finished his master’s and returned to Colombia” where he found a position “with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” By this time, Natalia had found “a great job” working as a top-level administrator in public relations and communications for a large international organization. Working at this international organization provided her with the “opportunity to talk with colleagues in English, write the reports in English. It was not just all in Spanish because it was an international organization.”

Natalia enjoyed a very comfortable standard of living in Colombia. She “had a person who usually goes six days a week every morning and do a massage on me. I had somebody going to my home every Saturday and doing my nails, manicure, pedicure, even she cut my hair.” She “didn’t have to worry about cooking or anything because I had a person at home.” Natalia’s office was six blocks away from her home. She commented: “So it was really nice because then I drove my daughters to school, that was two blocks away. And I went to work and then at lunch time I came home, have lunch with them and then go back to work.”

Natalia's husband was transferred to a different South American country for two and a half years. Natalia and her daughters stayed in Colombia at that time. The separation quickly took a toll on the family:

*So I said to my husband, "Okay you go there, I'll stay here." Because okay, the position is a lot of things. But the stress! My daughters are crying every day, "Oh, I miss daddy, can we call him again? Can we call him again?" I said there's no point. I was working overtime, then I had to hire somebody to do the homework with them. And I had to work, but there was no point. We were not having a life. He is alone, we were here, they've been crying.*

Natalia did not like how the separation was affecting her family so she shared that she "asked for a special leave and they grant me a special leave of two years, which is hard to receive. And they added to that all the vacation time that I had accumulated, so it was like almost three years." Natalia and her two daughters moved to the South American country where her husband was working in 1995 and remained there for almost three years. While the culture shock was difficult for her daughters, Natalia believes this experience "made the life of my daughters a little easier coming [to Canada] because they didn't felt that it was a big shock."

#### Seeking New Experiences Abroad

Natalia stated that her husband had always wanted to live in Canada: "My husband, since he was very little, he was always thinking about Canada, all his life, all his life." While her husband "was working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was in charge of what they call the U.S. desk and the Canadian desk, so that was part of his responsibility, so it gave him more people at a time. So he would say, 'Well, any point in time that I get to move from Colombia, I would like to go to Canada'." After her husband completed "the mission abroad, I told

him, ‘Okay, if we’re going to make the move, we make it now or we’ll never make it.’ He said, ‘Okay go ahead’.” Natalia and her husband submitted “all the papers” to come to Canada as skilled workers and within a few months, “we had all the visas, family passports, medical exams and everything. So I said, ‘Well it looks like it’s meant to be’.” At the time of migration, her eldest daughter was 13 and her youngest daughter was nine.

Natalia recalled being told at the Canadian Embassy in Colombia that “the only thing that we don’t do for you is we don’t find a job for you.” Natalia was not concerned because her attitude was “if I was able to find a job in Colombia, I can look for a job in here.” However, “they never tell you that once you start asking for a job, they’re going to tell you, ‘Oh, you don’t have Canadian experience’.”

### Where Can I Buy Canadian Experience?

Natalia, her husband, and their two daughters arrived in a Western Canadian city “in January and we were just rushing to find a house.” They “bought the house in a month” and Natalia and her husband quickly set their sights on “finding a place to open the store.” They also quickly found a school for their children. Natalia reported that she “did not approach any South American organization when I came to Canada because I said I have the language, I know more or less the system, I understand the American system so this might be very similar. So you can manage and navigate somehow.” Natalia and her husband’s plan was to open “a jewelry store” until both Natalia and her husband “found a job that would provide us with a comfortable life.” They “found a spot” for the

store “in a touristy area and we opened a store.” Natalia “set up everything and I told my husband, ‘Okay, now take over the store and I’m going to look for a job’.”

Natalia stated that the plan was for her “to start looking for a job and my husband manage the store.” Natalia described feeling frustrated when she saw the number of times “Canadian experience” appeared on job postings. She confronted a recruiter who, initially wanting to offer her a job interview, decided not to schedule the interview because she lacked Canadian work experience:

*The recruiter said, “You get everything, all the requirements to fit this position but you’re only missing just one little thing.” So I said, “What is it?” And she said, “Oh, you don’t have Canadian experience.” I said, “Well, if you tell me where I can buy it I can go right now, buy it and bring it for you.” She was, “Sorry?” “Well, I’m sorry but that’s a most stupid question you’re asking me. I’m telling you this is who I am and this is the kind of experience that I have, these are all the things that I have done. I know it matches the position that you are advertising, so what is it you want me to show you that I can work?” “Oh, you are missing Canadian experience” – I said, “Just let me know, explain to me because if I recently moved to Canada and I haven’t been working here, where do you have to go to get the Canadian experience? So what is the difference between the offices in Canada and the rest of the world? Do the computers hang from the ceiling? Do people go through the windows? What is the difference?” She didn’t have any answer, she couldn’t answer it.*

After searching for work for approximately four months, Natalia found a temporary (four-month) full-time position “working as an administrative assistant in a non-profit organization” which she described as “going backwards in my career.” In Colombia, she was “an administrator supervising a staff of 29 employees, so it was not exactly the same thing.” She described some significant differences with respect to “the way things were run as a community; how social marketing was interpreted in here was a different view.” Despite her

disappointment, Natalia “took the position” assuming that it would be “a stepping stone.” She recalled that at her initial interview, “They said, ‘A good thing if you come and work with us is that if there is a position you can apply and you will be considered as an internal candidate, which give you more possibilities than somebody from the outside’.”

Shortly after beginning to work at the non-profit agency, Natalia quickly became “bored. It’s just like routine the whole thing.” During the four months of the temporary position, a continuing full-time position within the same agency became available. One of Natalia’s co-workers told her to apply for the other position. Natalia noted “I applied for the position and I got an interview.” After the interview, she described “waiting and waiting and waiting and then I was told there’s going to be another interview.” She recalled receiving “a broadcast email the next morning saying, ‘We have hired somebody from the outside’.” Natalia felt misled about her chances of securing this position because she was told that one of the advantages of working in this temporary position was that she would be considered as an internal candidate. Natalia told the director that she was unsure if she “should take it as discrimination because I’m not Canadian yet? The guy couldn’t say anything at all.” Fortunately for Natalia, “there was another position, there was another series of interviews and then I got the position. So that’s why I got to stay.” She received “great comments” in her new position: “They would say beautiful things, ‘That was excellent, the organization, you put this together’.”

### Upgrading her Credentials...and Losing Her Job

During her fourth year with the agency, Natalia decided to “go back to university. I was starting to feel like a mediocre person.” She felt that obtaining Canadian credentials would help her to get a better job. She applied for, and was accepted into, “a master’s program at a university.” She obtained a reduced work schedule from work for the first semester so she could focus on her studies. In order to make up the income she would be losing by taking this leave, she mentioned that she “was a teaching assistant for the first semester. My husband and girls were very supportive during this time. And so things were working out somehow.”

Natalia recalled that at her place of employment, “everything worked perfect until the policy, they decided to change the whole thing.” The new policy involved “a change in assignment” for Natalia. She stated that “the person who took over that piece of training, she said she was getting too stressed. So at the end they call for some support and they call me, ‘Oh could you please give her a hand?’ ‘Yes sure.’ I gave her a hand.” Natalia phoned her place of employment “the day before to tell them I’m going to be late in the office. The day that Natalia provided assistance to her co-worker was “basically the day that I was, the first day of class, my TA assignment was starting that same day. So I went with the professor and then I went to work and then back to school with the professor.” Natalia stated that “the problems began when someone said, ‘She said she’s not coming.’ So that was the whole deal. Luckily, I had some witnesses with me, so

people said, they ask them a question, 'We were there and we know that she's coming late'."

Natalia stated that after the above incident, her superiors "were not trusting of me. If I wasn't sitting in my desk at 10:15, they were asking, 'Where is she?' 'Oh she's having coffee break'." She described "having to create signage for my door. Every time I was getting even washroom break, if went to the washroom I had to put up 'Washroom Break'." Her workload increased and she noticed "preferential treatment for the other people." Her "commitment to the agency was questioned" a few times.

Natalia became angry at the way she was being treated. She said that "luckily for me, I'm outspoken and when I'm really mad, I tend to be more clear and speak slowly." Natalia explained, "I did not have problems expressing myself in English." Natalia stated that standing up for herself was never something she hesitated in doing: "Sometimes, you go to a place and sometimes they just put you aside. No, I'm here. I was before. It's just you have to speak up, otherwise they push you aside. And do you have to shut your mouth? No, I won't." Natalia "went to the union representative" but stated that "this only made things worse." Her husband "knew what was happening and he support me all the way."

The stress of her work environment soon became overwhelming "to the point that I just couldn't even speak. I would try to speak and crying all the time, tears coming out of my eyes." She was also experiencing "migraines seven days a week." Natalia's husband was "running the store" because he "wasn't working because he hadn't found a job at the time." Natalia recalled "feeling helpless

because I couldn't do anything. I just wasn't able to leave that job because if I left that job it would have ended jobless, no money to put food on the table. My husband wasn't working, the two girls were in school. I was just like 'How do you manage the whole thing'? Yes, it was really hard." Natalia went "on stress leave" which included "counselling sessions." Natalia was still working on her thesis research and chose to collect her data in Colombia which allowed her to return to Colombia for four months. While she was there, she questioned "why did I come here? Why did I do it?" She eventually dismissed these negative thoughts by reminding herself of "who I am, where I came from," and what she has accomplished "because those will never taken away from you." Speaking of her four months in Colombia, Natalia expressed: "It was the best. I came back a totally brand new person."

Natalia successfully defended her master's thesis "six months after returning to Canada" which culminated in receiving a Master of Arts degree. During this time, her "husband was diagnosed with cancer." Natalia filed a complaint to the employment insurance officer because her employer denied her request to accommodate her work schedule in the same way they accommodated other co-workers. Natalia's "right was denied and I was told that if my husband had cancer, that was a much better reason to get another job." Her case was heard before a judge. In the end, she won her case, but lost a lot more than her job:

*Well, my family was stressed because, like you got to the point where it's like when they talk to you it's like a "No, no." It's just like a top on the stress is blowing, and at the same time feeling helpless because I couldn't do anything. I just wasn't able to leave that job because if I left that job I*

*would have ended jobless, no money to put food on the table. My husband was sick, he wasn't working.*

### Moving On

After her position was terminated, Natalia “wanted to apply for government positions” commensurate with her education and experiences. She explained that her “credentials were evaluated and I was told that in order to validate my credentials, they will take away the first year of university of the bachelor degree to match the 12 years of high school in Canada.” Despite having completed a master’s degree at a recognized Canadian university, Natalia’s undergraduate degree from Colombia “was not validated and was not the equivalent match at the university level in Canada.” Natalia was not able to apply for any government positions as a result, which made her feel “angry. I mean, this is ridiculous.”

Natalia went on to complete “some short-term contract work” in the non-profit sector and was offered her current position as the community development coordinator at a large non-profit organization where she began “on a short-term contract.” Natalia’s job keeps her “very busy” with her numerous and varied responsibilities, including overseeing “many different community programs, staff, and volunteers, attending meetings, and writing reports.” While not in her job description, her senior position at her current place of employment has allowed her to assist skilled worker immigrants wanting to re-enter their pre-migration occupations: “I’ve been working with different people in here, they come here and say, ‘Well, I don’t know what to do.’ I help them understand the system and how to move things around and that’s sometimes what the people need.”

### Successful Once Again

At the time of the interview, Natalia had worked as the community development coordinator at a large non-profit organization for three and a half years. She described her work as “very busy,” sometimes remaining at work late into the day for meetings. Her husband prepared dinner on the evenings when Natalia came home late from work. While Natalia felt angry and disappointed with her initial employment experiences, she stated her experiences served as a lesson for her daughters “about standing up for yourself. You don’t have to shut up your mouth. I mean at the same token, I’m not telling people be aggressive, and go and hit, no. You can speak up, be very respectful and the best way to tell the people about this is sometimes tell them with a smile.” Her daughters “are doing very well” and she is “proud of both of them.” Natalia still resides in the same Western Canadian city that she, her husband, and two daughters migrated to in 1998.

## Glenn

Glenn is a 59 year-old Professor Emeritus from the United States who migrated to a Western Canadian city with his wife in 1990. Glenn is a self-described “WASP” (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) born in the Eastern United States. His mother completed an undergraduate degree and worked as a secretary. His father earned a PhD and was a university professor. His eldest sister was a systems analyst prior to retirement and his middle sister is a librarian.

## Working Long Hours

Glenn completed his PhD at a well-known university in the eastern United States. He attributed his decision to become a professor to the strong academic values instilled in him by his parents: “My father was a professor so academic values and family values were pretty much the same for me.” He wanted to pursue a life as an academic and knew that relocation would be likely: “If you’re an academic, you have to realize that a willingness to move can be important to your career.” After completing his doctoral degree, Glenn found a job “as an assistant professor” at a university in the central United States where he and his common-law partner (now wife) resided for four years. After four years, he applied for, and successfully obtained a job as an assistant professor at a university in the southern United States.

Prior to immigrating to Canada, a typical week for Glenn consisted of “working quite a bit.” Glenn “was two years away from tenure review,” so he was working “long hours.” He described “working until midnight and, I don’t know, probably three nights a week, something like that.” He described the tenure

process as “uncertain and stressful at times”, not only challenging for Glenn, but also his wife. She did not have a community to join when she moved with Glenn to their new state. Glenn discussed the challenges his wife experienced during his five years at the university he was seeking tenure at:

*It was hard for [my wife], too, because we were there five years. She followed me there. And when you are a professor and you, I suppose it's true with any job but certainly when you're a professor, you're joining a community. You know they're ready for you to come, they want you to come - boom, but for spouses it's not like that.*

Glenn's schedule demanded a considerable amount of his time. In order to make it more enjoyable, he worked “in the outdoors” as often as he could. Glenn acquired “a small, old motor home” which he “would use a fair amount.” He stated, “Instead of going to work some days, if I had research to do, I would just drive my motor home to the park near where we lived and sit there and work and have fewer distractions. It was good for marking papers and stuff, so I did some of that.” When Glenn and his wife were not working, they “took the motor home and travelled a bit, vacationed. We'd drive off. It was great.”

### The Visit that Changed his Life

Glenn “came for a three-day visit” to a Western Canadian university in 1989 and “was offered a job with tenure.” Glenn remarked that:

*Twenty-one years ago, there were departments in the university that did not have to recruit first in Canada and [my discipline] was one of them. And there was truly a shortage of supply of Canadian Ph.D.s in [my discipline], they were still growing, and they were able to persuade the government of that case. And so they told me, “If you want to come, we do the paperwork and if we want you, we get you.” And I took their word for it and it worked that way.*

Glenn ended up turning down the offer because he was “risk averse.” Instead, he arranged to visit for an entire summer, taking the chance that he could regenerate the offer if his visit worked out. Not only was Glenn still interested in working at this university, but a “prominent faculty member” was still interested in hiring him. Glenn “accepted the offer” feeling confident that after having spent an entire summer at this university, he was able “to look below the surface, get to know the faculty.” He described his summer visit “like living together before getting married so you could get a better idea” if the job “would be a good fit.” This was important for him as a result of his experiences at his previous job:

*Actually, when I moved from [a university in the central United States] to a university in the Southern United States, I wasn't I wouldn't say unhappy, but I was disappointed with the culture. I thought a university was a university and it was quite socially conscious and there were some foreign faculty but they were sort of socially isolated. And I didn't like that and I thought that was weird, a little bit gossipy, stuff like that. And also, I went to there because I knew some of the people there; but then some of them left not long afterwards, I don't think because of me, but they had opportunities elsewhere. And so from that experience I thought it wise to look beneath the surface.*

Glenn stated that “the application process was really easy; it was a smooth process.” He was living “in a common-law relationship” with his current wife and they decided to get married prior to migrating to Canada. Language was “not an issue” for Glenn nor his wife as they were both born “native English speakers.” Prior to moving to Canada, Glenn’s wife “went to look for an apartment and found one pretty easily.” Moving to Canada from the United States was “straightforward” and did not present any challenges.

### Cultural Communication Differences on the Job

During the first few years of his life in Canada, Glenn described working “more normal hours,” which was “about 40 to 45 hours, something like that. It varies by season because when you’re teaching the other things don’t slow down; you’re still reviewing and you have research projects to keep moving along, so the hours go up and then they come back down again.” Glenn’s professorial job included many responsibilities, including “research, teaching courses, supervising graduate students, sitting on different committees, and administrative duties.” He was grateful for the change in the quality of life and a newfound sense of normalcy. As a tenured professor, Glenn loved the freedom that being a tenured professor afforded him:

*I liked that you didn’t have a boss watching over your shoulder. And they don’t really care what you do as long as the Dean doesn’t have students pounding on the door complaining and as long as you publish; you fill out an annual report and allow them to see that you’re making effective use of your time, having success. Aside from that, what you publish, as long as it’s in the area of your department, is really up to you. I liked the collegiality of it; I enjoyed the colleagues a lot, I enjoyed the intellectual stimulation in the environment.*

While the freedom of tenure was an important career value for Glenn, he believed that tenure also came with responsibility. He explained:

*It’s not just a job, it was a commitment; it was something that I believe in. And I took having tenure as a serious responsibility. It’s sort of like marriage in a way. So I felt strongly about caring about and nurturing the institution I’m at. And that led to some conflicts, particularly early on in my career...but I think that people thought that I had integrity and I was fair.*

Glenn’s values regarding tenure were put to the test early on in his academic career when:

*There was a push to change the hiring practice, at the end of the day, to explicitly allow for favouritism in hiring of women. And there were some faculty that were opposed to this and I didn't know these people. But I saw an article in [a publication] and it was written by a professor and she said that she was there for her women students. And I saw that and I just wrote my reply, see this is what I – and I said, “Well you know I think that most of us were there for all our students.”*

Glenn's reply to this publication soon garnered attention from some faculty in his university, who contacted him and learned that:

*I had some expertise in data analysis and the university had data on hiring of men and women. And so I asked for it and I analyzed it and I ended up writing a short article and I showed from the analysis that, based on the university data, that a woman applicant had twice the chance of being hired as a male applicant for the university as a whole, and six times the chance in Arts. So I just wrote that up. And I'm trained, like an applied statistician, of the scientific kind of – right; so I'm just writing up what the analysis says. But what was interesting was, immediately at the school I was at, like basically about half the faculty immediately disassociated themselves from me personally because I was not politically correct, I guess.*

Glenn described this career challenge as “unexpected” and that:

*It bothered me for a while. I was surprised. And I was kind of the new kid on the block too, right? I even got a little hate mail, but not much, a little taste. And I didn't think it was very professorial; but anyway. So I'm not one that needs to be loved by everybody and I never felt unsafe, but I was concerned and I was a bit upset.*

He continued to describe that it was “disappointing that half of the colleagues were like that” but was able to move past it by “getting over it and by giving it time.” Glenn emphasized that having tenure “helped a great deal in this situation” because he knew that he “couldn't be dismissed for what I wrote.” He was still able to maintain “good relations” with “the other half” of his colleagues, whom he “enjoyed a lot.”

Glenn pointed out that his approach to this situation likely came from a cultural difference between the United States and Canada with respect to

communication styles. In the United States, “if you did something, I’d talk to them about it.” Canadians, on the other hand, “are a little more indirect. It is a polite culture and it’s positive, but it also means that it’s a little bit hard sometimes for people to communicate in a more forthright manner, I think anyway.” Glenn was quick to point out that he “was not an activist,” but believed in “collective wisdom and responsibility. He felt that “in university, you have a responsibility to speak your mind and interject.” However:

*Having tenure, again, I hate to keep harping on that, but that certainly is a difference because before you have tenure you know when you’re fired. When they hire you, you know you’ll be fired in seven years if you don’t get tenure kind of thing, right. So it is quite different, you’re off probation is a way of putting it.*

Another career challenge that Glenn attributed to the “difference between the United States and Canada’s communication styles” also occurred during his first year in Canada where there was a situation in which a professor in his department “was using people. He was taking ideas that other people had and publishing all the papers without their name on it.” This professor’s actions had affected not only Glenn (“he’s done this to me actually with two ideas”), but also untenured professors and several graduate students. Glenn “didn’t talk to any of my colleagues about this, actually. I went to him. I stood up to him which led to some conflict later on.” Glenn stated:

*I don’t think the situation hurt me because I’ve been there 21 years and I’m not like a politician, I’m not in a position of great power or anything. So most of the contact is, well you know what it’s like. It’s pretty small scale. But I think that people thought that I had integrity and I was fair, and I like people, I respect people, I enjoy people.*

Glenn pointed out again that Canadians “are a little more indirect”, so he didn’t anticipate the conflicts that ensued between him and the colleague and perceived a “clash” in communication styles. Because of his strong belief in the need to “speak your mind”, he maintained his more direct communication style despite confronting these cultural differences on the job, and just began to recognize the differences and “expect some reactions sometimes.” At the same time, the problematic professor left the university and the hiring issue was resolved, both in Glenn’s first year in Canada, removing these sources of conflict.

#### Earning His Pay – and Retirement

Glenn accepted a pre-retirement phase out plan where he reduced his work days/hours leading to eventual retirement at the age of 58. His “feelings about the work had changed.” He was beginning to have “difficulties concentrating” and mustering up the energy and enthusiasm for his work. Being a naturally outgoing and social person, he was beginning to struggle with the solitary work often required in academia.

*...everything’s in front of the computer, almost, if you’re analyzing data. If you talk to people, we were just analyzing data about people and writing papers and I’d been sitting in front of a monitor of some sort or another since the ‘70s. And the view doesn’t change very much and I was kind of tired of it. I found it increasingly difficult to make myself do it...it was a struggle.*

Glenn found that once he “got away from the computer monitor and the keyboard, that proved to be a good thing to do and a lot of my unhappiness went away.” At the time of the interview, he was “at work four days last week and four days the week before, so it’s not as much different as I’d like.” However, “the

main difference is I don't feel I have to be there. I feel like I earn my pay. And I get more exercise, quite a bit more, four or five days a week of real stuff." At the moment, Glenn is "pushing right now to finish these papers" so he can enjoy his upcoming travel plans. After he completely disengages from his position as a university professor, Glenn and his wife "plan to retire" in the Western Canadian city where they have lived for the past 21 years. "It's a good place to live," Glenn said. "It's a safe city, it's a much safer environment. The quality of life is really good. My wife nor I want to move."

## Julia

The sixth interview presented is with Julia, a 58 year-old elementary school teacher who immigrated to Western Canada from the Philippines with her husband and infant daughter in 1978. Julia was born in the Philippines and identifies as Filipina. Her mother earned a high school diploma and owned a dress shop. Her father completed high school along with some post-secondary studies in agriculture and worked as a merchant. Julia noted that her father assisted his wife with household and childcare duties, which was uncommon for Filipino men. All of Julia's siblings, except for one sister, live in Canada.

## Living Well

Julia was born into a "large Filipino Catholic family" with 11 brothers and sisters. She reported having "a great life in the Philippines" surrounded by numerous family members. She completed her undergraduate degree in education when she was approximately 21 years old. Julia stated that "in the Philippines, everything was taught in English, except when you were taking a Filipino course then that would be Filipino. That's our national language. You went to college and they spoke in English using American books and everything. So the books that we used were from the States."

Immediately after completing her undergraduate degree, she began working as an elementary school teacher. Julia stated that teaching "is the lowest paid profession in the Philippines" and that individuals who chose to become teachers was "because you wanted to do it. It's not because of the pay, but because you wanted to be a teacher, it's your passion." Being a teacher in the

Philippines “is a lot of work, a lot of work. The conditions are not great. There were no materials, nothing. Like, I wanted to do something, but the money wasn’t there because I taught in a public school, which is a different education system than the private system. There were usually 45 students in one class.” Despite the difficult working conditions, Julia “was passionate about teaching.” She worked as a teacher for four years prior to migrating to Canada.

Julia enjoyed a “comfortable life” in the Philippines. She stated that “the quality life is all about wellness, you know. I don’t even know if that was wellness. I never went through, like, teenage problems or youth problems, like having problems with emotions or relationships because I didn’t have any.” A few months before she graduated from university, she met her current husband who “courted me.” She described this courtship as “old-fashioned. We were dating and I kind of looked forward to that because we would go to the mall and we would have a nice dinner. And then we would go for a walk and come back and dad will be waiting for me.”

While employed as a teacher, she “was working and living with my mom and dad.” Julia recalled that “my mom would wake up my dad and I and then we would all have breakfast. Everything’s ready for me. And then I would eat that and I would go to work, which took about half an hour. I took the public transportation and would go there.” Julia taught “for about eight hours a day in the Philippines. It was a long school day.” At the end of the work day, she “came home and dinner was ready for me. My mom and dad would be there to make my dinner. And then I just hang out a little bit and then go to bed, wake up the next

morning and then you do that again.” Saturdays were spent “hanging out with brothers and sisters and then we went to church.” Julia described her life in the Philippines as a “normal routine, it was nice, like it wasn’t very stressful. I noticed that I was teaching, but it wasn’t stressful.”

Julia married her husband when she was 23 years old. One year later, Julia “got pregnant with my first daughter,” who was born in the Philippines. By the time she turned 25, “my parents and many of my siblings had already left the Philippines.” Julia wanted to be geographically closer to her immediate family, so “I asked my husband if he was willing to move to where my family was.” Her husband agreed and Julia began the application process, which she described as “long, but pretty okay.” Less than a year later, Julia (who was pregnant with her second daughter), her husband, their infant daughter left for Western Canada.

### Trying Something Different

When Julia and her family arrived in Canada, they “stayed with my parents for the first few months.” She gave birth to her second daughter a few months after arriving in Canada. Her husband, an engineer, immediately began looking for a job while Julia “stayed at home looking after the girls.” Julia decided to return to work when she noticed she had “gained some weight” as a result of “living a less active lifestyle. I wanted to get healthier and spend some time outside of the house,” so she began looking for full-time employment.

Initially, Julia did not want to re-enter teaching: “I came and said, ‘I don’t think I’m ready to do that,’ to put in all that work to teach. I thought if I work in an office, sit in front of my desk that was probably better.” Instead, she applied

for, and successfully obtained, a full-time clerical position “with the provincial government” where she remained for seven years. Her “parents offered to look after my girls” while she and her husband were working. Julia stated she “paid my parents some money to look after the girls. It was the right thing to do; they helped us out so much.” By this time, Julie shared: “we had moved to our own apartment.” Julia’s full-time position with the provincial government allowed her “to walk to work from our apartment.” Julia recalled that “people thought I didn’t have money to pay for the bus. They’d just say, ‘I saw you walking’, they kind of look down on you because you were walking. I would have my back pack and at the end of the day, I’d go to the bathroom and change into my runners and I would be walking again.” Just two years after moving to Canada, “we already bought a house.”

Julia described her first few years of working life in Canada as “routine.” She remembered having to “plan quite a bit because we had two small children.” Her husband would “drop off the girls in the morning at my parents, we would both work for eight hours, come to mom and dad, take them and go home, and that was our day.” Weekends were spent “cleaning the whole house. I would be baking; I’d be cooking up like a storm. So it was a routine for me. It was very routine.” This routine did not come without its challenges:

*We had to have some kind of a system to do it so that it’s more organized because if you’re not organized, that’s when the stress comes. Not that I’m saying we were not stressed, maybe we were, we just didn’t know what it meant at the time. But maybe we were a little bit stressed at the time, but that’s – when I look back, I thought but that’s how we did it.*

Julia felt grateful to “have mom, dad, and my sisters around, we would get together.” The family support she received was undoubtedly helpful when she experienced racism at work and social functions, something which she states she continues to experience:

*The racism, you know what, it's always there. Like, I've noticed that if you are a visible minority, you will see that right away, how they treat you. People, in terms of you're there, you are in a social event, when I first came out here, and you're a visible minority, they will not come to you. They'll approach someone of their kind. So it's there you know. Sometimes it's not – it's deep seated; it's right there sometimes. It has gotten better now but it's still there. You cannot say that it's gone.*

Julia noticed that when “they hear you speak English, ‘Oh, you’re okay because you’re speaking English.’ And then more so once they found out that you’re a professional, it gets better. And so they show you a little bit more respect. Then it becomes a different ballgame.” Even in her own neighbourhood, Julia stated that “when they know you’re a professional, they treat you a bit different. Racism will always be there. You don’t notice it, but you could feel it.”

Despite the racism and prejudiced attitudes she faced, and continues to face, Julia tried to ensure that she befriended individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. She did not “want to be around all White people, I don’t want to be around all Filipino people.” She has always strived to “try to have a multicultural friend because to me being here in a multicultural country, even when I was younger at the time, I always wanted to have a mix of friends, not just friends that are Filipinos. I want to have people from different cultures because that’s how you grow.”

Julia stated that initially, “the job was fine,” but she eventually grew weary of the “lack of stimulation and challenge” of office work. She took “a typing class” thinking that it would provide her with the challenge she needed “to be able to do the office work.” She quickly realized that she “was not happy working there.” She felt that she was compromising her quality of life by continuing to work for the provincial government:

*Very important for me is the quality of life. This is what I said to myself and to my husband, “If we were to work, we might as well be happy at what we do.” I did not want to be working eight hours a day and sitting there and being watched because I wasn’t busy and not being able to do anything and just pretending to be busy. That really, really is very, very difficult for me. And so we have to find a way to realize our dreams.*

#### Going Back to School: “Now it’s your turn”

Julia’s husband, who was trained as a licensed engineer in the Philippines, “wasn’t happy, either” working as a designer “even though he was getting paid good money.” Julia recalled that her husband “would come home and he’d say that he would be training people at the office and he wasn’t an engineer at that time. He wanted to be an engineer.” Julia knew that “we got to find a way to realize our dreams. And how are we going to do it? We have to give up something.” She and her husband discussed what it would mean for him to go back to school at that time:

*I said to [my husband], “You know what, if we give up stuff that we have now” this was in ’85, “If we give up what we have, in the end we will be – give up and go back to school, in the end we would have materials and we will have happiness inside us, because we would be doing what we want to do.” And so we had decided to give up our house and go back to the apartment.*

Julia and her husband “sold the house and gave up a lot of things” so her husband could attend school full-time in order to obtain his engineering license. Her husband “had to give up his job” in order to go to school full-time and would only work “during the break in the semester. He would be working April, May, June, July, August and then would go back to school in September. And that’s when we realized that, ‘Hey, it’s only four months. It’s nothing’.” During this time, Julia became the primary breadwinner, which concerned her because “I wasn’t making that much money.” She would remind herself and her husband that the sacrifices they were making would be worth it in the future:

*But he went to school and I said, “Can you imagine when you’re done what could happen? You’ll be happy. You will be happy plus you will be happy with your job, plus we can probably afford what we want later on.” And so that’s just how I was thinking at the time. Nothing big.*

After two years of full-time studying, Julia’s husband obtained his engineering license. Julia recalled him telling her, “‘Now it’s your turn.’ I said, ‘My turn? I don’t want to go back to school twice in my lifetime, forget it’.” Julia applied for a teaching position at an elementary school, “but they wouldn’t take me because I didn’t have my teaching certificate.” Despite her reservations about returning to school, Julia “was feeling a bit insecure about not being able to do what I was trained for. And I did not want that feeling.” All she wanted to do was “to be able to work here with the same line of work I was doing in the Philippines. That’s what my goal was.”

Julia decided “to go back to school after ten years” in order to increase her chances of working as a teacher again. She “welcomed the challenge to be

educated in North America - that was the most important thing for me. I challenge myself, I said I'm a Filipino and if I could just do this then it'll be, like I can wave the flag and say I can do it....To me, to be able to challenge the educational system here is very important.”

Julia stated that going back to school was:

*...hard for me because I didn't go to school for 10 years, my brain was kind of rusty. It was hard. The system was different and I studied day and night and I was telling my family, they would just laugh every time I'd tell, "You know what? I studied day and night and I was just not making the grade." I came home and I had all my books and I would read. And gosh I wasn't understanding it; I did not have the experience.*

Having been out of school for a decade was not Julia's only challenge in going back to school at the age of 36:

*Doing it in English was hard. I was able to understand, but not the greatest because I was young at the time. I believe that with experience and age you get better at listening. And I considered myself young at the time. I taught for four years. When we were in class, if they asked for examples on classroom management, I was able to share better than some I guess that helped.*

Julia was concerned that the teaching certificate program would take too long to complete so she decided to “go to the education counsellor.” She described being upfront and honest with the counsellor about her concerns with the teaching certificate program. “I said, ‘You know what? This is my second time in university and time is not on my side. I just want to be able to teach’.” During her meeting with the counsellor, Julia emphasized how difficult it was for her to voice her concerns to someone in a position of authority at the university: “I said to him, ‘Listen, I was brave enough to come and say I don't have all of this time. I'm a mature student’.” Julia made it clear that she was “not going to do

something I've done before. They wanted me to take a prerequisite before I would be able to take a course. And I said, 'I only have two years. That's all I'm giving'." Julia's assertiveness paid off:

*I said, "I'm only going to be teaching elementary. Why would you like me to do all this big stuff?" So they said, "Okay, you don't have to do that stuff." So I asked them if I can do a minor in special education and they gave me permission. "Oh yes, you can do that, do a minor on Special Ed." I think we have to do that. You just have to assert yourself. Communication is important and we need to be assertive sometimes to be heard.*

Julia "thought if I had a minor in special ed. that would be good in my resume. And that's what happened. I said, 'This is what I want.' And if you did not assert yourself, they're just going to make you do things that you've done before. What for?" Despite the difficulty of this teaching program, she "persevered and I had nobody to ask for help about the materials. My girls were young and my husband didn't know anything about teaching. It was hard for me. It was not easy." Julia acknowledged that what helped her most was her husband's support: "He's always been one hundred percent supportive of everything that I do. So that's helped me a lot, first thing, yes the first thing that helped me." Next, she described her gratitude for the support she received from her parents and siblings: "My whole family is all rooting for me. They're happy that I'm doing it so that gave me the strength to keep moving because they're looking up at me. They believe that I can do it so I have to show them that I can do it." Not only did Julia want to show her family that she could successfully complete her studies, but she also wanted to show her daughters that "that everything is possible for immigrant people, that we can be successful, too. And I

want my girls to see a good role model.” Her faith in God also allowed her to “give me the strength to continue. Prayer is very important.” Julia’s efforts, along with the support she received from her family and her faith in God, paid off: She completed her teaching certificate, along with a minor in special education, in two years.

### “I Made It”

Immediately after completing her teaching certificate and minor in special education, Julia “applied for a job to teach in elementary school.” She was successful; shortly after applying for several teaching positions, she obtained a full-time position as an elementary school teacher. Julia described no longer feeling “insecure about not being able to do what I was trained for. I’ve always been true to myself and I did it. I made it.” Her husband, children, parents, and siblings “were all rooting for me. They’re happy I’m doing it.” A few years after she began teaching, Julia and her husband purchased “a nice home we were happy and comfortable in.” By this point, Julia had been living in Canada for a decade, which she stated allowed her to feel much more confident with her linguistic skills:

*I guess being here talking and working with English-speaking coworkers is helpful. It’s a natural thing that happens and it gets better with time. And then of course I have a passion for reading and then you kind of pick a few things there, too. You get better at it somehow.*

After several years of teaching, Julia began to notice that her “spirit was dampened” as a result of “the monotony of being in school and seeing the same people all the time and thinking – and hearing negative things. It kind of dampens

you.” She decided to enrol in a four year part-time certificate program in theological studies. Julia was “excited to go to school and sit with people that have the same wavelength as me.” Julia “was there for four years and I absolutely loved it and I looked forward to, every time that I would have school, I would look forward to it.”

### Living a Balanced Life

Julia is employed full-time as an elementary school teacher in the same Western Canadian city she migrated to in 1978. Julia stated that “I look forward to my work. I look forward to coming to work because I love what I do and I love the kids. I like to communicate and I look forward to being with professionals.” After work, Julia goes “to the gym, swim, or exercise” and then “I’ll come home. I just take a little break, sit on my rocking chair and just kind of close my eyes and just think about the rest of my day.” She tries “to make food on the weekend so I don’t have to rush myself and cook” on weeknights. Julia stated that she and her husband “can go out to dinner whenever we can now, unlike before when we were young that was not possible. So all these things make life even better.” After having dinner with her husband, they will “go for a walk together.” She enjoys spending time “with my grand-daughter and my daughters.” At the time of this interview, her daughters are currently completing post-secondary and graduate studies. She is very health conscious and takes the time to learn about non-traditional forms of healing and wellness. Julia and her husband travel regularly and have visited a number of countries. Julia acknowledged that her journey in Canada “was hard work, but rewarding.”

## Abraham

Abraham is a 64 year-old professional engineer who immigrated to Western Canada from the Philippines with his wife and infant daughter in 1978. Abraham was born in the Philippines and identifies as Filipino. His mother was a homemaker who completed a two year college diploma before her ten children were born. His father completed a master's degree in chemistry in the United States and worked as a research chemist and professor. Most of Abraham's siblings are educated professionals and reside in the United States and Australia.

### An Ordinary, "Happy-Go-Lucky Guy"

Abraham followed a technical stream in high school "which created a path to what I am now because it's pretty much all mechanical." While attending high school, he developed "an insatiable interest in the applied sciences, particularly in physics, chemistry and mathematics." He discovered he "was good in drafting. Yes, that's where I developed the expertise." Learning drafting encompassed "not only drawing circles and squares and lines, but there's an applied science that you need to know to put that, to go to that design." His skills led him to complete an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering from an exclusive technical university in the Philippines. After completing his degree, Abraham "also enrolled in electrical engineering, because mechanical and electrical complements each other in practice." While completing his electrical engineering courses, he concurrently began to work as a mechanical engineer.

Abraham described himself as an “ordinary, happy-go-lucky guy” who lived a comfortable life in the Philippines. A typical day in Abraham’s life as an engineer involved “waking up in the morning, preparing my breakfast and yes, I go to work.” For lunch, Abraham and his colleagues would usually “go to this eatery.” At the end of the day, Abraham would “go home to have dinner and sometimes go out with friends.” He stated that this “was a typical day for me.”

### Honouring My Wife’s Wish

Soon after he began working as an engineer, Abraham met a woman, who became his current wife. “We were dating and courting her was a bit of a challenge, knowing how many brothers she has. So I have to behave myself,” Abraham recalled.

Abraham and his wife got married “in ’77 and we were blessed with our first daughter who was born almost a year later.” By this time, his wife’s family “had all moved to Canada except for one who had some issues with Canada immigration.” Abraham did not have “any plan or anything to come over.” In fact, Abraham “was about to be dispatched in the Middle East” by his employer, but he wanted to honour his wife’s wishes to be closer to her family. “It was my wife who pretty much wanted to go. I’m just tagging along.” Abraham recalled his officemate commenting, “‘You know what, if I were to go elsewhere, Canada is the place, there’s more opportunities there.’ And that enticed me even more to come over.”

Prior to migrating to Canada, all Abraham “initially knew about Canada is Canada Dry.” He was also “worried about the extreme cold weather in Canada”,

as friends had told him that “in Canada, when you spit, your spit, by the time it hits the ground it’s already ice.” Abraham recalled “feeling that we’re going into a strange place that you have little knowledge about. And you begin to worry about life’s uncertainties when you get there.”

Abraham described the application process as “straightforward.” At the time of his migration, there were many opportunities for engineers in Western Canada: “Engineers were in demand in Canada.” He and his wife “were going to the city where my wife’s family was.” Abraham recalled “as we approached the travel coming down here, I’m beginning to learn more and more about Canada.”

### An Engineer in Hiding

Abraham, his wife, and infant daughter moved to Canada in 1978. They lived with his wife’s parents “until we got our own apartment.” A few months after arriving in Canada, Abraham’s wife “gave birth to our second daughter.” At first, Abraham did not have many concerns about re-entering engineering considering his training and experience: “From my training in the Philippines, the kind of work is pretty much the same when I came over.” Unfortunately, he “quickly realized that I wasn’t going to work as an engineer right away. I had to start at the bottom, pretty much like starting from square one.” This meant “starting to work as a design drafter.”

Abraham began looking for work immediately after arriving in Canada. He was concerned about being overqualified for drafting positions so he used the following strategy: “I tried to revise my resume not to mention about things that I’ve been doing in the Philippines. Yes, I was not honest at that time, but there are

some underlying reasons why I did that, though. I just wanted to secure that job in the bag.” Abraham recalled when he “first came, the white stuff start to fall. There’s white stuff falling out there, so we’re kind of excited to see our first snow fall. And then I came to realize, holy cow, now I’m going out there to find work in that kind of weather.” He recalled one particularly “cold and messy day,” while waiting at the bus stop, “it really got cold that I had to find a shelter from the cold.” He “managed to find one from an office just across the street.” While waiting inside the bus shelter, “I saw the sign there, ‘Wanted: Draftsman’; so why not? So I gave my resume for the job and shortly after, the bus came and went.” By the time Abraham arrived home, “here comes the wife running, ‘Hey hey hey! You got a phone call! A guy phoned you and he wanted you to back there on this date and that.’ I went back to that office and eventually got the job. And the guy who hired me, he’s from New Delhi.”

Abraham recalled that his employer, “a guy from India,” faced similar obstacles:

*He got an M.Sc. in engineering in the States. He moved to Canada to join his wife-to-be who was already established and settled here. A graduate engineer, he started to pursue his license to practice in Canada. The people up here I think they just probably not familiar about the program that he has so he took the same exam, the same pattern that I had. He took the exam, proved that he’s worth it and he became an engineer.*

As previously mentioned, Abraham purposely omitted from his resume his engineering experience in the Philippines in order to secure the draftsman position. After receiving his “first assignment, which was scheduled for completion in a week, it took me just, I don’t know, six hours or something like that. So now he became suspicious.” His employer asked Abraham, “Okay,

you're not telling me – I know you can do more than this and you're not telling me something.” Abraham replied “So I said ‘Okay, well, I’ve got a wife who doesn’t drive, we’ve got a nine month-old baby and I’ve got to find work somehow to pay the bills. Apartment rent is up, too.’ And then he found out that, yes, I’m a trained engineer.” Abraham’s employer understood his plight “because he undergone the same experience.” Within “three months of starting my job,” Abraham “was upgraded to a higher level and now I’m doing real stuff.” He received promotions “every six months. He was just trying to elevate me to a level that would correspond with what I am capable of doing.”

### Getting Certified

Despite “making good money as a design drafter,” Abraham knew that he wanted to become recognized as an engineer in Canada, so he decided to “apply for my certification.” Like many skilled worker immigrants, he was asked “to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language. Perhaps Canada may not realize that we were once a Commonwealth of the United States having adopted English as the medium of instruction in education.” Challenged by this, Abraham said, “‘Bring it on. I’ll take it’.” Abraham passed the TOEFL “with flying colors. Then came the issue with my credentials. ‘It’s not that we don’t recognize your degree but it’s the engineering program that needs to be accredited’.” Essentially, “my degree was okay, but they said ‘you can take the exam or there’s an equivalent course that you can take rather than take the exam. For every exam, there’s two equivalent courses’.” Abraham was assessed to take “three confirmatory exams on courses that were based on your experience. Okay, that’s fair. I’ll take the

chance.” Abraham successfully passed two confirmatory examinations and then “challenged himself to take two equivalent courses at [a university] in lieu of one of those exams left to satisfy the [professional regulatory body’s] requirement.” This gave him “the opportunity to experience attending a North American university.

Overwhelmingly interested, Abraham decided to take “additional courses which are not even required just to get the feel and experience.” Abraham came to the realization that engineering education is global; “Even the textbook used in one of my engineering design courses is exactly the same text we’re using in the Philippines. It’s an American text, yes.” When asked why he took extra courses, which amounted to “two years of full-time studies,” Abraham stated:

*It’s part of the challenge I think, Anoosha, that I have to prove something that we foreign trained is capable of accomplishing whatever the other guy can do. Because I feel like I do have the training and why waste it? Use it. And for the other guy who doesn’t seem to have – like yes, I’ve seen people, doctors, it’s just blows my mind kind of thing. When you find trained medical doctors over at Safeway doing odd jobs – I felt like, don’t they feel degraded or something like that. It just mind boggling, because if I compare it to what I have accomplished and to what we’ve gone through, if I can do it then I’m sure they can do it, too. But then again, as I said, it’s really up to the individual – I cannot do it for him, he has to do it himself.*

During the two-year period he was taking classes full-time, “to lessen our financial burden,” he “gave up our home of four years to live in an apartment.” Abraham’s wife was working full-time supporting the family “and my wife’s parents were looking after my daughters.” In the end, he received a certificate in mechanical engineering, as well as his professional engineering designation. He attributed his academic and professional success to his daughters as inspiration:

*And the other thing too, Anoosha, is that at that time [my daughters] were my inspiration. I've got to give my kids a good future and in so doing I can't give this kid a good future just by if I were just to work at McDonald's. And that kind of thing, and realizing that I have the experience and I have that training, make use of it. So realizing that, how do I use it? Well, you have to be certified to make use of your experience and training to full potential. Okay, so those challenges, you just have to take it because I know you can do it.*

Abraham also acknowledged the role of his employer in his occupational success:

“He’s also part of the success that I’m having, that I had at that time. It’s just him being there as mentor and adviser. He fast tracked my intent.”

Another factor that Abraham indicated helped his family manage the financial challenges of him going back to school for an extended duration and the struggle to re-enter his profession was his faith. Abraham’s strong faith in God allowed him not only to keep persevering with his goal of working as a mechanical engineer, but to feel hopeful about his family’s future in Canada: He explained that his mentality was really “Don’t worry, God will provide, that kind of thing. God will not abandon us, will not forsake us.” These words are often uttered “when in a difficult situation.”

While Abraham denied any racism or discrimination at the workplace, he did recall his first racist encounter en route to Canada:

*My daughter was just nine months then and I think we have a stopover in Japan to pick up some passengers and there’s this couple when they saw us; they wouldn’t sit beside us for some reason, I don’t know. But then there’s this happy-go-lucky Vancouver guy approached, “Oh I’ll sit there, what the heck. Nice baby you’ve got there.” That was our first racism in Canada.*

He described other situations outside of the workplace whereby he encountered

“negative attitudes and you don’t know why.” Abraham had heard that

“Canadians, they’re polite, they want to show – they’re very nice facing them, but once you turn back, they change their attitudes. I don’t know what’s happening.” He knows that “you have to understand them and surely they’ll understand you in return. If you show them respect - we get respect, so that’s the main thing.” For Abraham, “having that piece of framed paper on the wall sometimes helps. People give you due respect now that you are somebody. I don’t know why, that you have to be somebody to be reckoned with sometimes, I do feel that.”

Abraham felt that his level of proficiency in English when he first arrived in Canada enabled him to “communicate, but sometimes the comprehension takes a bit longer.” He did not take any English classes in Canada. He recalled “asking people, ‘Can you rephrase that in a layman’s term?’ that kind of thing for me to better understand. It was a challenge.” One of the biggest challenges for Abraham was giving presentations at work. He recalled feeling nervous the first time he had “to do this project presentation. Can you imagine all eyes are on you?” He “got through” the presentation by imagining “that there’s nobody there sitting and looking at me, so I just go on, go on, go on.” He described feeling confident after the presentation because “they did understand what I’m talking about because they’re raising questions about the subject. That’s an indicator that they, in fact, understood what you’re trying to tell them.”

### On the Move Again

After working at the company where he started as a design drafter for approximately eight years, Abraham and his family moved to the United States for two years “because it was part of my wife’s quest. She wanted to teach. Now

if she can get a North American experience probably she can get the certification. So we ended up in the U.S., where she taught for two years.” Abraham tried to find employment, “which I almost did successfully, until they ask me, ‘Do you have a green card?’ And I said, ‘Well it’s in the process.’ ‘Well, I’m sorry, sir, but we need to know whether or not you have a green card because that’s the only way’.” After two years of residing in the United States, Abraham and his wife moved back to the Canadian city in which they had lived “because I can’t find a job down there, so I told my wife, ‘It’s not going to work, come up here’.”

After returning to Canada, Abraham applied to several engineering companies “and I found a job as an engineer within a few months of returning.” He stated the transition “went smooth.” The company which he has been working for over twenty years had several projects in different provinces, which Abraham could not work on “because I didn’t have the registration for other provinces, just in the province where I live.” Abraham did not understand, and continues to be puzzled by, “why we have to register here and not being recognized in [other provinces]. So now I have two registrations only because I need to have a registration in [another province] because we have projects out there that need to be certified by an engineer with registration from that province.” Having two registrations has helped Abraham’s career advancement. Obtaining this second registration “wasn’t really difficult for me.” While travelling is not a regular part of his job, he “used to occasionally go to [different province] to work on some projects, but it wasn’t that often.” He has “no major complaints about the job - sometimes you have hard days, but I have a good job.”

## Being a Mentor

Abraham currently works full-time as a senior mechanical engineer. He enjoys “the challenge of working in a constantly changing field,” as well as meeting other engineers from around the world. Abraham is in a position to provide letters of reference for junior engineers and he takes great pride and responsibility in this role. He is particularly happy to mentor professional immigrants wanting to re-enter the engineering field. He advises them to “try and get into your field because that’s where you trained and you know very much what’s been done in that kind of work.” Abraham insists that “if I can do this, then so can they. I am not one of the lucky ones” to re-enter his pre-migration occupation and that what skilled workers need to do is:

*Just be persistent. Just believe in yourself. You have the training and background. You have to have that drive, like an outlook in the future. But then again, it’s just me, in my own, from my experience. But I think it applies to them if only -- and again, persistence, persist. You fail, that’s for sure, I know. We’re human. But don’t take that as a total failure. You can try again. You fall, get up, and move on.*

Abraham and his wife are both physically active and enjoy travelling and spending time together outdoors. Abraham recently welcomed the arrival of his first grandchild and is thrilled to spend time with her.

## Maria

The eighth participant presented is Maria, a 31 year-old biomedical engineer who immigrated to Western Canada, alone, from Mexico in 2005. Maria was born in Mexico to parents of Mexican and Lebanese descent and identifies as Mexican. Her mother has a bachelor's degree and worked as a teacher before her children were born. Her father earned a master's degree in business administration and currently works for a large company in the transportation industry in Mexico. Maria's brother and sister are both successful professionals in Mexico with advanced degrees.

### It's a "Wonderful Life"

Maria described having "a wonderful life" in Mexico. She "was from the upper middle-class" and comes from "a very big family" with numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins. From the age of 6 until she completed high school, Maria was enrolled in "an English immersion program at school." Furthermore, she used to "spend summers with the same host family in the United States" from the ages of 9-22 to improve her fluency in English. The English immersion program, coupled with her summers, allowed Maria to achieve a level of fluency in English that is almost at the level of a native speaker.

Upon completing high school, Maria began her Bachelor of Science in biomedical engineering. She described her undergraduate degree as being "half theoretical and half practical." Part of the practical experience of her degree entailed the successful completion of an internship in the final year of her program. Maria "thought it would be funner to do the internship abroad

somewhere.” She “had a Mexican contact” in a large central Canadian city who “offered not a job but a project that I could help with in a hospital,” which she accepted. Maria “went there for six months and lived kitty corner from the hospital in this building that was kind of like a furnished building that are for temporary stays.” It was in this building where Maria met Adam, “who was also in that city for work purposes.” They became friends and, eventually, they “became boyfriend and girlfriend.” When Maria’s internship came to an end, she “went back to Mexico because I thought it was a fling.”

Upon returning to Mexico, Maria “went back home, got the full degree, and started working two months after graduating” as a biomedical engineer. She worked for a “private company that sold and maintained cardiovascular equipment and minimally invasive surgical equipment. We also gave in-services to nurses or even doctors of how to use the machines, everything. So anything that has to do with a medical device in the hospital, anything, we’re involved.” Her position required a high level of organization and numerous responsibilities as she was “the only one in charge of the equipment in four hospitals.”

Despite working longer hours in Mexico compared to her current position in Western Canada, she reported having enjoyed “a very comfortable lifestyle.” She “had a lot of luxuries” including frequent “manicures, a maid, and I had a driver to take me places, like when I went out dancing so I didn’t have to worry about how to get home.” Weekends were spent “at the weekend house with family or friends.” Maria would “wake up, chill around the pool, swim, play pool, ping pong. At night, we’d go out or play cards or dominos.”

### Moving for Love

Maria maintained regular contact with Adam. After one year of corresponding via telephone and email, Adam went to Mexico to visit Maria and during his visit, she told him that she was willing to move to Canada. Maria maintained a realistic attitude about moving to Canada: "I'm willing to move to [western Canadian city] to see what the relationship brings for us, right, because if we stay long distance we're going to break up eventually. And we love each other so much, why should we break up?"

Prior to visiting Adam, Maria "asked every person I knew in biomedical engineering in Mexico if they knew somebody in the field in [Western Canadian city]." She obtained "a couple of contacts and wrote emails to them and got interviews with them." Maria recalled that "instead of visiting Adam, for five days I did information interviews. It was more like working, a network kind of thing." When she met with these contacts, "they all told me, 'Oh, you've got to come study because, even if you're really good, it's hard for us to give you a job if you don't have studies in Canada'." Maria listened to their advice and "decided to do the master's because if I'm leaving my job and my family and my friends, I better have something to back me up, because if I break up with this guy or it doesn't work out then at least I would have a master's out of it and I'd just go back to Mexico." Maria "didn't even try to apply for jobs because everyone I talked to, they said even if you're really good, it's hard for us to give you a job if you don't have studies in Canada."

Maria recalled the application process for applying to the “four different master’s programs in engineering” as challenging: “I could not even understand the website and I spoke fluent English. I had already worked in [large Canadian city]. It wasn’t a matter of language; it was a matter of different mind sets and different cultures.” Maria navigated the application process by having “Adam on the phone sitting in front of the computer, me on the phone sitting in front of my computer in Mexico, figuring this website out, which today I would say is super easy to do because my mind has changed.”

Maria ended up being accepted into a well-known master’s program in biomedical engineering in the city where Adam resided. She described calling the department head:

*...directly and persuade them to take me of course. So then the one that took me, he was so happy I had called; he saw all the interest I had. He’s from Europe so he’s like, “Oh, I’m glad you’re not from North America because people here are so used to having everything easy”, like having funds. And he said, “I don’t have funds, but I can take you as a student.” And my dad said that he could pay for my master’s.*

Upon learning of her acceptance into the master’s program, Maria applied for, and received, a study permit. She described the application process for the study permit as “confusing, but once I was in the program it was easy, the Embassy gave me the Student Visa easily.”

#### Academic Upgrading: A Stepping Stone to Becoming Employable in Canada

Maria moved to Western Canada “two days before classes started.” She experienced challenges “right off the bat.” She required a campus email identification and password in order to complete her assignments. Almost

immediately, she noticed “cultural differences in how people would help you” between Canadians and Mexicans:

*In Mexico, everyone is like, “Oh come here. I’ll take you, I’ll help you, let’s get you your log in”, whereas here everyone’s like, “You need a log in” and they keep walking. So you’re like, “Don’t you see I don’t have one? Don’t you see I don’t know where to get one?” Like I’m not saying no one helps you, but maybe one out of twenty, you know. It’s not like, not everyone’s just willing to drop their stuff and help you, whereas in Mexico maybe 90% of the people are willing to drop their things and help you.*

Maria also indicated that her supervisor could have been more helpful: “I think my supervisor should have been more on the ball. He’s an awesome person, but he’s not an organized person. So I had to figure out these things on my own.”

During her second semester of the master’s program, Maria’s father was no longer able to financially support her. “I had my savings because when I worked in Mexico, I lived at home and my parents would pay for everything,” Maria said. “So I was a smart cookie and I saved it instead of spending it on shoes.” These funds lasted for two semesters. During this time, Maria had been working as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate engineering course. She knew she “needed more money once my savings ran out” so she “took over as a [teaching assistant] for Spanish because then I needed the money. And also, for a short period, I worked as a baker at a deli in the summer.” Her study permit did not allow her to work full-time, so she kept the teaching assistant positions in engineering and Spanish for the remainder of her program as they were her only means of support. By this point, Maria had moved in with Adam, which allowed them to further develop their relationship.

Maria described feeling “very lonely in the beginning when I moved to Canada.” She described making friends in Canada to be challenging: “I didn’t

know how to make friends. All my friends in Mexico have been my friends since first grade.” Maria felt that Canadians, while nice, “are not that friendly as a culture” compared to Mexicans and were not interested in getting to know “the new girl, the immigrant, because they’re all into their own lives.” She described taking the initiative by asking for the telephone numbers of a few people whom she found to be friendly, “but imagine when your friends are not your friends yet. It’s like, okay, you go out, but then do you call them to get together again? I don’t want to seem pushy, you know?” Maria “had Adam, but I didn’t want to rely on him to go out every single time. I couldn’t do that forever.” She found it particularly difficult to eat by herself before she moved in with Adam, something which she had never done in Mexico, and used to call her mom while she ate “so I wouldn’t have to eat by myself. I was living by myself on campus and sometimes I would turn on the TV or something so it wasn’t quiet when I was eating.”

As the months went on, Maria noticed she was continuously “criticizing Canadians and Canadian culture” for the challenges she was experiencing during her master’s program. One day, she realized she “needed to get the right mind set. It’s like instead of thinking, ‘oh back at home this and back at home that’,” she resolved to:

*Stop criticizing Canadians and Canada because if you’re just saying oh these Canadians this, oh these Canadians that, well you’re not going to change the whole country, right? Either you change your attitude or just go back, or you’ll be miserable forever. There’s no other option. Either you struggle in your country of origin or you struggle in Canada. It’s just a mind set. So that was my resolution and it worked.*

Maria acknowledged her extraverted nature and stated, “If I was shy, or an introvert, or something, I would have gone back to Mexico. It’s so hard to

approach people when you need help or to make friends when you're in a new country.”

### Applying for Permanent Residency

After completing her first year of the master's program, Maria “applied for the permanent residency under the federal skilled worker category.” She decided to “apply in the Canadian Embassy in Mexico, meaning I didn't have to translate all the papers if I applied in Mexico.” Maria knew she was “short in points, but I thought by the time they are ready to give me the residency, I'll be done with my master's.”

Maria was, indeed, short “by one point.” Maria laughed as she recalled, “No one has ever been short for one point, not five, you know like the master's would give me five points, but one point!” Maria described receiving “a very respectful letter telling me that I'm short one point and if I don't prove that something has happened in my life that's good enough for them to give me one point in 90 days, so three months, my PR process was going to be cancelled.” She submitted “all the proof, like the phone bill, the lease, and sent it to the immigration.” This “bought some time at least; because then I received another letter saying that, ‘The papers that you sent are not valid for giving you an extra point' because nothing is concrete.” Maria had “90 days to get that one point.” In those 90 days, Maria worked “16 hour days, just eating cereal and whatever, cold food, no cooking, and I told Adam he had to go to his parents' house when he got a cold” so she could finish her master's thesis without interruptions. Her hard work and determination paid off; she successfully completed, and defended her

master's thesis, which ultimately gave her the one point she was short of to acquire her permanent residency.

### The Next Step

Maria began looking for a job. "I spent eight hours a day, five days a week looking for a job. I was taking it super serious." Maria recalled that towards the end of her master's degree, "Adam warned me, 'You should start doing a resume.' So I'm like, 'I have a resume. I've been working in Canada; I know what I'm doing'." Maria quickly found out that her resume "was trash for Canada." When asked to describe how resumes in Mexico differed from Canadian resumes, Maria explained that in Mexico, job applicants were only required to provide factual information concerning their education and job duties in their resumes and not accomplishments, as is the norm in Canadian resumes. Maria explained:

*In a Mexican resume, you write what you did, what you were in charge of, that's it. So the name of the position, the company's name and what was...your responsibilities in your job, right. That's it. No examples, no – it would be awful in a Mexican resume to put that you're good at something, because who are you to say that you are good? You know? It's like that's being just cocky and snobbish. Like if someone's going to say that you're good, then that's what the reference letters are for. It's like stupid to say, "Oh, I'm so perfect." Well, of course you're going to say you're so perfect, what are you going to put in your resume, "I'm so stupid I can't make a sale"? So you just say "I do sales." You know? Everyone's going to put they're awesome in their resume. Here, you blend in your responsibilities among this bullshit of words that make you sound so awesome that God is just below you.*

Maria sought help with resume and cover letter writing from the on-campus career centre. She was there "every second day working on resume and cover letters. Thanks to them, I got good at the resume and interviews." Maria

described having to “change my mind set when I was doing those resumes. You have to understand how Canadians view things and then you can write it that way.”

Maria attended many information meetings at companies she was considering applying to “because that’s the right way to go.” This allowed her to become “a little bit more familiar with the procedure of an interview and with meeting with strangers and not being so nervous because even if you’re nervous, it’s not a job interview.” Maria also “did a lot of networking.” She was putting herself out there all the time by attending “every single event that was about medical devices in the city.” These efforts allowed Maria to “feel a little bit warmed up” by the time she started attending job interviews.

After a few months passed, Maria “still didn’t find a job” as a biomedical engineer. She began feeling frustrated, but:

*Never in a million years I considered taking a job that was out of my field because I like my field, that’s the reason why I chose my field. I’m not going to settle for something else. I studied hard and there’s a reason why I did it, because I like it. And I feel in my field you help people, so it’s like I’m not going to be selling creams or ice cream when I can be helping someone that’s sick.*

Towards the end of her job search, Maria did submit applications for retail jobs because she was “bored to death,” but she “never even got an interview because, seriously, who wants to have a person with a master’s degree selling ice cream or cream at The Bay? They don’t want someone like me. They know I’m not going to stay. And I wasn’t planning on staying.”

Adam found a job posting he thought would interest Maria. After reading it, she prepared her resume and “asked Adam to proofread it for me.” However, “by the time he proofread it, and I was going to submit it, the posting was gone.” The next day, Maria “got ready for a job interview which I didn’t have. I printed my resume and went to the hospital to find the person who was going to hire me.” Maria found the biomedical engineering department and spoke with an office assistant:

*I introduce myself, I tell this lady my story, you know, “I just finished my master’s, I have a degree in this, I’m looking for a job. I have no idea if you’re hiring, but I’m so bored at home I’m just handing out resumes.” So she takes it and she’s laughing at me. And she’s like, “Yes, I think they’re hiring, I’ll give this to my boss.” Because she’s like, “I’m just the assistant. They’re not in right now, otherwise I would let them know you’re here, maybe they want to talk to you.” I’m “Okay, thank you.” And I go home and I’m thinking ‘Oh my God, how random is that?’ So then the next day they call me for a job interview and I got hired within the next two days. After eight months then I finally got lucky.*

When she started working in her current position, Maria was “received with open arms. Most of my coworkers were very welcoming since the first day.” A few of her colleagues, however, were “on the fence with me because I have so much more studies.” She believes “they felt threatened by my education curriculum.”

Maria stated that “the most challenging thing” at her current position “was to figure out what I was supposed to do in my job. There was very little guidance on the tasks I was expected to do and the goals I was supposed to aim for. I found very soon that there were no policies, procedures, or guidelines established in the department I work for.” This has not changed in the three years that she has been working and “still, this issue has not been fully resolved by the management team

despite me and my coworkers requesting for them.” Maria even suggested that what would have been helpful for her in the beginning was to “have a mentor” to show her the “ins-and-outs of the job, the protocol, the basic things of the union which I had never been part of before. I’ve had to figure all the contract content on my own.” Maria stated that when she has questions, she will “ask the assistant” who has “always been helpful.”

Another challenge that Maria struggles with in her current position is that “some coworkers are very scatterbrained or they have been working at this job for so long that they have developed bad habits, or laziness, performing their jobs.” Initially, this was unnerving for her because “as a new employee I wanted to learn as much as possible, but they did not have the interest in teaching me or they would teach me the short cuts they would do to go around problems.” Maria believes that the reason this issue has not been resolved is because “this is part of a bigger issue, that workers belonging to a union feel they are entitled to having a job, benefits, vacation, etc., and they know they cannot get fired or it’s almost impossible to get fired. As long as they don’t do something extreme, such as stealing, their job is safe.” Maria stressed that only “some coworkers are like this. Other ones are wonderful, helpful, knowledgeable, and resourceful and, most important for me, willing to help and share their knowledge at any time.”

Despite these challenges in her current position, Maria believes “you can’t have it all. You just go with the flow.” It is this relaxed attitude that has helped her cope with “the work challenges. No job is perfect, and I really like mine, but you just can’t have it all.”

### Living Comfortably

Maria is currently employed as a “full-time biomedical engineer in a hospital” in the same Western Canadian city she migrated to in 2005. She is able to utilize her research skills and work with medical machinery in a multidisciplinary environment. Maria married Adam in 2010. Her work schedule allows her to “finish work at 3:00 and get a month off for vacation.” She enjoys “time for movies, time for friends, and time for a husband and time for travelling.” Maria receives “medical, like extended healthcare coverage, I get dentist card. It’s just so comfortable having those things.” She and Adam are “planning to have a family” in the near future. Despite the challenges she faced in her first few years in Canada, Maria is grateful she “can just have a job that I like versus a job that I need.”

## Mehrdad

Mehrdad is a 54 year-old structural engineer who immigrated to Western Canada with his wife and toddler son from Iran in 1998. Mehrdad was born in a large city in Iran and identifies as Iranian. His father obtained the equivalent of a bachelor's degree and worked as a notary public for over 30 years. His mother completed grade nine, which was considered a high educational achievement for Iranian women of her generation. She did not work outside of the home. All of Mehrdad's siblings are successful professionals with advanced degrees.

### Canada as "A Safe Haven" from War and Revolution

Mehrdad described himself as "a very good student" throughout high school. He explained that "high school in Iran is tough, so tough. You have to take 12 classes every year and take exams for each class. If you fail one exam, you fail the entire year." He stated the "subjects were so tough. Like we had calculus in grade 8 or 9, I remember. The teachers were tough to us." Upon completing high school, Mehrdad was accepted into a prestigious university in Iran where he completed his "Bachelor degree in engineering." After earning his degree, Mehrdad applied to, and was accepted into, the top engineering graduate program in Iran.

The 1979 Iranian revolution seriously interrupted his graduate studies. Shortly afterwards in 1980, the country engaged in a "bloody eight year war with Iraq" which caused over one million casualties. Mehrdad stated that during the three year period following the Iranian revolution: "I couldn't go to school. Nobody could. All the universities, all the schools, they shut down." After

resuming his studies and eventually completing his PhD in urban planning at a well-known university in Iran, Mehrdad obtained his structural and civil engineering licenses. For 20 years, “I was a university lecturer, but half-time.” He spent his remaining work hours as a senior board member of a large construction company that worked on several high profile projects both within Iran and internationally. Part of his job duties included overseeing over 120 engineers and project managers. Mehrdad met his wife, a physician, “in graduate school. We got married and our first child, our son, he was born in Iran.” A few years after completing his PhD in urban planning, Mehrdad completed a second PhD (through distance education) in construction engineering at a university in the United Kingdom.

While Mehrdad and his family enjoyed a comfortable standard of living in Iran, “things were not stable. The political and the economy, everything was unstable.” An individual could live comfortably one minute and then have everything taken away the next:

*You know, in Iran, you don't know what do you have. One day, you are king, another day, you are prisoner. You know? You are in prison for no reason. You are rich today and tomorrow you could be very poor. Anybody from the government can close your bank account. That's why it's not stable.*

Mehrdad and his wife were especially “concerned about my son’s future.

Mehrdad knew “we had to move for our son. That was the most important reason for us. That’s why we left the country.” Mehrdad’s son was three years old when Mehrdad and his wife began seriously researching “countries where we could go.”

Mehrdad researched his options thoroughly:

*I studied about lots of countries, like European countries, U.S., Australia, Austria, you know? I had an opportunity to go to the U.K. because of my second Ph.D., but for my kids, I found that Canada is better, safer. But I found Canada is like multicultural country. And Canada is a safe country. We wanted a safe life for ourselves, for our family. Therefore, we chose Canada.*

After choosing Canada as their migratory destination, Mehrdad contacted a few Iranians he knew who had settled in a large Canadian city to inquire about their experiences settling in Canada and re-entering their pre-migration occupations. “I found out that all of my friends were driving taxis or working in the factory. Nobody was working as a professional.” All of the individuals he spoke with told him that “there’s not a good salary for university professors in comparing with regular job if you go to work with a company.” Despite feeling dismayed by what he heard, “we applied to come to Canada anyway.”

Mehrdad applied to come to Canada “as an Independent Immigrant.” He described the application process as “long, but straightforward.” Mehrdad and his wife decided to settle in a large Canadian city and resolved that no matter what happened, they would remain in Canada. Mehrdad emphasized that “going back to Iran was not an option for us. This is the way and this is the only way.”

### Researching Options and Feeling Invalidated

Mehrdad, his wife, and three and a half year-old son moved to Canada in 1998. A few months after arriving in Canada, Mehrdad’s wife “gave birth to our daughter.” Mehrdad’s mother, who lived in Iran, was diagnosed with a terminal illness at the same time. Mehrdad “had to go back to Iran. I stayed there for six months. My wife was alone here in Canada looking after the life, all the things.

She wasn't very good at English at that time, so everything was taking her longer than usual." Mehrdad returned to Canada after his mother passed away.

Like the majority of participants in this study, Mehrdad had some knowledge of English prior to moving to Canada. Mehrdad began learning English "from grade seven. We had one course in English from grade seven to twelve. Then university, for bachelor's, I took six credits of English. Then for master's and PhD, I took something like ten credits of English. The books, lectures, everything was in English. In class, we talked English, outside, talk to friends, family, relatives in Farsi." Mehrdad did not enrol in any English classes in Canada, but ensured he immersed himself in English on a daily basis by "watching TV, reading English, and talking to Canadian people in English." He also enrolled his son "in a daycare which they need parent participation; therefore, I was involved with that." This allowed Mehrdad to "practice English with many people" and to learn about Canadian social norms. Despite improvement in his linguistic abilities, Mehrdad believed he had not mastered English as well as he would like. He believes that he is still viewed as a foreigner because of his accent:

*But you know, here, when I came here, after 13 years, language is still an important thing for me. Whenever we start to talk with an accent, still I think this is a weakness for me. When I talk to my kids, who grew up here, I see this weakness because I am reminded of my accent. It's tough. Any immigrant, their whole life would be tough. You go to a different country and if you are not familiar with the language, even after 20 years, still they think you are a foreigner.*

One of Mehrdad's central career challenges was being the primary breadwinner during the first several years in Canada. Mehrdad recalled that "in those days, they did not need physicians. They need engineers. That's why they

talked to my wife and said you will never be a physician here. And in Canada, maybe we cannot provide job for you.” Nonetheless, Mehrdad was determined that he and his wife would work in their pre-migration occupations in Canada. He told his wife “that she should study” in order to “pass the exams to become a physician again.” Mehrdad’s wife stayed home to look after the children and to study for her licensing examinations.

During this time, Mehrdad took approximately six months to “search for a job, how to do it, what to do, how to become engineer in Canada.” Mehrdad “also researched the Canadian education system for my kids because they need good education and how the medical system works here to help my wife.” Mehrdad also assumed as much of the parenting responsibilities as he could so his wife could focus on studying for her licensing examinations. He “was not in a rush” to start working during these six months: “If you are in rush, most immigrants who come here and they are looking for today job, then they start wrong, no? They find the wrong job. I said, ‘No, I only work in my field’.” Mehrdad was able to accomplish all of this by utilizing the savings he and his wife had accumulated prior to migrating to Canada. He acknowledged that “I was not like people who didn’t have any money here and they had to, they had to choose any job any time.”

While he was researching his job options, Mehrdad submitted his application to become a licensed engineer with his province’s professional regulatory body. He recalled that “my application was not accepted the first time. I wrote that I’m an experienced lecturer in the best university in my country and

they said ‘we don’t accept any of this for engineering to give you professional engineer title.’ I said, ‘How come? I trained 4,000 thousand engineers.’ They said, ‘no, it’s not engineering. You were a university lecturer. You were good as a professor, but not as an engineer’.” Even Mehrdad’s work experience as a senior board member, where “over 120 engineers and project managers reported to me,” was not recognized because “I used the wrong title for my position in Iran. If you translate my job title from that position, it’s a technical manager. All the engineers, all project managers worked under my supervision. So the association said, ‘Okay, a technical manager is someone who has a diploma at the most. And they are not engineer, so it means you were not engineer in your country.’ I said, ‘Yes, I was’. How you present yourself, how you introduce yourself is important.”

After his application for becoming a licensed engineer was rejected, Mehrdad “went to a quick course for immigrants where I learned about how to prepare a resume.” Mehrdad stated that this course was invaluable because “I became familiar with the culture, the local career culture, you know for example, to use the proper titles to show what you were doing in your home country.”

After approximately six months of researching his employment options, Mehrdad applied for an engineering position at a large engineering firm. “I was overqualified for this job,” he recalled “because the manager wanted an engineer with Bachelor degree. I have PhD and I worked in my, in the field for 20 years.” Despite being overqualified, his application was successful and he began working full-time at this firm, where he remained for three and a half years.

### Overqualified and Overlooked

Mehrdad stated that when he began working at the engineering firm, he “started to do engineering design. It was tough for me. I was involved with engineering design in Iran a very long time ago.” He described having to “work on the sites sometimes” which he was not accustomed to doing. Mehrdad “had to accept assignments in engineering design that I didn’t like, projects I didn’t want to do because they weren’t a challenge for me.” Mehrdad knew that “if I wanted better salary, I would have to re-apply to get the professional engineering license.” From his first attempt at obtaining his engineering license, Mehrdad was told he “needed to re-take three classes” which he took during his first two years of full-time employment in Canada. “It was tough, very tough,” Mehrdad recalled, “because, you know, my wife, she was studying for her licensing exams and we had two young children.” Mehrdad recalled sleeping very little and “I still passed the exams. I got my professional engineering license” two years after beginning to work at the engineering firm.

After obtaining his engineering license, Mehrdad recalled attending a company function where the president was in attendance. He was introduced to the company president “by one of the co-workers who knew about my background, about where I come from, my experiences.” After his co-worker told the president that Mehrdad has two PhDs in engineering, “the president started to laugh and he asked me, ‘what kind of doctor you are? Ha ha ha.’ I said to myself, ‘How stupid this guy is, he doesn’t know.’ I couldn’t believe it.” This experience

did not deter Mehrdad from asking his supervisor for a raise after obtaining his engineering license. Mehrdad recalled that:

*When I got my engineering license, which is very important, maybe 10% of foreign educated candidates get this designation. I talked to my manager about it. I said, "I got my engineering license, so can you talk to the CEO or whatever about my salary?" He said, "I can talk to him, but I don't know what is P. Eng.?" A Canadian guy with MBA who is our boss, manager, six engineers work under him; he has no idea that P.Eng. is a license for the engineers.*

The comments made by his manager upset Mehrdad, who attributed his manager's ignorance to the fact that "Canada doesn't have any respect for educated people. They invite people; they say, 'We need educated people.' I believe they are looking for people who are educated and their culture is hard so they don't make mess. They don't speak up." While Mehrdad obtained a raise in his salary, he was "still not happy with the way the company was treating me, not respecting my qualifications, not using me like they should because I had many good ideas, a lot of education and experience, but nobody cared." Mehrdad stated that when he would offer ideas of how to improve projects, "they didn't listen to me. They just do it their own way, but they lost so much time and money. Generally speaking, nobody cares. Nobody respects education here in Canada. Nobody cares about your degree. You are Ph.D., you are Ph.D.; you are Master, it doesn't matter. So after a while, I just stopped saying anything."

Mehrdad became tired of the lack of respect and recognition of his education, work experience, and foreign and Canadian credentials by his superiors. After three years and a half years at the engineering firm, he resigned from his position. Mehrdad "never thought about working at a university here

because I had a couple of friends who came from Iran and they told me you cannot have a good life in Canada working at a university. I don't know if it's wrong or right, but the most they said you can earn is \$70,000 per year when you start and you will be involved full-time for the university. In comparing with a regular job, if you go to work with a company, that isn't a good salary."

### Taking Charge

Mehrdad "decided to have my own business and in my own business, I could be in construction or I could be in design. I chose construction because less time I could spend for construction rather than engineering design. In engineering design, you should be involved from early morning until night. I can't do that because I have a family." He was also able to "market my credentials the way I want to and not have to hide or be ashamed for having a PhD." Mehrdad obtained his "certificate in home inspection" a few months after terminating his employment with the engineering firm, which allowed him to conduct home inspections as a way to finance his company in its early growth stages. Conducting home inspections "gave me an opportunity to network with different people, real estate agents, builders, all these types of people so they know about my services." Approximately three years after becoming self-employed, Mehrdad "began to build houses. I start to use my knowledge of construction engineering again."

Approximately five years ago, Mehrdad decided "to get my structural engineering certificate because it would be opening more doors for me, to have more qualifications and get better contracts." The certification in structural

engineering “was actually a series of 12 classes, very tough.” Mehrdad is only one of a small handful of people who has obtained this certificate. In order to complete this certificate, “I had less rest, less sleeping time, you should reduce your sleeping time, something like that to make it possible. Yes, it was very tough.” Mehrdad did not have the support from extended family members that he would have accessed were he still living in Iran: “We were a big family in our country, like everybody was; lots of cousins, relatives, you lose all of them.” Asking for help from friends was not, and continues not to be, an option: “Now here you see some people from your country are friends, but everybody is engaged with his own problems, or they have their own problems. Therefore, nobody helps you. There is no support over here.” Mehrdad’s efforts and sacrifices paid off: he completed his structural engineering certificate approximately two years ago. Obtaining this certificate has provided Mehrdad with more challenging and better paying contracts as a self-employed engineer.

### Calling the Shots

Mehrdad is currently self-employed as a licensed structural engineer. He is able to “set my own hours, accept the projects I like, and have enough time to spend with my family” in the same Western Canadian city he migrated to in 1998. His wife, who also experienced the challenges of unrecognized foreign credentials and experiences, is now working full-time as a physician in a medical clinic. Mehrdad’s two children, who are now teenagers, “keep me busy. They are very active in school and sports and with their friends.” He believes the sacrifices he

and his wife have made, and continue to make, are “worth it because of my kids. They live in a safe country. So it’s worth it.”

## Nester

The final interview presented is with Nester, a 45 year-old dock master who immigrated to a Western Canadian city alone, from Panama in 2003. An only child, Nester was born in a medium-sized city in Panama. His father completed high school and worked as a land surveyor for a sugar cane company. His mother also completed high school and worked as a secretary.

### Seeking Out New Experiences

Nester attended a public high school in Panama where he received “a really good education” and was taught by teachers who were “mostly educated in the U.S.” He pursued an engineering stream, taking many “challenging classes.” Nester “learned the basics of English in high school, not enough to apply to get into the U.S. university.” After completing high school, Nester applied for, and gained acceptance, into a Panama university “to study engineering.” During his third year, he learned of a study abroad opportunity to the United States, which included “getting paid for up to one year of English.” Nester was required to write “the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] and other subject examinations” as part of his application. He applied for, and received one of the few coveted spots in this program. This program in the United States included one year of English language classes “in [a southern American state], which is not really the coolest place to learn English for a 21 year-old.”

Nester initially moved to a southern state in the United States for one year “so I could learn English.” He acknowledged that “spoken language was my problem. The written language was not a problem for me. The problem was

listening and speaking. I'd have problem with listening and then speaking to people, too." Initially, he was afraid to speak English for fear of being perceived as "ignorant because you don't communicate well. And some people, they thought that, 'oh, these guys are not really that intelligent' because that's how they perceive it. They're not really that smart because they make all these mistakes when they speak English."

After one year in the southern United States, Nester moved to a different state for three years to complete his undergraduate degree in marine engineering "at a military academy." While Nester described liking "the school a lot," he "did not like the military aspect of the school because I'm not really a kind of military type of mind. Eventually, I got a little bit of that kind of thinking, but not really that much. Like it helps in discipline, it makes you a little bit tougher than the regular, the average person."

After completing his undergraduate degree in marine engineering, Nester worked at a few different jobs in the United States. His first job was with a "chemical company for about two years on a ship" which he left "because that job was very dangerous." He subsequently "took job with an oil company, onboard a ship, and I worked with them for about three and a half years." He "basically stayed inside the ship for six or seven months at a time." In the five years he worked on board ships while employed in the United States, he "only had two months of vacation" which he spent "at home in Panama." While working onboard ships was "fun" initially, the lifestyle was beginning to take its toll on Nester:

*The setting for that kind of job is not really that great. You have to work onboard ships and that takes a lot of your life. As you get older, that doesn't work well, actually. And it's very, very hard work too. It really takes you, like psychologically you change a lot, too, because you are always like stressed and like ready for something wrong to happen when you are working. So you don't have really a peaceful type of living.*

Nester soon became tired of working onboard ships and quit his job with the oil company. He moved back to Panama and initially applied to migrate to Canada as a skilled worker immigrant because he was “not sure if I could find a job, the kind of job I wanted” in Panama. Shortly after submitting his application to the Canadian embassy in Panama, Nester found a job as a scientist for a research institute where he remained for five years. He decided to withdraw his application to migrate to Canada in the hopes that this position would materialize into a “permanent, full-time job on land.” Unfortunately, this position “did not really work for me because I was still travelling as part of the job,” so Nester terminated his employment with this research institute and found a job “in a shipping company, on land, with a company in Panama that was selling fuels and lubes, fuel oil and lubricants.” He stated that while this “was a good job, there was these kind of shady personalities working in the company doing certain things that were not that legal. You don't want to go too deep and stay too long with certain companies. They were just right there at the edge of legality.”

Nester noticed that he “kept on landing on the same kind of stuff, the same work onboard ships” because “I spoke good English and communicated well with the clients.” He resolved “not to waste any more time working onboard ships.” He decided to apply for a “master's degree in marine engineering” in the United Kingdom hoping that this would allow him to “actually get a job now in a

shipping company, on land, in a different setting.” Nester “went to the United Kingdom with one of the guys which I went to school the first time in the U.S., so we went there together.” Nester and his friend “both got our degrees” which was not difficult for Nester after having studied and worked in the United States for almost ten years.

After completing his master’s degree in marine engineering, Nester “returned to Panama” in order to find employment. Unfortunately, his efforts did not materialize into a job offer. While “the worst was over after the Panama invasion in 1989, the economy was not strong. There was a period of a rearrangement of the political forces and there was this struggle back and forth, back and forth. So the country would not really improve much at that time.” Nester decided that his best option was to seek employment abroad.

#### Leaving Panama in a Hurry

Nester “actually applied to come to Canada one time before and I drop it because I got a job. I thought it was going to go okay, but it didn’t go okay in that one. So then, okay, I reapply and I got it.” He stated that the application process the second time “went okay, I think, but my case, I think, it was fast. It took me about a year since I began my application until I got my Visa to come.” Nester hypothesized that the reason why his application was processed so quickly was because “my English was okay and my education was – I mean I fulfilled all the prerequisites very easily.” The only challenge he had during the application process was with “the police check. It took a little bit of time. I had to have police

checks for different places; from the U.S., from the U.K. because I was all around.”

Nester was given very little time to move to Canada: “I had to come actually in a hurry. They gave me less than 20 days to get all my stuff together and come over here because that was the expiration of the Visa that they gave me.” Nester chose to migrate to a large Canadian city based on information that it had a warmer climate compared to other large metropolitan cities.

### Going into “Survival Mode”

Nester stayed “in one of the welcome house for one week” when he arrived in Canada. He described immediately going into “survival mode” which entailed “going to the very basic, do anything that you need to do in order to preserve resources, so to preserve as much as I could the money that I brought, and to get my foot in here.” Within two weeks, Nester “got a job at an inventory company going to the grocery stores counting cans, the whole day counting, counting, counting cans. So at the end of the day my eyes were like – something like, because I was not used to that.” Nester remained at this job for approximately three months.

Shortly after working for the inventory company, Nester found “an advertisement for [a marina] and they needed a night watchman and janitor.” Nester did not hesitate to apply for this job because “it was clearly in my sector. That is exactly what I know, the boats, so I’m grabbing it.” Nester was serious about securing this job; when he went to submit his resume, he said “I took my suit and my tie.” He spoke with the manager who informed him that “this is

basically a janitor and night watch job. ‘Yes I know, yes I know.’ So I took it. So they just hire me. So after that he told me, ‘That was very funny that you came all suit up for the janitor job’.”

As the night watchman/janitor, Nester worked the “night shift for three and a half years, which was 12:30 to 8:30 shift every night in the marina, inside, and with all the cleaning in the marina.” His hours were from “Tuesday night and ended Sunday morning. And it was, in my case, just work, work, work, work and work, basically around the clock.” Nester stated that working as the night watchman/janitor affected his quality of life: “I came back at 9:00 home. I just went to sleep until approximately 4:00, then I would fix dinner or fix the things for the next day, myself. I was in shared accommodation there for three years, like I have just a room, I have to share the kitchen and share the bathroom with other people.”

One of the most challenging struggles he faced during the time he worked as a night watchman/janitor was the cognitive dissonance of whether to continue working as a janitor/night watchman at the marina, pursuing academic upgrading, or attempting to re-enter the marine engineering field:

*What I think is it's something that basically comes from inside your mind when you don't feel okay about what you are currently doing and you feel like you could do a lot better than that. It's a process, yes. It's not something that happens from one day to the next or something like that. I guess many of the immigrants think like, "Okay one day someone's going to offer me a job in exactly what I want and then I get the job." I don't think that's going to happen that way. You'll be kind of working for that objective little by little and it all depends how passionate you are about getting that.*

Nester described getting through this difficult period of his life by automatically “going into survival mode, and staying in survival mode. We are always in – any immigrant to this country is always in survival mode. It doesn’t matter how things get for them, they are to be also – I mean always inside your head, you are in survival mode.” Being in survival mode also impacted his chances “to make friends here. I found a few friends, very few friends here actually during that time.”

Nester could not recall the exact moment he began disengaging from the cognitive dissonance he was experiencing; however, he acknowledged that:

*When you are in survival mode you are always on the defensive, right, and you are doing this and you are like struggling. After a period of time you feel like, “Okay I feel a little bit more comfortable with how I am managing the situation.” And then after you feel like that, your brain starts to work things in the direction that you would like to go. So there’s not a specific moment, it’s something that starts to happen.*

When Nester resolved to improve his situation, he sought to become familiar with, and utilize, the career and settlement services available for newcomers, which he described as “excellent.” This helped him not only with different career and education options he could pursue, but also provided him an opportunity to meet new people:

*Immigrants here have access to – like you can have access to computers right away, to any orientation courses, all that kind of stuff, and this is very important. So I make use of that. Really, I mean I took full advantage of that, to have the access to computers, to printing, to someone to help you write your resume or things like that. They can actually guide you to be more effective and more efficient about looking for a job. So for me that was great. And then through them, I got in touch with certain organizations that at certain times, I could take the time to attend meetings and it was basically to socialize.*

During his final year working at the marina, Nester enrolled in “an electronic dieseling course” at a technical institute “just to get something in my papers.” He would “go to class at 3:00, come back around 9:00, take something to eat and come back to work about 11:00 and just keep on doing that all the time, all the time, all the time.” He stated he “did not have much social life, actually. Like my days off was probably Sunday. During the day, I slept most of the day, and Monday I used to run my errands, buy stuff I needed.”

After completing the electronic diesel course, Nester “got a license for building engineer, full class, to work on buildings.” Nester began working for a maintenance company doing “maintenance work; heating, ventilation, air conditioning for the bank.” Nester stated that this “was a good job” where he stayed “for about a year.” He recalled “there were very few problems at this job.” He met “some immigrants from different parts of the world” at this job and “we got along well, all of us.”

### The Phone Call that Changed His Life

While still employed at the maintenance company, Nester “got word that my immediate boss, the dock master at the marina, he left the job. The manager thought that he could actually go without a dock master, and they went for about eight months and it did not really work well for them. So they actually started looking for another dock master.” Some of Nester’s former colleagues at the marina informed the manager that “he had a person here that was appropriate for the job, but he left already. And one of the guys there actually contacted me. And then I called him and say, ‘Would you like me to take that job?’ And he

asked me, ‘Well can you take that job?’ ‘Yes, of course, I can take that job’.”

Nester and the manager of the marina “agreed on a salary” and Nester began his three year employment as the dock master with many and varied job duties:

*I was doing maintenance and assignment of making sure that the boats were located in the right places, they have all the services they’re supposed to, and basically getting all the staff ready to take reservations properly, processing reservations properly, rendering the services, asking for any outside help if they need it and a lot of security. Like you really have to look to try to find out what really go – inside a marina lots of stuff can go on and you have to be watchful and keep track of who comes, who goes, all that kind of stuff.*

Nester stated that while his job was, for the most part, “easy in terms of what you do, sometimes it’s not. Physically, it could be demanding because you have to do a lot of stuff that many people are not willing to do here.” He pointed out that as an immigrant, he had an advantage “over locals” that he was “more willing to do a lot of the stuff that the locals don’t want to do, especially if the locals are educated, they feel that they do not have to do menial things, but are important for the whole operation of any organization.” This included the laborious and maintenance tasks that he engaged in as dock master as well as “working on the weekends. An advantage for an immigrant to get a job is that he is willing to take schedules that the locals would not take. So that’s a good advantage for us.” Nester observed that “for Canadians, time off is really, really, really important. Locals will not work weekends.” Nester stated that “having a military background” helped him with completing menial tasks “because in the military, you do everything from the top to the bottom. Basically, the strategy is to show all your staff how foolish they are because they cannot do even these simple

things and you go and you can do that. And they, ‘Oh I didn’t want to do, I don’t know.’ You do anything, basically.”

Nester stated that part of his success of re-entering his pre-migration occupation “was not just because I lived and worked in the U.S. and studied in the U.K.,” but also his willingness to:

*...not to be too strongly attached to something specific because what is an architect? What is an engineer? What is a teacher? I mean you don’t get into something to be the slave of that. You don’t want to be the slave of your profession. You use what you learn to use it to what your situation is. With education, you learn to solve problems, any problems basically in the areas where you are actually more – you feel that you are more capable, you can do better than other skills. But it doesn’t mean that you have to be the slave of your job title, be the slave of your diploma. You use the diploma; your certificate doesn’t use you. So probably most people think, “Okay, I got this degree and then I have to go by strictly the meaning of that degree.” It’s not a really, really way to look at things. Every job is different. You make up your own job. You create your own job, basically. And you just try to make it happen with the things that you know how to do best. And basically, that’s what I try.*

Nester pointed out that “what matters is how much capacity you show to do things.” He believes that immigrants are constantly proving themselves to their Canadian-born counterparts and that confidence is one key to success that immigrants should develop and not be afraid to demonstrate:

*It’s like a feeling of, a little bit of a feeling of pride I think, yes. Like I know I can do that, I can do something better, I can be better, and that’s enough motivation for me. It’s like I never felt that I was, and that could be for anyone, that I was the regular guy on the street. I would think I am actually better. That’s an attitude... Sometimes you have to challenge other people and say, “You know, I can do that better than you can. And I can show you that I can do it.” So that’s basically how I try to overcome things here. You’re just showing confidence, I think. It’s just showing a lot of confidence and delivering, too, and making sure that you know what you’re doing.*

Nester stated that while having confidence is important, one must be careful not to project an attitude of entitlement:

*Some of the immigrants, they come with an attitude that really is really, really poor attitude. Some of the guys come here thinking that the world owes them something. No one owes anyone anything. You really show yourself that you are worth something. As an immigrant you are more in doubt for anything than a local and you have to show confidence, and you have to show it right away.*

#### Being Recruited and Keeping His “Foot on the Pedal”

After three years as the dock master, Nester received a phone call from the dock master he had replaced at the marina where he was working. This individual “took the position of manager” at a different marina and asked Nester if he would replace him as dock master. Nester agreed and began working as the dock master at “a larger marina” where he has remained for the past one and a half years at the time of this interview.

Nester’s current position is “a lot more complex. There is a cultural side of this because it’s working with the Natives. So it’s a Native property, things are different than – like, they do not follow specific rule from the city. There are a lot of stuff that can be done there that cannot be done [in the city]. So it is a different regime I would say.” Nester believes that his experiences as an immigrant in the United States and the United Kingdom “and having Native background myself” have helped him develop good relationships with the Aborigines he works with.

While Nester enjoys his current job, he remarked that working weekends “affect your social life a lot. You are not really in the same schedule as most of your friends.” He believes that “there are openings there for an immigrant, anyone that wants to come to this country to work,” but they have to “be willing to work

during times that the locals don't want." Nester noticed that "when I come into work on Mondays, no one shows up for work." Nester said he "cannot really get mad about that because that's the way it is, basically." He tries "to make arrangements to that, try to keep my foot on the pedal."

### Cultural Difference and Disconnection

One challenge that Nester has encountered not only at his current place of employment, but also at the first marina where he worked, was discrimination "by the clientele that we have, the kind of customer that we have. They were very rich, very wealthy customers." Nester quickly pointed out that "some of the very wealthy, they understand and are very open-minded about people, they travel a lot." Others, however, "were not that open-minded. There are some people that, in their minds, they probably are brought up to discriminate people of different origins. It's not something that I would say it's all across the society; it's specific cases that you always encounter." Nester stated that discrimination is not unique to Canada; "You can encounter that here, back in the States, everywhere." Nester stated he did not encounter any discrimination or prejudiced attitudes from any of his co-workers at any of his jobs in Canada. He does, however, feel different from some of his colleagues as a result of cultural differences:

*Not because of race or because of origin or language; it's also like a little bit more like cultural. Sometimes, you don't find people that talk about the same things, have the same interest. Like the things that interest them are not really the things that interest me. I don't really want to continue talking too much about things about the movies or certain fashion scenes or something like that. You know, I cannot really keep a conversation with you; you keep talking about those things because I am not interested. So it's a cultural difference.*

Despite these challenges in his current position, Nester feels “very motivated just because I like the job. And I’m confident in my job. I do it well.” He is grateful to have been given “freedom to do anything that I decide to make my job better, very few restrictions.” He is able to “do anything that I needed to do in order to get – to do even my own projects.” Nester stated that he does not “think I would be given the freedom to do that back in my country. So yes, I mean it is difficult, but you can make it happen. It’s just attitude. It’s an attitude, right? You can try harder and make it happen. Yes, it doesn’t matter really how difficult it is, if you really want to.”

#### Life is Better

Nester is currently employed full-time as a dock master at a large marina in the same Western Canadian city he migrated to in 2003. Nester enjoys “a better quality of life here; better than Panama, definitely.” He enjoys “cooking, spending time with my friends and doing low-key activities. I have a little bit more free time now. It’s a little bit more comfortable now.” He acknowledged that if his quality of life “hasn’t changed that much, it’s because of my own choice. It’s not because there are not opportunities now, it’s because basically I keep living the same way I always live actually.”

Nester believes that part of what helped him survive, and then thrive, in Canada was his military training: “You are a little bit tougher, you are able to survive, to go with less, I mean to go farther with less and to accept certain things that other guys would say, ‘No, no, I just drop it’.” He likes the fact that the city in which he lives “is easy to move around. It’s easy to get many things; you can

get basically anything you need here, once you get the means, though.” Nester knew that re-entering his pre-migration field would be a long process: “It’s not something that happens from one day to the next, or something like that. You have to make a lot of sacrifices, personal sacrifices, but you could get it. It’s possible.”

## CHAPTER FIVE INTEGRATION CHAPTER

The purpose of this study was to explore the career transition experiences of an ethnically mixed sample of skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada over the course of their resettlement process. The guiding research questions were: (a) What kinds of career/academic changes and challenges have immigrant professionals who have found jobs in their fields gone through since the time they came to Canada? (b) How did they experience, respond to, and overcome the challenges they faced? (c) What factors, issues, or life circumstances do immigrant professionals take into account when making decisions about pursuing re-entry into their pre-migration professions versus accepting employment outside of their fields of training? Ten skilled worker immigrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and professional occupations were interviewed to address these research questions. Participants were asked about specific challenges they faced while attempting to re-enter their pre-migration occupations, how they experienced these challenges, and what helped them overcome them. Participants' responses to these direct inquiries suggested that they experienced a variety of professional, academic, and personal challenges while attempting to re-enter their pre-migration occupations. Despite the multiplicity of challenges they experienced, they drew upon personal and familial strengths and community resources in order to overcome the challenges they experienced during their career trajectory. This chapter will present themes related to the career trajectories of skilled worker immigrants who re-entered their

pre-migration occupations in Canada, how they experienced career challenges, and the factors that enabled them to overcome occupational barriers in Canada.

### Career Trajectories of Skilled Worker Immigrants

While each participant described unique lived experiences of their career trajectory over the course of their settlement process in Canada, several common themes emerged representing the collective experience of the participants. The various elements of participants' career trajectories that emerged in their interview responses are described below.

#### *Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect*

The majority of participants believed that their education and work experience would secure them stable and well-paying positions in their pre-migration field in Canada. In fact, many participants recalled that even prior to migrating to Canada, they felt confident that they would be able to secure employment in their pre-migration field. Rodrigo expected to find employment as a professional photographer shortly after his arrival. He believed that the combination of his education, teaching, and work experience from Mexico would translate into not only finding comparable employment in Canada as a professional photographer, but also a comparable standard of living to what he was accustomed to in Mexico. He stated that he "was expecting more when I came to Canada. I was expecting to do better. I was expecting to work as a photographer. I think I was very motivated to move to Canada and I was feeling very strong about to make it in Canada. And I think I was expecting more from Canada." Even though Julia purposely chose not to re-enter teaching when started

looking for employment, she still felt that she could find a teaching position when she decided to submit an application for a teaching position. “I thought I could still get the job as a teacher because I had four years of teaching experience from the Philippines...but I didn’t. I still had to go back to school after all these years.” While still in Iran, Mehrdad was working on an international project that was founded in Canada. He believed that his contributions to solve one aspect of this project would be an asset for when it was time to migrate. Instead, he was met with “blank stares” when he “talked to some mayors here in three different cities. They didn’t know what this project was. They said, ‘we don’t know what [project name] is’. So I said thank you and goodbye.”

Participants’ score on the points system further served to reinforce their belief of securing employment in their pre-migration field in Canada. Natalia was one participant who, despite being told by somebody at the Canadian Embassy in Colombia that they do not find employment for skilled workers, felt confident that her score on the points system would allow her to “find a job here that I could use my skills because my points were high” Nester also believed that his high score on the points system would make him a competitive applicant for positions in marine engineering. He recalled, “I fulfill all the prerequisites very easily. I thought I wouldn’t have problems to find a job like I had in Panama.”

Helen was the only participant who did not expect to work in her pre-migration occupation in Canada: “Actually, I didn’t have any expectations about recovering my professional field, so I knew that I had the language barriers and I never spoke English before coming to Canada. And it was just that I needed to

move forward, but not too much expectations how it will be.” She fantasized about working in special effects in the film industry or with animals through the SPCA: “I was convinced if I went for that path will be worthy anyways, because when you are new in a new society you have lots of things to learn.” Ultimately, however, her settlement needs, as well as those of her family, took precedence over starting anew: “I went to the ESL school right away, to settle my family, to settle myself and I start to do some network contacts, you know, regarding my profession to see what’s going on in here.”

The only participant for whom the Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect held true was Glenn. He was offered a tenured position as a professor at a public institution and began working shortly after his arrival. “At the time, there was truly a shortage of supply of Canadian Ph.D.s in [my discipline]. The department was still small, they were growing and convinced the government of that case. So it actually wasn’t difficult for me to come here. They took care of the paperwork and I took their word that they could make it happen. It was a very smooth process.”

#### *“Temporary” Career Challenges*

Participants expressed that they believed working in menial or entry-level jobs would either be temporary or would serve as a stepping stone to re-entering their pre-migration occupation in Canada. Despite a stable income working as a draftsman, Abraham wanted to work as an engineer. His employer, an engineer from overseas who faced similar obstacles as Abraham, supported his aspirations. Abraham recalled wanting to prove to himself that he could once again work as an

engineer: “Back then was, yes, I have to prove myself. It’s just him being there now it’s more like a fast track, he fast track my intent. He’s also part of the success that I’m having, that I had at that time.” Mehrdad, also an engineer, initially started working in design, which he stated “was tough for me. I was involved with engineering design in Iran a very long time ago. In engineering design, you should be involved again from early morning until night. It was very tough because I had, I have family and my wife was studying for her exams to be physician again and she wasn’t working. But I knew that if I did it for a little while I would get back into the type of job I wanted again.”

Julia initially stayed home with her daughters when she first arrived in Canada. When she noticed herself “getting chunky, that’s when I said maybe I should start working, just so I could get out of the house and shed some of the pounds.” She initially “didn’t want to go into teaching” as she “wanted to do something new, something different” so she “accepted a job as a filing clerk.” Even though this job provided her with a steady income, Julia “wasn’t happy with what was going on. Some of the coworkers that I had, they were really judging. Something wasn’t right. Also, I had to pretend that I was busy and that was very, very hard for me, very hard because I’m a person that likes to move. I want to work. I thought did I want to do this for the rest of my life? So after seven years working there, that’s when the fire started inside me. I had to go to school.”

Shaya’s first job after approximately five months of living in Canada was a short-term contract position in accounting. She described this job as “awful. That first job wasn’t good. That was really an awful job. I wasn’t the only

immigrant. They were all immigrants like I knew it was a company in bankruptcy. They wanted people to do all the cleanup. And I thought, 'Oh my gosh. I don't want to keep doing this. This is awful'. ' Shaya's experiences working for this company gave her the impetus to "improve my English so I didn't have to keep working at this job." Shortly after her contract ended, she enrolled to obtain her designation in certified management accounting (CMA) through the provincial regulatory body. Natalia's first job in Canada was "working as an administrative assistant in a non-profit organization. That was the closest thing that will assimilate to what was my position back home. So I start doing that job, but I began to be bored. It's just like a routine, the whole thing. So I said, 'Okay, well stepping stone. It's fine with me'."

Rodrigo's work as a dishwasher provided him with the impetus to re-enter photography as he "hated doing dishes" and wanted a more secure future for himself and his family. After a series of events, "the restaurant went into bankruptcy" which he believed "was a very good thing" because after approximately one or two weeks, the manager at a photography company with whom Rodrigo had kept in regular contact with, informed him that "there was a chance to work again one Friday four hours, just once a week. I say, 'Yes of course.' So I went the first Friday for four hours and then she told me, 'you know what, I can hire you part-time.' I said, 'Okay perfect', so everything fit into my planning that I wouldn't do other type of work for long." This opportunity came to Rodrigo approximately 14-16 months after migrating to Canada.

*Work, Interrupted.* As a result of overextension due to working long hours, taking classes for upgrading or re-certification purposes, engaging in volunteer work, dealing with settlement challenges, and, for some participants, attending to family responsibilities, some participants experienced physical and mental health issues. Helen sustained a serious back injury requiring surgical intervention three years after migrating to Canada. “I was isolated. I couldn’t move for six months. I was stuck at home. Some days I just move my eyes, I’m not kidding.” For Natalia, the stress of her work environment became so overwhelming that she would burst into tears seemingly unprovoked. Additionally, she experienced a decrease in her appetite, severe migraines, and was unable to drive. She was constantly under scrutiny by some of her colleagues and her job security was in jeopardy. She could not quit her job because she was the primary breadwinner in the family at that time. She ended up on going a stress leave. Natalia explained:

*I got to the point that I was crying all the time. I couldn’t even speak, I was just crying all the time. My husband wasn’t working because he hadn’t found a job at the time. During the whole time that I was working at that place, I was having migraines. Even I went to the neurologist and things like that, back and forth, a pill that basically put me down to sleep, and I couldn’t even drive or anything, so I was missing work because of the same reason. They were thinking it was just full pleasure missing work...The doctor says, “You know what? You cannot be killing yourself. They’re killing you.”*

Approximately six months after migrating to Canada with his wife and toddler son, Mehrdad’s mother, who lived in Iran, was diagnosed with a terminal illness. Mehrdad’s settlement was “interrupted. I was trying to organize, to help my wife because she just had our daughter a few months after coming to Canada. There was a lot to do. I need to research what to do for job. Then I got the news

that my mother was sick. So I had to go back to Iran for six months. I left everything.” Mehrdad returned to Canada after his mother passed away.

### *Dissonance*

Both cognitive and compensation dissonance emerged as forms of dissonance that participants struggled with and eventually overcame during their resettlement process.

*Cognitive Dissonance.* Participants who worked in menial or entry-level jobs reported noticing a lack of cognitive stimulation and challenges, something which they did not contend with in their countries of origin. This inconsistency was characterized by psychological discomfort, ambivalence, and anxiety. They knew that they could not work in such conditions for very long, which helped provide them with the impetus to work towards re-entering their pre-migration field. Natalia’s first job in Canada was as an administrative assistant, “which was going backwards in my career.” She worked at that company for six years “doing that job and I said, ‘Okay, well, stepping stone. It’s fine with me’. But I begun to be bored, it’s just like routine the whole thing, it’s like – I said, ‘Oh, I know I can do more’.”

Julia initially chose not to re-enter teaching because she was concerned that she would have to endure the same poor working conditions she endured as a teacher in the Philippines. Instead, she worked in a clerical position for seven years. She began feeling insecure knowing that she was not working as a teacher and that she was compromising her values. Julia explained:

*I worked in an office. I didn’t like very much what I was doing because, maybe because I wasn’t busy. When I was alone and look at people*

*around and I said, hmm, there's that feeling of insecurity in me and it that's how – like I thought, can you imagine if I can do that? There's got to be a way. So it impacted me. It's given me the drive to move on and move forward.*

Nester “didn’t feel okay” about working the nightshift as the night watchman/janitor and felt that he “could do a lot better than that.” When he was struggling with whether to continue working as a janitor/night watchman at the marina, he thought about how “the circumstances that actually cut my wings from working in my profession.” He said that “after a while, you feel like your brain start to work things in the direction that you would like to go. So there’s not a specific moment, it’s something that starts to happen.”

After completing her master’s degree, Maria began applying for full-time jobs in biomedical engineering. During the “end of my job searching, I did start applying for other jobs [in retail], but it was maybe for two months at the most.” She knew that she “would not be happy selling cream” and that “nobody wanted someone like me,” but still submitted several applications. “I knew it wasn’t going to work for me to work there, but I still applied,” recalled Maria. “But always I was going to go to biomed.”

*Compensation Dissonance.* The majority of participants who worked in menial or entry-level jobs experienced lower levels of earning considering the human capital they possessed from their education and work experiences in their countries of origin. Helen discussed “working like a senior, but...getting the payment like a junior” when she was conducting intakes for a counselling agency:

*When I started doing intakes and I remember having clinical discussions even I was in the position, you know. But when the counsellor, the clinical*

*counsellor with the full credentials, asked me questions about what's going on with this client, I don't know, you know was in that way. I should be there, but getting payment like a junior – it is weird.*

For Nester, working for minimum wage was part of “going into survival mode” which entailed doing “anything that you need to do in order to preserve resources. So yes, I'll do it because I have to do it.” Rodrigo recalled that despite his low wage as a dishwasher, he considered it fair because he had not been living in Canada for very long. He explained: “My first job was a dishwasher. The pay was fair in the sense that, I mean I got that job after three months living in Canada. So I just start to earn eight dollars or something like that.”

Even being paid a stable wage working in an entry-level position, as Abraham experienced when he first arrived in Canada, was not enough for him to continue working as a draftsman when he knew he was a competent engineer and deserved to be compensated as such: “So I'm, holy cow, \$850 for a month or something. It's good money at that time, '78. But I could be doing more. So my plan back then was, yes, I have to prove myself.” Mehrdad was “shocked” by his earning potential in Canada as a university professor and working in the private sector compared to what he earned in Iran “because I was making more money as professor in Iran. Here in Canada, there's not good salary for university professors in comparing with regular job if you go to work with a company.”

### *Skills/Competency Reconstruction*

Participants expressed that despite the decredentialization they experienced, they were determined to successfully complete any academic or professional upgrading required in order to re-enter their pre-migration field. Prior

to migrating to Canada, Maria contacted some individuals in her profession and inquired about how she could find employment in Canada as a biomedical engineer. She was informed that her chances of working as a biomedical engineer in Canada without Canadian qualifications were negligible. They recommended acquiring Canadian education in order to maximize her chances of working as a biomedical engineer in Canada. Maria recalled:

*Everyone I contacted said that I needed to come study because it's going to be hard to get a job if you don't have studies in Canada. So one guy was so awesome; he invited me to this regional meeting for the biomedical engineers. So I went there and I met with all these people and they all told me I had to study in Canada. So I'm not going to be able to work, I might as well do the master's, because it was either a master's or [a two-year program at a technical school] in biomedical engineering.*

Abraham was determined to prove that he could obtain his professional engineering certification. He welcomed the challenge of “taking the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language]. I wanted to try and get into my field because that's where I trained and I know very much what's been done in that kind of work.” He “challenged two courses and successfully passed two confirmatory examinations” and even continued taking various engineering courses “just so I can challenge myself and to get the feel and experience. I wanted to prove that foreign-trained engineers could do the job just like any Canadian person could. You just have to take those challenges because you know you can do it.” Despite her initial reservations about going back to school “for a second time in my life”, Julia “welcomed the challenge” and wanted to show that she “already knew the courses so it came naturally because I've done it before. It was doing it in English that was hard. It was hard for me, it was not easy. But I did it and I showed people that I could do it.”

Even the participants who obtained their education from an English-speaking country chose to pursue some kind of certification in Canada, even if it was not directly related to their pre-migration occupation. Nester discussed his decision to obtain his license as a building engineer while working as a janitor/night watchman at a marina. After obtaining his license as a building engineer, he left his job at the marina and worked for a maintenance company. It was only one year later that he “got word that they were looking for a dock master at the marina I worked at. So I got it.” Despite obtaining his engineering license, Mehrdad decided to obtain a “certificate in home inspection” a few months after terminating his employment with the engineering firm where he worked for three years. He wanted to “open my own business” and obtaining his certificate in home inspection allowed him to conduct home inspections as a way to finance his company during the start-up stage.

Not all participants benefitted from academic upgrading. Natalia not only lost her job as a result of completing a master’s degree, but her physical and mental health and family life suffered as a result of the stress she experienced. Natalia stated that “it was frustrating because, like I said, I had to go back in my career. Even when I finished, I just felt like useless. I just felt like I wasn’t doing anything for me after all that happened.” Other participants, like Glenn and Rodrigo, did not face the challenge of re-credentialing. Glenn “was sought out by faculty at [a university]” and began working as a professor immediately. As a photographer, Rodrigo was not required to obtain additional certification. He explained that he “didn’t need to upgrade anything. My specific career is just

about show a portfolio and show that you know how to do those things and that's it." Maria also did not face the challenge of unrecognized foreign credentials because she initially completed a master's degree prior to applying for employment: "They wouldn't hire me with my Bachelors, right, when I asked. But it was because – I think it was because it was harder for them to hire me because they would have to sponsor me. So if you don't study here, it's very hard to get hired."

### *Career Acculturation*

All participants, regardless of their career trajectory in Canada, discussed the differences between workplace norms and communication styles in Canada and those in their countries of origin. The more indirect communication style that participants noticed affected the way in which they dealt with workplace conflict. When Glenn encountered some animosity from some of his colleagues as a result of writing a newspaper article that was considered not politically correct, a sizeable proportion of his colleagues no longer spoke with him. "About half the Faculty immediately disassociated themselves from me personally because I was not politically correct, I guess" he recalled. "It was a little unexpected and I wasn't very happy about it. I was a little disappointed by it." Coming from the United States, Glenn was accustomed to "a more direct style of communication. If someone did something to me that they didn't like, they'd come and talk to me about it." Despite his disappointment with the way some of his colleagues behaved, Glenn believed that "people thought that I had integrity and I was fair." Maria also noticed that Canadians prefer a more indirect communication style

compared to Mexicans, which often left her guessing the meaning behind what she heard or read: “Canadians, in general, they like to use fancy words and talk funky and be so politically correct that always the meaning is so hidden. So if you read something and every single phrase has this hidden meaning to it, or a different – like it’s not spelled out loud.”

Interactions with co-workers became subject to scrutiny for a few participants. Julia noticed that her outgoing and direct nature was out of place at her job with the provincial government: “I’m very outgoing and I like people. I like to deal with people and talk to them. I have nothing to hide. I’m just very open and direct. Some of the people I worked with would just look at me funny if I tried to talk to them or get to know them. I didn’t like that. I didn’t want to hide myself because this is my true personality.” Natalia became aware of some of her colleagues monitoring how she spent her time after a particularly unpleasant incident that occurred as a result of a policy change when she was employed as an administrative assistant: “They were pushing me to do a lot of things. Then they would say, ‘You don’t do anything here.’ If I wasn’t at my desk, they were asking, ‘Where is she?’ This never happened to me in Colombia. Nobody monitors you like this. And so I spoke out to them. I said that what they were doing wasn’t right. Luckily for me, I’m outspoken. When I’m mad, then I speak more clearly so the message is clear.”

Even adapting to the Canadian workplace culture was challenging. For Mehrdad, the more relaxed workplace culture at the engineering firm where he worked was not what he was accustomed to in his native Iran. “In Iran,” he said,

“we have a very different work culture. It’s not so relaxed like here.” He remarked that “Canadian people take their coffee break so seriously. To me, you can take coffee break anytime. Why it always has to be so protected for the same time every day?” One of Shaya’s most salient memories from when she had just begun her first job as a contractor working in the accounting department of a small company was also beverage-related. “In Argentina, there is a little drink called mate. Everybody drinks it. So here, I decided to bring the mate to work. They didn’t think it was appropriate. I was embarrassed and I didn’t know, so I apologized. So these little examples are things that affect the confidence.”

### *Career-Life Integration*

Despite the challenges that participants faced during their settlement in Canada, they all successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations and were enjoying a better quality of life at the time of the study interviews compared to their resettlement period. Nester described how his quality of life has improved since his resettlement period:

*I have a better quality of life. I spend some time with friends, we go to a specific meeting, socializing, picking all the birthdays all along the year and that’s a good pretext to get together. Even the dogs’ birthdays we celebrate sometimes. So yes, I mean it is difficult, but you can make it happen. It’s just attitude. You can try harder and make it happen. Yes, it doesn’t matter really how difficult it is if you really want to.*

Julia acknowledged the re-credentialing she pursued, and the challenges that came with it, enabled her to feel fulfillment in her career: “To me, if I do that and if I finish and I graduated and get a job, I am a fulfilled person in terms of career. If you’re not willing to give up something, then it will not happen.” She

described enjoying many luxuries she did not have during her resettlement process: “My husband and I can go out to dinner whenever we want. Before when we first came here, we had to make many sacrifices. So it wasn’t possible then. Now we can go out whenever we want and take vacations every year.” She emphasized that she now lives “a very balanced life, very balanced, not work, work, work. And to me, I have to have a balance. I put myself first because if I’m not healthy, I won’t be able to take of my family.”

Glenn’s “feelings about the work had changed” so he accepted a pre-retirement phase out plan where he reduced his work days/hours leading to eventual retirement at the age of 58. He remarked that he tried to make his time at work as enjoyable as he could by completing administrative tasks “outdoors”, but that this was not enough. His eventual retirement has allowed him to enjoy things like “getting more exercise, travel, a lot of natural body and greenery. The quality of life is really good. I got away from the computer monitor and that proved to be a good thing to do and a source of my source of my unhappiness.”

For some participants, career-life integration encompassed not only successfully re-entering their pre-migration occupations, but for their children to enjoy their efforts as well as the educational and recreational opportunities in Canada. Being a role model for his daughters was important for Abraham because he could show them that immigrants could succeed in a new country without having to work outside of their pre-migration field: “The other thing, too, is that at that time [my daughter] is my inspiration. I’ve got to give this kid a good future and in so doing I can’t give this kid a good future just by if I were just to work as

a draftsman. I wanted to show her that it's possible for immigrants to be successful in this country." Natalia reported that the stressful situations she and her family experienced during the resettlement process "either makes the family tight or most of the time breaks a family. It made my family stronger." With those stressful days behind her, Natalia can now enjoy "shopping with my daughters. Sometimes we go the four of us to have dinner and either [eldest daughter] invites my husband and I for dinner or [youngest daughter] is the one paying for the dinners. It's just like, 'Oh, you don't pay mommy, we just pay for the whole thing'. We've been 12 years and I told my husband we have a lot of things accomplished. Our girls are good girls. I think that's a great thing." Helen stated that all three of her children "are fluent in three languages" and that her "husband tried to catch some Portuguese" and that she "would love to go for French." Rodrigo stated that being hired as a full-time photographer enabled him and his family "to get more food and we were able to take buses. And then we were able to pay this apartment that was very nice, a lot of light and very nice street. We were able to buy a car and my kids they enjoy going to different things like concerts."

### How Participants Experienced Career Challenges

The following section describes the themes that highlight the ways in which participants experienced career challenges during their career trajectory in Canada.

*Identity Regression*

A central theme running through the research data was the experience of the various ways in which participants' identities were compromised during their settlement period. Participants articulated several compromised aspects of their identity, including a loss of financial status, career identity, and the feelings of frustration accompanying their lack of linguistic proficiency and the ways in which they were stereotyped for not speaking English fluently. Maria went from working as a full-time biomedical engineer in Mexico, enjoying many financial perks, to being a full-time student in Canada. While her father initially paid for her expenses, he experienced financial difficulties during her second semester and was unable to support Maria. Maria discussed some of the luxuries she enjoyed in Mexico that she no longer has: "In Mexico, I had a lot of luxuries. I had a maid. There's no laundry, there's no cleaning, there's no cooking. I was lucky, meaning not everyone has this, but thank God I did and I enjoyed it. So I had all these luxury things in Mexico, which was awesome. And then I moved here." Nester went from "living on my own in Panama" to "sharing a house with other people. I had my own room, we shared the kitchen and bathroom" while he was working as a janitor/night watchman.

Loss of career identity was a central feature of many participants' experiences. Julia described purposely choosing not to re-enter teaching when she decided to return to work. She worked in a clerical position for approximately seven years before deciding to attempt re-entering teaching. She emphasized that she "wasn't being challenged. I'm a teacher. That's who I am. I wanted to be back

in the classroom. I had to find a way.” Mehrdad was another participant who experienced a loss of career identity when his application for becoming a licensed engineering was rejected the first time he applied because he used the wrong job title on his application. He was in disbelief and recalled feeling “so shocked that they didn’t think I was engineer in Iran. I had the right degree and experience, but even though I used the wrong title for the application, I still couldn’t believe they didn’t read what I did and say, ‘This guy is not engineer’.”

Participants articulated being stereotyped due to their lack of fluency in English. While Nester was studying English in the United States, he recalled the fear and shame that initially affected his confidence to attempt to speak English, commenting that “It’s a kind of fear especially after certain – it’s like, I don’t know, you feel a little bit ashamed like you will be taken by like ignorant because you don’t communicate well.” Helen described feeling frustrated because everything took longer to complete due to her lack of proficiency in English: “You are not a learning disability, but it’s the time that it takes for everything. It’s like the frustration of okay, I’m doing this, I’m doing that. And we’ll see. We’ll see.” For Rodrigo, who made a concerted effort to improve his English, he felt frustrated when his Canadian-born co-workers would not correct him when he said something grammatically incorrect. He welcomed the feedback that native English speakers were unwilling to provide him:

*Sometimes I am telling my coworkers, say, “You know what, you never tell me you’re speaking the wrong way, when you can say things in this way, because then I can learn. But if I still making the same mistake and you never say anything to me, then I cannot improve.” And the people doesn’t like to teach the other one, the White people, I think. That’s my feeling.*

### *Refusing Mediocrity*

Participants resolved that they would not work in entry-level or menial jobs for low wages for the rest of their lives. One of the most challenging struggles Nester faced while working as a janitor/night watchman was whether to continue working, pursuing academic upgrading, or attempting to re-enter the marine engineering field. He recalled that “this decision wasn’t easy to make; it didn’t come to me one day all of a sudden. It is in the back of your mind whether you could be doing better and how you could be doing it.” Emphasizing her need to remain loyal to her profession, Julia described “feeling a bit insecure about not being able to do what I was trained for. And I did not want that feeling. I’ve always been true to myself and I’ve been true to people; this is what I want to do and I need to find a way to do it.”

Many participants expressed great love and satisfaction for their pre-migration careers and were unwilling to settle for working outside of their pre-migration field. Reflecting on her love for biomedical engineering and the sacrifices she made in order to work in that profession, Maria stated:

*I’m not going to settle for something else. I would do a job out of my job out of necessity for a short term, but you know I studied hard and there’s a reason why I did it, because I like it. I worked so hard for so many years under stress. I would never settle for working in anything less. I want to work as a biomed. I love my field.*

Shaya expressed that she “wanted to get back into accounting and nothing less. I had a goal and I was going to do whatever it takes to work again in my profession.” Natalia explained that “initially, because your career does not have the same approval in Canada, maybe you’re going have to do little steps, baby

steps in things. And that's what I did. And I showed people that I have done this and this and this, that I had experience in the administrative field. I wasn't going to stay in the lower position forever. I was going to make sure that I that I can fit that position in administration and move up."

While Glenn did not experience many challenges working as a university professor in Canada, he emphasized that "academic values were strong in my family" and that he was able to uphold these values during a few challenging times in his career. Mehrdad knew that he could earn a higher income working outside of his field, but knew that he would be unhappy doing so and decided against it:

*I know realtors or mortgage specialist or some kind of job like this they make 10 times of my job. But the reason I didn't choose them is because I love challenge, I like my profession, I like whatever I studied. It doesn't matter if nobody cares about that or nobody respect to this, or government doesn't care, still I like my profession. I only work in my field and I don't*

### *Time Management*

Participants emphasized the importance of utilizing their time in a manner that would increase their likelihood of re-entering their pre-migration occupation which would, in turn, improve their quality of life. Time was an important factor for Rodrigo, who initially worked as a dishwasher, so he ensured that he improved his English as he considered it his main barrier to securing a job as a photographer. Once he felt more confident with his linguistic abilities, he contacted the manager of a photography company that was hiring. "I hate doing dishes," Rodrigo said. "I didn't want to wash dishes forever, so I went to that office when my English was a little better and showed to them my portfolio. I

didn't want that job to go to somebody else.” Nester felt he could do much more than work as a janitor/night watchman at a marina. During his final year at this job, he decided to pursue an electronic dieseling course, as well as his license to become a building engineer. He would study and take classes during the day and work the night shift. Reflecting on this challenging time of his life, Nester commented, “It was a lot. I was in survival mode. I was trying to look for ways to improve my situation. And it wasn't easy.” Maria based her decision to complete a master's degree on the advice she received from other biomedical engineers.

She explained:

*Had I come here without a master's, without studying, then I would be, 'Okay what do I want to do for the rest of my life? I want to work as a biomed. So then what do I need to do to work as a biomed in Canada? I need to study.' So then you get a short-term decision of studying, but it's based on a long-term decision.*

For the participants who brought some monetary resources with them to Canada, they knew that these resources would eventually deplete, so they ensured that they made decisions to preserve as much of these resources as possible while still making vocational decisions that would serve them well in the future. For Mehrdad, this meant not accepting any jobs outside of engineering. He explained that, “For those six months, I was not sitting at home. I was searching for job, how to do, what to do. But I was not in rush, no? If you are in rush, most immigrant who come here and they are looking for today job, then they start wrong, no? Wrong job, they find wrong job.” Natalia was another participant who put her resources into purchasing a home and opening a jewelry store. Once the store was set up, her husband took over the day-to-day operations while she looked for employment “because we cannot be just sitting here and we don't get

to sell anything, how are we going to eat? We have some money, but the money won't last as much."

For Shaya, time was of utmost importance when it came to completing the various steps towards her certification in certified management accounting: "Right here, right now. Now. No time to lose. Right away. The sooner I could get my credentials, the better. If I wait, the more time I lose, the worse it will be, and the more fears I would get." Accepting temporary employment outside of her profession was out of the question for Shaya: "Taking a job outside of my field means that I won't get back in. You won't go back in, it will be really hard." Shaya recalled that "no matter how long it took, I would do it. I would finish it. And I would be me again. I would be an accountant again."

Abraham realized very quickly after arriving in Canada that he "would not be working as an engineer right away." Instead of "working in a job like at Safeway or McDonald's, I decided to see if I could find work as a design drafter." Abraham did not want to "waste time working in a job like at Safeway" because he "felt like I do have the training and why waste it? I should use it." He resolved that "no matter what it took, it would be a challenge and I need to prove that I can do it. We foreign-trained can do anything as good as the guys trained in Canada."

### *Developing a Career Network*

While difficult and daunting, participants described stepping out of their comfort zone by volunteering, networking, and developing connections outside of their ethno-cultural communities in order to develop their personal and professional networks. Helen attended a variety of workshops and lectures so she

could meet others in the mental health field and begin developing some contacts.

She explained:

*At the beginning, I went to different places networking. The first network was at [an organization]. That was my first place. And then they connected me with a series Mexican psychologist, you know? And for instance, if I went to contact to the liaison workers at [an organization], I went to the workshops that they were offering for parents. I think that was helpful for me.*

Nester attended different organizations' meetings when his schedule allowed him to do so while working as a janitor/night watchman in order to socialize. He stated that he "got in touch with certain organizations that, at certain times, I could take the time to attend meetings and it was basically to socialize. And then those are my few friends here and they have been my friends for eight years, basically, but that helped me too in knowing about different jobs." When Mehrdad was contemplating self-employment, he "made a list of all of the people that I knew in my field and what kind of work they were doing. I made the phone calls, tried to build a relationship with them and then after some time, I told them I am going to open a business." This strategy helped him build connections and, over time, referrals.

In order to improve their chances of securing employment in their pre-migration field, participants took risks that, despite making them feel uncomfortable initially, paid off in the end. Rodrigo stated that once his English improved, he began calling or visiting potential employers inquiring about employment vacancies. He even contacted businesses outside of the photography industry, explaining that:

*Because I have been survive in this country, I can go to next door and knock to door and say, “You know what, I’m looking for a job. I am a photographer.” “No, we are lawyers.” “Okay, thank you.” Or maybe the lawyer said, “No we are lawyers but I know somebody that needs a photographer maybe.” Because that’s the way it works. So if you have that type of mind it’s easier to move things around. At some point, you are going to find something. It’s a law.*

Like Rodrigo, Shaya also “networked a lot. I talked to everyone. I was networking with anyone and everyone.” Her networking efforts included “making a few friends and being introduced to their friends, going to workshops at [two settlement agencies], and volunteering at some community events for a few years.

Maria took the bold step of preparing for, and attending, a job interview she did not have, based on a tip given to her husband to check an on-line posting by a connection the two of them had made which resulted in her current position:

*[My husband] saw this posting online and he’s like, “You would be wonderful for this job, you should apply.” So I get my resume ready and I ask him to proofread it for me. And then, by the time he proofread it, I was going to submit it, it was gone, the posting was gone. I am like, ‘You’ve got to be kidding me; I am grabbing my bag and I’m going in person’. So the next day, I got ready for a job interview which I didn’t have, I printed my resume and off I go.*

### Overcoming Occupational Barriers in Canada

This section describes key themes highlighting the ways in which skilled worker immigrant participants overcame the occupational barriers they faced during their career trajectory.

#### *Risk-Taking*

Many participants shared stories involving purposely seeking out new experiences, including international study or work experience prior to migrating to Canada, as well as migrating to Canada in order to seek new experiences or to

pursue a romantic relationship. Some of them had family members that had stepped out of their comfort zones to move abroad or work abroad that served as the impetus for them to take the same risk. During his third year of undergraduate studies in Panama, Nester applied for, and received, a “scholarship to study English in the United States. It paid for up to one year of English.” He continued studying in the United States after completing one year of English language training, which culminated in an undergraduate degree in engineering. Nester even completed a master’s degree in the United Kingdom after returning to Panama from the United States. Natalia also participated in “a one year exchange program in the United States for studying English” prior to completing her undergraduate degree in Colombia.

Maria gave up a comfortable life in Mexico to pursue a relationship with a Canadian man she had met while working as an intern in a Central Canadian city. She conducted some information interviews and realized that she “wasn’t going to go just get a job like that even though I came to Canada under the points system, so I applied for the master’s program. And, say, if I broke up with Adam then at least I would have a master’s out of it and I could go back to Mexico.” Shaya also took a risk migrating to Canada in order to pursue a relationship with a Canadian man she met while traveling overseas: “We travelled back and forth visiting one another and when it was the time to get serious, um, he wouldn’t speak Spanish, he wouldn’t be willing to move down...so yeah I took the plunge, we got married, and now I’m here.”

Some participants had family members who migrated to other countries for academic or employment purposes. Prior to getting married, Abraham's father attended graduate school in the United States. Upon returning to the Philippines, he began working as a chemical engineer. He eventually married, had children, and migrated to the United States with his family. Abraham wanted to pursue studies in chemical engineering, but "rather than him supporting me he dissuaded me from taking chemical because during his studies because he spent a lot of time in the lab so he developed some kind of health condition. So it's something that he said he doesn't want me to be in the same situation." Helen described becoming aware of an unconsciousness of immigration that surrounded her growing up in Argentina, but only became aware of when she migrated to Canada: "I think that something about immigration was unconscious, but it was always around me. And so I took the strength to say, okay these people survive knowing that they couldn't talk with their families again and happen in that way because they died or because the Internet wasn't there, or the phone. So it will be easier for me, at least."

Glenn was "still two years away from review for tenure" at an American university when he was invited "for a three-day visit" at a Canadian university. During this visit, he was offered a tenured position which he "turned down because I was risk averse." Instead, he "decided to take the chance to visit for a summer and take the chance that I could regenerate the offer if I was interested, and that's what I ended up doing." Glenn recalled "the tenure alone wasn't enough or I would have taken it straight away. But it was certainly a factor."

### *Learning Shameless Self-Promotion*

When they were ready to begin searching for employment in their pre-migration occupations, many participants did not know the ways in which they should promote themselves to Canadian employers whether on paper or in person. They described initially utilizing strategies they used in their countries of origin only to discover that these approaches were ineffective in Canada.

Some participants, like Mehrdad, attended a workshop that taught immigrants the importance of networking in addition to how to prepare resumes and cover letters. Mehrdad recalled feeling “glad I took this course because I did not know that how to write the resume for Canada. I learned about how important the words is, the language, how you describe yourself. They teach me important lessons for what to say to network with people.” Others, like Maria, recalled having to change her approach during employment interviews to more closely match the style of self-promotion and confidence that Canadian employers value. She discussed how she likely contributed to her initial lack of success by being uninformed about the proper ways in which to market herself and her skills. She explained:

*Here, and I didn't know this while I was searching for a job for the first few months, is that engineers here apparently are very theoretical, meaning they do a lot of paper, a lot of calculations. But that's why you guys have technologists, to do the hands on. We don't. We don't have technologists in Mexico so we do everything. So that was so stupid, for example. How come no one told me that an engineer here is more of a theoretical person? So of course I'm going to these interviews and I'm looking so stupid because I like hands on.*

Maria stated that these early experiences, combined with what she learned at the career centre located in the university she attend, gave her the confidence to highlight her skills in a manner she previously thought to be unthinkable:

*So it's like people here are like, "Oh I'm so good at this, oh I'm so good at that." And that's how you have to be in the interview, right. It's hard to be like that because I was raised the opposite. I'm like, you always have to be humble and you don't overdo yourself. You like people telling you that you're good, but you don't tell people that you're good. So the hardest thing was to change the mind set of not bragging and being humble of who you are to just saying you're so great in everything, even if you're not a master's degree in the topic, but you have to say that you are.*

For Shaya, "everything about finding a job in Argentina was so different." She stated that "back home, I had to hand write all my cover letters so they would look at my hand writing and say whether it was professional or not." Employers would also consider "my personality, my psychology. I would have to go for a lot of psychological tests. They were very thorough tests just to get a profile of you." When she first began looking for employment in Canada, she was shocked by what she was "supposed to do to promote myself" and "honestly didn't know what to do." She recalled feeling "so excited at her first job interview "that I told him everything personal," which was something she regretted. She "remembered this experience when I was ready to search for a job after getting my CMA." Shaya relied heavily on networking by "spreading the word. I met a lot of people, I joined the CMA seminars, going to the events, and meeting new people. I talked a lot about my experiences. It was new for me and I was really shy at first."

Once he was more confident with his linguistic skills, Rodrigo decided it was time to contact the phone number from an advertisement for a professional

photographer he had found in a local newspaper. Despite an initial offer not materializing, Rodrigo “called her every two weeks. I just kept calling every two weeks and over and over again every two weeks. Then I got a call from the manager to work one afternoon per week.” This part-time offer turned into a full-time photographer position approximately 14 months later. This experience improved Rodrigo’s self-confidence to the point that he now feels comfortable self-marketing by “knocking on a door and say, ‘You know what, I’m looking for a job. I am a photographer’. That’s what you have to do to survive in a new country.” During her networking, Helen casually mentioned to a fellow Argentinian mental health worker that she could “write a ‘Good Immigrant’s manual’ instead of the ‘Good Samaritan’ for newcomers.” Two months later, the Argentinian mental health worker contacted Helen and informed her that “they created a committee so they allowed me to write this manual for those who recently arrived.” Writing this manual increased Helen’s employability because “I had now a publication in Canada that was relevant to my field.”

Dressing in a suit and tie helped Nester secure a job as the night watchman/janitor of a marina a few months after arriving in Canada. “I’m going to show them that I’m serious about getting this job because it was clearly in my sector,” recalled Nester. “The manager was really surprised. It was really unbelievable for him. So he hired me.”

#### *Ethnocultural Community Avoidance*

The participants who were not fluent in English acknowledged that if they wanted to improve their linguistic skills, it might be better for them to refrain

from building friendships with individuals from their respective ethno-cultural communities, because this would lead them to keep falling back on their first languages rather than orient them towards learning English. This was difficult for some participants as they recalled sacrificing potential social ties and friendships that may have evolved more easily and naturally with members of their ethno-cultural group compared with Canadian-born individuals. However, they believed that the benefits of not only improved linguistic proficiency, but also opportunities to network with Canadian-born individuals in order to increase their chances of finding employment or volunteer work would outweigh the temporary discomfort and loneliness they would initially experience by not seeking connections with members of their ethno-cultural community.

Mehrdad recalled that when he first arrived in Canada, he made a conscious decision not to befriend other Iranians right away. He wanted to improve his spoken English and the only way he felt he could do that was to network with individuals whose first language was English:

*I knew I should go to a different community. I talked to Canadian people, to improve my English. It was hard for me, but I try to get involved with the daycare of my son, to talk to the parents, and then with the schools and the teachers. Just to practice speaking, it wouldn't have been possible if I limit myself to only Iranians when I first come here.*

Similarly, Helen prioritized improving her fluency in English over befriending other Latin Americans right away: “Language is something to consider, something to prioritize. It was tough, it was very tough to be in a school and don’t understand. I didn’t understand anything what they were saying. I got my first friends there, from Japan, from China, from Iran. So I was not seeing other Latin

Americans, which maybe, I think, helped with my English.” Shaya also “did not want to mingle with Latin Americans because I had the impression that it would slow down my adjustment period. I didn’t want to talk to anyone in Spanish. I kept saying to myself that it would distract me from my goal because I wanted to learn English because it was so hard for me. It was a little bit extreme.” It was only until she had significantly improved her English “after two or three years” that she “started making Latin American friends. I do have a lot of Latin American friends now, but back then, I said that it wasn’t good for me.”

Julia made it a point to befriend individuals from different ethno-cultural backgrounds. While she has always strived “to have a multicultural friends”, she found that her English also improved “because I was always speaking in English.” Rodrigo did not speak any English when he arrived in Canada. He knew that if he was going to succeed in a new country, he needed to learn the local language “and learn it well.” He decided to refrain from befriending Latinos during his settlement “because I wasn’t going to speak English with them.” It was only when he felt comfortable with his English that he started befriending other Latinos.

### *Adaptive Flexibility*

In order to re-enter their pre-migration occupations, participants demonstrated adaptive flexibility by accepting jobs and working shifts that the majority of Canadian-born individuals would find undesirable and likely reject and making temporary sacrifices in their relationships in order to maximize their chances of completing the re-certification process.

While Nester's willingness to work weekends and shifts that many Canadian-born individuals would decline affected his health and relationships when he worked the night shift as a janitor/night watchman for three and a half years, this decision proved to be instrumental in maximizing his chances of working as a dock master:

*So I went there and I stay there for three and a half years, doing the 12:30 to 8:30 shift every night in the marina, inside, and with all the cleaning in the marina. It was very tiring, actually. I was an owl for that time. I got very little sleep. But here in this country, if you come and you show that "Yes I can do that and I can do it right"; and you have to think about okay – you have to sacrifice, too. That might mean to work the shifts that Canadians don't want. You have to make a lot of sacrifices, personal sacrifices, but you could succeed. It's possible.*

Shaya recalled that while the first contract position in accounting she accepted in Canada was less than ideal, she credits this experience as being a stepping stone to deciding to pursue re-certification:

*That first job wasn't good. That was awful. It was a company in bankruptcy. They wanted people to do all the cleanup. And I thought, 'Oh my gosh.' I didn't want to do it, but I had to do it because when I got here, I couldn't even speak English. I couldn't communicate. I said, "How am I going to do what I want to do?" I can't do it. So I had to take this job. But this job was like a stepping stone to build something new. So I decided to do my CMA to build something new. You know, my future. It's a payoff.*

Rodrigo was another participant whose first job in Canada was as a dishwasher, a job which he "hated" but "I did it anyway." He knew that he "didn't want to do it for the long-term" but that "there are always different ways to do things and sometimes, those things we have to do is not always nice or pleasant." He never forgot his goal of working as a professional photographer during the fourteen months he worked as a dishwasher: "So this part between the thing that

you want to do or your goal, you need to be very clear about how to put everything together. Because the best way you put this together is the best output that you are going to go to the other side, even if you have to wash dishes.”

Rodrigo stated that the job as a dishwasher gave him “a push to use that small piece of paper that I was keeping with phone number about a photographer. So then at some point, I was tired of the restaurant and I was thinking to start to look for something that works.” It was this photography company that offered Rodrigo his first full-time position as a photographer.

During her fourth year of employment as an administrative assistant in a non-profit agency, Natalia decided “to go back to school.” She “asked for a special leave so they grant me like 60% of my time for the first semester, which was fine. I was a TA for the first semester; it was working 60% of my time.” Working at the non-profit agency, along with studying and working as a teaching assistant was “tiring” because it meant “driving back and forth all the time, everywhere in the city to make this meeting or that class and being all the time tired.” Nevertheless, Natalia stated that “things were working out somehow.”

Maria was the only participant who initially applied to come to Canada under a study permit so she could pursue a master’s degree. When she was ready to apply for permanent residency under the federal skilled work category, she found out that she was “one point short of getting my PR [permanent residency] card.” She had to “prove in 90 days that something good happened to me for them to give me one point.” Maria “worked my ass off trying to finish my thesis so they would give me just one point.” She described “being away from everyone and

everything. I didn't see anybody and didn't do anything all day and night, except to work on my thesis." She stated that she had to make "many sacrifices" during this "very stressful time" that involved "not being healthy." Maria completed her master's thesis and subsequently received the one point she needed for her Permanent Residency card.

Julia was another participant who "made sacrifices to study and pass my courses" when she "went back to school for my teaching certificate." She described "studying day and night. I came home and I had all my books and I would read. I wouldn't see my husband that much when I was in school, you know, to spend lots of time together, it just wasn't happening. It was very difficult...but you have to do what you need to do." Abraham echoed similar sentiments as he described how he completed his engineering re-certification process: "I went to school for two years of full-time studies and I enjoyed the challenge, yes. But it was just that, a challenge because I had a wife and kids and my wife at the time was supporting the family because I wasn't working. So I didn't see her very much and I didn't really have time for relaxation and hobbies."

### *Career/Family Compromises*

Participants considered whether re-credentialing was the right step to take, when to pursue it, and what they would need to compromise in order to achieve it. The transition from working to pursuing re-credentialing often meant a temporary decrease in standard of living. These compromises also temporarily affected the amount and quality of time they were able to spend with their families. Julia explained that her quality of life and that of her family's changed when her

husband decided to pursue coursework at the local university in order to obtain his professional license while she would continue working full-time. Julia recalled that “we had to give up a lot of things. We had to give up our house. Our quality of life was compromised because we had to live back in the apartment because [my husband] was the main bread winner. Our lifestyle was compromised. But then I said, ‘Maybe for now we will give up [the children’s] swing set in the backyard. We didn’t have any of that because we had to downsize’. And so it’s impacted us in a positive way, but it wasn’t easy.” Mehrdad and his wife took turns with their respective re-credentialing processes, which involved one spouse assuming the majority of the household and childcare responsibilities while the other spouse studied for their licensing exams. He acknowledged the sacrifices he and his wife made during the re-credentialing process: “We had to study so we sleep less, always study, but try to spend time with kids. I make sure my wife had enough time for study so I worked during that time. Then she did same while I went to study. But you should always sacrifice something, but these sacrifices are only temporary.”

Shaya described the discomfort she felt during her resettlement process when her husband was supporting her financially because she was used to earning a good living: “I remember at the beginning, he was supporting me and I always felt like a burden. Back home, my life was pretty good. I had a really good job; I got to travel all throughout the country. When I came here, suddenly I’m nothing.” The compromises she made with respect to her financial contributions

to the household during her re-credentialing process delayed their plans to start building a life together:

*Of course, making more money improves the quality of the things that you can buy and acquire and get more courses and more training. So if you don't have the funds, you can't really move ahead. When you start with nothing, I mean, when I came here, he didn't have anything and I didn't have anything, so when you start with nothing, you don't want to get into debt. So we had to wait a little bit longer to be able to build, to start building something together because I was taking all those classes to get my certification.*

The majority of participants recalled having to compromise the quantity and quality of time they spent with their families. During the 90 day period she was trying to complete her master's thesis in order to obtain the one point she was short of for her Permanent Resident card, Maria told her boyfriend, with whom she was living, that “you have to go to your parents' house since you're sick because I need to be working here. I have 90 days to write the thesis, review it, and just finish. Your mom can take care of you; I don't have time for this.’ Literally he was living at his parents' for three weeks. When he got better and he came back, I didn't have time for him. I told him to do his own thing and not to bother me. So really, I didn't see a whole lot of him during that time.”

Natalia described the compromises both she and her husband made when they opened their jewelry store: “We were planning to have our own business in [Western Canadian city] until we both find jobs.” Natalia set everything up in the store while her husband “took care of the housing and school matters for the girls.” After Natalia “set up everything” and her husband assumed the daily responsibilities of running the store, Natalia said that she “would go look for a

job.” She was worried about their financial resources even though they “had some money, but the money won’t last as much.” Natalia and her husband continued to see less and less of each other: “I was not seeing my husband too much when I was working and doing my master’s.” While she knew this would be temporary, she still “questioned why I came here. My husband wasn’t working and he had challenges with the language and everything. I wanted to be with my daughters and try to help them, like they were involved with the new culture and everything. So I need to just cut different kind of things. So I didn’t see my husband for too much when I was back at university and working full-time.”

At the time of the interview, Helen was pursuing a master’s degree on a part-time basis. She described “going through this program day by day; that is, literally day by day” and having to forgo “some social gatherings so I can study and to finish my assignments.” She stated that she purposely waited eight years to begin her master’s degree until “my kids are doing well, my husband is doing well and my back got better, you know my body got better.”

### *Self-Advocacy*

The participants shared their experiences of standing up for themselves when they believed they were being mistreated by their co-workers, as well as challenging the regulatory body of their profession. Natalia described in considerable detail the ways in which she was mistreated at the non-profit agency where she was working in an entry-level position she considered to be a stepping stone to once again working as a community development coordinator. She described the problems stemming from a change in company policy (and a

subsequent change in her work assignment), as well as discriminatory attitudes. She was very outspoken about the way she was being treated. Her union could not help her, so her case went before a judge in a hearing. She won the case and left her position. Despite the physical and emotional strain this experience put on her and her family, she was happy she stood up for her rights. She explained:

*It's just that it was really tough. I felt helpless. I have always fought in Colombia. I have fought twice as much in Canada. I first went to the director of the department, then to the union. I had a paper trail because the papers say a lot of things you don't have to interpret and it's better to have it in writing. Having the papers is the best strategy that you can have. The union rep came, he tried to help. There was screaming and yelling between the CEO and the union representative, so they decided to go into mediation. So they decided to negotiate with me thinking we can do something. It didn't work. So we went to a hearing and that's how it went to an end.*

Rodrigo described receiving belittling comments from some of his co-workers about “how to use the photography equipment or something about the mail system in Canada that they think we didn't have back in Mexico. So I say to them, ‘I'm not stupid, I know about these things’. For some people, there are these perceptions that you are coming from this country that they think is third world, so you don't know many things.”

Abraham would sometimes encounter individuals who did not believe he was a competent engineer. He remarked that sometimes the best thing to say is nothing at all and let his credentials speak for themselves: “Having the paper on the wall sometimes it helps. You know my certification, they'll give you due respect now that you are somebody. I don't know. You have to be somebody to be reckoned with sometimes.” When Julia was told that she would have to take all

of the courses in the teaching certificate program, she convinced the admissions counsellor to allow her to only take courses relevant for an elementary school teacher, as well as the courses that would lead to a minor special education. While speaking with the admissions counsellor was difficult for Julia, she believed that she should not have to take courses that would not serve her in her career. She highlights that “I didn’t have time for this. I’m not going to take those other courses that’s not helping me. I want to teach elementary school. I have this ability to teach elementary school. I can keep the students engaged. I did it in the Philippines. So I just said this to [the admissions counsellor]. They’re just going to make you do things that you’ve done before if you don’t assert yourself.” In the end, Julia ended up “doing a minor in special education.” She rationalized that completing this minor would “look good on my resume for when I was ready to apply for a job, so I took the classes for it and I did it.”

After obtaining his engineering license, Mehrdad approached his manager for a raise. He believed that “since I got my license, I should be paid like a licensed engineer and nothing below.” He stated that his “manager didn’t even know what a P. Eng. was. He has no idea that P. Eng. is a license for the engineers.” Undeterred by his manager’s comments, he “scheduled a meeting with him and the supervisor and they looked at my file. They asked me some questions and I said to them that I have many good ideas. I got the raise.” Helen described feeling “some resentment for going for a training, but not getting the certificate” shortly after obtaining her full-time position at the non-profit agency. She stated “this was a two-part training” and that she had successfully “finished

the first part.” Because her master’s degree is not recognized by her profession’s regulatory body, Helen “didn’t get the certificate...even though I passed both the parts. So now I am just doing this training and I will do more trainings in the future, but I don’t know what happens because I’m still doing studies. So it’s tricky with these things because it’s up to your employer what they want to do with your credentials.”

### *Staying Put*

All participants remained in the same Canadian city to which they had migrated and found that staying in one place allowed them enough time to establish some roots and solidify career opportunities. Glenn expressed his desire to retire in the Canadian city to which he had migrated to in 1990. He indicated that once he “got away from the computer monitor, I realized, ‘Wow, there’s actually fun things to do here’. No need to move.” Nester expressed a desire to stay in the Canadian city in which he has established himself during the summers and return to Panama during wintertime in Canada: “I like [Canadian city], I love [Canadian city] and I want to stay here just during summer time. So I plan to be like a migration bird of some sort, stay summer there, summer here, summer there, summer here, summer there, summer here.” Abraham moved to the U. S. for two years so his wife could accumulate teaching experience in order to maximize her chances of obtaining a North American teaching certificate. However, he proudly asserted that he has “planted my roots here and this is home. I can easily go to another city in Canada or anywhere else, but this is home.”

Helen recalled the time in which the owner of the house she was renting told her “we need to sell the house and we wanted to sell the house to you.” Helen was stunned and initially turned down the offer. It was during this time that Helen realized she “had made some good connections at work with the colleagues. So I went to ask some of my colleagues and they said, ‘You can make it’. And they start to share their personal experiences in regards to getting a mortgage and to buy a house in Canada.” Helen discussed it with her husband and “I said okay. So we went to a credit union and got the mortgage. So I realized that I was doing okay, that I was given a chance for a new life.”

Mehrdad explained that establishing roots was important not only for his business, but also his wife’s career: “My wife studied very, very hard to get licensed as physician. While she did the residency, she met other physicians in hospitals, clinics, places like that. This helped her to start to work in Canada to find a job.” Maria also felt that remaining in the same Western Canadian city she had migrated to benefited her in the long run because she was able to create important connections with various individuals in her industry:

*Since I did the master’s degree in Canada, I stayed here for a few years, right? So when you stay in one place for a while, you get to start meeting different people. I got to go to different biomedical engineering conferences and got the chance to meet different people. If I was interested in the company, I would say, “Oh, I’m just a master’s student right now, but I’ll need a job later, after when I graduate’ and they would say, ‘Sure, okay. Here’s my business card” and I would try to keep my eyes open for these opportunities.*

### Conclusion

Participants’ interview responses revealed rich and diverse career trajectories, as well as the ways in which they experienced career challenges, and

how they overcame these career challenges. Even though participants experienced occupational and personal challenges during the settlement process, their disclosures demonstrated a desire to re-enter their pre-migration occupations, as well as numerous active coping strategies they utilized in order to ensure a successful future. The next chapter will situate participants' pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences within the existent literature in this area, as well as provide recommendations for researchers, counsellors, and policy makers.

## CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the career transition experiences of an ethnically mixed sample of skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada over the course of their resettlement process. The guiding research questions were: (a) What kinds of career/academic changes and challenges have immigrant professionals who have found jobs in their fields gone through since the time they came to Canada? (b) How did they experience, respond to, and overcome the challenges they faced? (c) What factors, issues, or life circumstances do immigrant professionals take into account when making decisions about pursuing re-entry into their pre-migration professions versus accepting employment outside of their fields of training? Ten skilled worker immigrants from a variety of occupational backgrounds and source countries were interviewed to address these research questions. Participants' responses to these inquiries suggested several common themes that emerged representing the collective experience of their career trajectories, such as temporary career challenges, career acculturation, and skills/competency reconstruction. Commonalities stemming from the ways in which participants experienced career challenges also emerged, such as a regression in identity, career boredom, and time management issues. However, despite the occupational barriers they faced, participants overcame several challenges by taking risks, utilizing adaptive flexibility, avoiding their ethno-cultural community during their resettlement process, taking turns with their spouse to undergo the process of re-credentialing (if the participant was married

and required to recertify in their pre-migration occupations), engaging in self-promotion for employment purposes, and utilizing self-advocacy or assertive behaviour.

This chapter will discuss the career trajectories of the participants, how they experienced career challenges, and the factors that enabled them to overcome occupational barriers in Canada. Research specifically examining the successful pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences of skilled worker immigrants is extremely limited. However, the literature regarding cognitive, behavioural, and career theories, as well as research examining immigrants provides some insight into these findings. The implications of the research study for counsellors and policy makers working with skilled worker immigrants attempting to re-enter their pre-migration occupations will subsequently be presented. This chapter concludes with the disclosure of the researcher's experiences studying skilled worker immigrants who successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupation and outlines directions for future research.

#### Career Trajectories of Skilled Worker Immigrants Who Re-Entered Their Pre-Migration Occupations in Canada

Each participant in this study underwent unique experiences during their career trajectory. Together, several common themes emerged representing the collective experience of the participants. The career trajectories of these participants are discussed in the context of the current literature in the following sections.

*Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect*

The Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect, a term which I have coined and defined as the belief that the education and work experience acquired by immigrant professionals outside of North America will secure them gainful employment in their pre-migration occupations in their host society, was a predominant theme in this study. A major discrepancy between immigrants' expectations related to working in Canada and the reality of their job-seeking and employment experiences has also been found in other studies of immigrants' careers (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Lee et al., 2001).

A number of participants discussed the confidence they experienced prior to migrating to Canada with respect to resuming their careers in positions that would allow them to utilize their qualifications and experiences. They attributed their confidence to not only their educational qualifications and work experience in their countries of origin, but also to their scores on the Canadian points system that was used in the gate keeping process and led to the success of their immigration applications. Many were dismayed when they realized their qualifications and experiences were not deemed acceptable by Canadian employers and the professional regulatory bodies. Khan and Watson (2005) described similar results in their study of professional immigrant women from Pakistan who felt cheated by the points system that provided them with false hopes of occupational success and a better quality of life in Canada. Based on the findings of the present study, and related findings of previous research (e.g., Aghakhani, 2007; Arthur et al., 2010; Khan & Watson; Lee et al., 2001), the Pre-

Migration Career Confidence Effect appears to heighten distress of immigrants' in their attempts at career re-entry in Canada. The other themes that emerged in the study shed some light about how participants deal with the distressing experience of a major blow to their previous self-image and perceived occupational success.

### *“Temporary” Career Challenges*

Soon after arriving in Canada, many participants began working in menial or entry-level positions due to impending financial needs, unrecognized foreign qualifications and work experience, as well as a lack of Canadian work experience, which several researchers have also noted (Arthur et al., 2010; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Khan & Watson, 2005; Lee & Westwood, 1996). While these positions were comparably inferior in status and income to what participants were accustomed to in their countries of origin, they coped by believing that working in these jobs would either be temporary or would serve as a stepping stone to re-entering their pre-migration occupations. The literature is saturated with examples of professional immigrants who continue working in these menial jobs without ever re-entering their pre-migration occupation (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson; Merali, 2008) and experience declines in their physical health (Lee et al., 2001), mental health (Dean & Wilson), family relationship and structure (Dion & Dion, 2001; Merali; Sue & Sue, 2008), and social class (Reitz, 2001, 2005). Even though participants in the present study were frustrated with the challenges of working in menial or entry-level positions, their frustrations provided them with the impetus to make decisions that would maximize their chances of re-entering their pre-migration occupations. The hardiness of their personalities in handling

adversity and in utilizing career adversity as a motivator to continue to pursue their occupational aspirations in Canada supports emerging findings on the migrant personality. Research suggests that a unique subclass of individuals from around the world seek out new experiences for better social, economic, and educational opportunities, and that the specific individuals that tend to succeed in their new host countries tend to be higher in work focus and centrality than family focus, and tend to have more resilient personalities and coping styles than those who succumb to career barriers (Boneva & Frieze, 2001).

*Re-credentialing.* One decision made by a number of participants in this study to help them overcome temporary career adversity was to pursue re-credentialing, often while working in menial or entry-level positions. Some participants completed graduate or professional degrees while others sought licensure through their respective occupation's professional regulatory body. Two participants sought certification in Canada that was not directly related to their pre-migration occupation as a means of gaining entry into their pre-migration occupation. One participant lost her job and experienced a variety of physical and mental health challenges as a result of completing a master's degree (she subsequently found employment in her pre-migration field). Other studies have demonstrated that re-credentialing often poses significant challenges for immigrants (Bauder, 2003; Dolin & Young, 2004), including impending financial needs (Aghakhani, 2007), time constraints, and difficulty supporting one's family (Lee & Westwood, 1996).

Despite experiencing a variety of emotional and financial challenges during their re-credentialing process, such as completing the requirements in English, impending financial needs, time constraints, and, for some, family obligations, they successfully obtained their respective degrees or professional licenses. Participants, however, were quick to point out that the same points system that allowed them entry into Canada based on their educational qualifications and work experience denied them employment in their pre-migration field. While a few participants viewed re-credentialing as a welcomed challenge that provided them with valuable experience in Canadian culture, the majority believed that re-credentialing was an unnecessary barrier that only delayed their entry into the Canadian labor market. However, they recognized that this was the only vehicle to their eventual career resilience. Many studies have focused on the impact of decredentialization on professional immigrants' sense of identity and in generating feelings of bitterness, frustration, anger, worthlessness, and hopelessness (Chen, 2006). Only a few studies have reported the creative and innovative ways in which some organizations facilitate access of skilled worker immigrants into their pre-migration profession, such as through apprenticeship training and access to professional development courses or university courses as part of job skill acquisition (Schmidt et al., 2010).

*Career Acculturation.* Participants in the present study discussed employment adaptation challenges, such as differences between workplace norms and communication styles in Canada and those in their countries of origin and how their use of English as a second language was perceived by others or

experienced by them. The process of acculturation or adaptation to cross-cultural contact and the corresponding value and behavioural shifts is most often expected to occur on the individual level (Sue & Sue, 2008). However, in Berry's (2006) most recent works on acculturation, adaptation to intercultural contact at the organizational level is given greater importance. In order to effectively integrate into the new host society, immigrants need to engage in behavioural shifts that correspond to the expectations of the culture of work in their respective occupations. The findings of this study suggested that some of the most relevant aspects of the culture of work that may require behavioural shifts for immigrants to successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupations appear to include language use, workplace communication styles, norms for self-presentation, and self-advocacy, which will be further described as they relate to other themes uncovered in this research.

The impact of challenging intercultural contact experiences at work on the participants in this study were consistent with findings of other studies demonstrating that immigrants' employment-related experiences predict their psychological adaptation and well-being (Arthur et al., 2010; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). Moreover, employment challenges are associated with frustration, anger, chronic stress, negative self-concept, and health problems (Grant & Nadin, 2007; Merali, 2008). Two participants in this study experienced health problems as a result of employment challenges. What is notable about this group of participants is that they overcame employment adaptation challenges and were able to gainful

employment in the Canadian labour force, which allowed them increased opportunities for cross-cultural interactions. The increased opportunities, in turn, facilitated their cross-cultural learning and integration, contributing to their eventual success.

*Cognitive and Compensation Dissonance.* The cognitive and compensation dissonance noted in this study served as a catalyst for participants to seriously ponder their occupational future in Canada and set realistic career goals. For these participants, that meant re-entering their pre-migration occupation. Some participants strongly disliked the menial jobs they were forced to work due to impending financial needs while others were unhappy with the lack of cognitive stimulation and challenge in entry-level jobs. Still, others were not being fairly compensated for their expertise and skills in these entry-level positions. As a result of the cognitive (Festinger, 1959) and compensation dissonance, they resolved that they needed to come up with a clear and tangible career goal in order to be effective in pursuing their aspirations, and to successively approximate this goal with each subsequent job or educational/retraining step. Numerous studies have demonstrated that goal-setting is a necessary and required step in order to maximize one's chances of a desired outcome (Latham & Locke, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2006). While Amundson, Yeung, Sun, Chan, and Cheng's (2011) study on the transition experiences of successful Chinese immigrants did not define what "success" or "doing well" (p. 130) meant, they revealed that the lack of a career goal was one of the hindering factors for participants.

The majority of existing studies have focused solely on the barriers to successful integration among professional immigrants that contribute to a sense of hopelessness, such as a lack of Canadian work experience (Lee et al., 2001), unrecognized foreign credentials and experience (Khan & Watson, 2005), discrimination based on accented speech, race, or religious background (Mattu, 2002; Murdie, 2002; Yakushko, 2009), language barriers (Purkiss et al., 2006, Perewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006), and ethnic-sounding names (Oreopoulos, 2009). In this study, with the exception of one individual, had experienced all of, or a significant number of, these challenges during their resettlement process. Despite these challenges, they were able to successfully address their cognitive and compensation dissonance emerging from all the barriers and re-enter their pre-migration occupations.

Few researchers have investigated transition experiences of successful immigrants. One exception is Amundson et al.'s (2011) study which examined the transition experiences of 20 successful Chinese immigrants, specifically how participants accounted for their success. Utilizing an exploratory interview-based approach, participant subjective definitions of what constituted a successful transition were explored. Findings indicated that having a positive attitude and personality, skills and resource development, proper education and work experience, and the presence of family and community support contributed to a successful integration experience. It was unclear whether any of the participants had re-entered their pre-migration occupations.

### Experiencing Career Challenges

The results of this study suggested that participants experienced a variety of career challenges during their resettlement process in Canada. The challenges presented here have been previously described in the literature.

#### *Loss*

Despite high pre-migration hopes, the immigration process for participants in this study resulted in a number of emotional, social, economic, and cultural consequences that affected their identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

Previous studies (Bemak et al., 1996; Khan & Watson, 2005; Arthur et al., 2010) have also demonstrated that loss is an unavoidable aspect of immigration. The loss experienced by the participants came as a surprise especially as they began to notice the inconsistencies by which they were selected to migrate to Canada and the lack of available employment opportunities in their pre-migration professions. Skilled worker immigrants may be more likely to experience more extreme feelings of pain and loss during the resettlement process as a result of the loss of economic and social status. Researchers have criticized the disparity between Canada's immigration criteria and hiring policies (Aghakhani, 2007; Chen, 2008; Khan & Watson, 2005). The majority of participants stated that loss of occupational status was one of the most painful losses they experienced, which was also demonstrated in Aghakhani's study examining the career development and career transition experiences of first and second generation Iranian-Canadians. The first generation Iranian-Canadian participants in Aghakhani's study experienced losses in their socioeconomic status, educational and

occupational status, support network, and culture. It took many years for participants to re-build what they had lost as a result of migrating to Canada from Iran. Despite their best efforts, however, none of the first generation Iranian-Canadian participants ever re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada.

### *Lack of Occupational Challenges*

Working in menial or entry-level positions results in a lack of cognitive challenges and stimulation, something which skilled worker immigrants were not accustomed to in their countries of origin. Studies have demonstrated that immigrants' employment-related experiences are predictive of their psychological well-being and adaptation (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko et al., 2008).

Employment challenges are associated with feelings of alienation, adaptation problems, acculturative stress, negative self-concept, frustration, anger, chronic stress, and other health problems (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Health Canada, 1999; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). Skilled worker immigrants who remain unemployed or underemployed receive fewer returns on their education compared to similarly-trained Canadian-born counterparts (Girard & Bauder, 2005), thus leading to lower rates of participation in the labour force and lower levels of earnings in Canada (Reitz, 2001). The human capital skilled worker immigrants bring with them to Canada is not utilized to the fullest extent in order to benefit the economy.

Medicine is one profession that would greatly benefit from the existing pool of qualified International Medical Graduates (IMGs), who are individuals that have completed their postgraduate residency training outside of Canada or the

United States (Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, 2012). Despite the shortages of family physicians in Canada (Dauphinee, 2006; Emery, Crutcher, Harrison, & Wright, 2006), providing IMGs with opportunities to re-enter medicine is one step that would provide this group of highly skilled immigrants with the challenging and meaningful work they were involved with in their countries of origin. Merton (1968) argues that the social structure that defines, controls, and regulates the acceptable ways of achieving a goal can either be facilitating or hindering to individuals seeking attainment of the goal. For IMGs, the social structure of the certification process makes it difficult to practice medicine in Canada. Thus, IMGs' ability to reach the cultural goal of financial success through professional re-integration becomes more and more unattainable the longer they spend working outside of medicine.

### *Discrimination*

Discrimination is an important factor when attempting to understand the experiences of immigrants in Canada. Previous studies have revealed that immigrants experience discrimination not only by individuals, such as employers, co-workers, or in social situations (Choudry, Hanley, Jordan, Shragge, & Stiegman, 2009; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, 1999), but also by the devaluation of international credentials and experiences, with less value being attributed by employers to internationally obtained credentials than to those obtained in Canada (Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005; Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Galabuzzi, 2005; Reitz, 2001), all of which were demonstrated in this

study. Furthermore, some participants noted that the discrimination they experienced, and continue to experience, was not always overt; subtle, “invisible” forms of discrimination that is not obvious still affects individuals (Chen, 2008).

Previous studies have demonstrated that Canadians are less comfortable around some ethnic minorities than others and hold stereotypical views of certain ethnic minorities. Specifically, these studies show that Canadians are least comfortable among ethnic groups of non-European origin (Berry and Kalin, 1995; Kalin and Berry, 1996). Given that attitudes toward members of ethnic groups can lead to discrimination (Ziegert and Hanges, 2005), this lack of “comfort” could feasibly bring about differential and negative treatment of non-European immigrants. Interestingly, the only participant in this study who reported not experiencing discrimination was a White American male.

The Stereotype Content Model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008) hypothesizes that stereotypes possess two dimensions: warmth and competence. Warmth refers to how friendly, kind, and affectionate an individual seems while competence refers to how capable an individual appears to be. Observers utilize these dimensions to determine competition and status. Research has demonstrated that Canadians view members of specific ethnic groups differentially. For example, Asian immigrants are viewed as competent and respected, but not socially warm (Fiske, 2012). Jewish, Muslim, Middle Eastern, and Black immigrants in Canada are viewed as neutral, undistinguished on both competence and warmth ratings (Fiske). Given that attitudes toward members of various ethnic groups can lead to discrimination (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005), this lack of

“comfort” with members from specific ethnic groups could feasibly bring about differential and negative treatment of immigrants from non-European backgrounds. The experiences of the participants support the efforts that more and more organizations are engaging in to provide diversity training to their employees. It appears that such training is critically important to facilitate the effective integration of immigrants into the Canadian workforce. Berry (2006) argues that integration has to be a two way process, with immigrants adjusting to Canadian society and institutions, and Canadian institutions and organizations adapting to and facilitating an environment that is welcoming to immigrants.

### *Time Management*

Utilizing their time in a manner that would increase their likelihood of re-entering their pre-migration profession was of utmost importance as participants believed it would lead to a better quality of life. This meant improving their English language skills. Language plays an integral role in the adjustment process in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008). Previous studies have demonstrated that language barriers are one of the most common challenges for immigrants as they seek employment (A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women, 2007; Arthur et al., 2010). The majority of the participants in this study were not fluent in English when they arrived in Canada. Even though participants experienced feelings of loss of ethnic and cultural identity and longing for one’s country of origin while improving their linguistic skills (Bemak et al., 1996), they nonetheless made it a priority to improve their language skills by attending ESL classes, watching and listening to English-language programming, attending

workshops and meetings that would provide them with opportunities to speak English, and avoiding their ethnocultural community during their resettlement process. Interacting primarily with people outside of their cultural communities was perceived by the immigrants to provide the best opportunity for second language acquisition, whereas focusing on interaction with one's own community was perceived to be a hindrance during the integration process.

This finding of ethnocultural community avoidance is a new dimension of skilled worker adaptation to the Canadian workforce that emerged from this study and raises interesting issues. For example, while ethnocultural community avoidance may increase opportunities for English acquisition, it may reduce opportunities for social support during skilled workers' initial resettlement process, and contribute to feelings of isolation during a time while they are experiencing cognitive dissonance and other forms of distress. Therefore, it may contribute to better employment outcomes but possibly poorer mental health outcomes in the short term.

Re-credentialing was a priority for those who were required to do so and they emphasized this in the way they managed their time. These participants did not want to spend more time on re-credentialing than was necessary due to the expensive costs associated with upgrading and the lost income they would inevitably have to endure the longer they remained unemployed during their re-credentialing process. Re-credentialing is not easy for the majority of skilled worker immigrants. Participants in this study were able to successfully complete their re-credentialing despite the numerous challenges they faced, an uncommon

finding (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2010, Young & Mandzuk, 2010). Their effective time management processes and prioritization of re-credentialing likely contributed to their success.

### *Career Insecurity*

Participants reported being unfamiliar with how to market their skills in order to attract employers during the early stage of their resettlement process. One of the primary needs of newcomers is access to the labour market (Mwarigha, 2002), which the majority do not have as a result of unrecognized foreign credentials and experiences. Some participants were shocked and uncomfortable with the Canadian norms for self-promotion, but realized they needed to change their approach during employment interviews to more closely match the style of confidence and self-promotion that Canadian employers value. While settlement services provide some job finding and employment assistance to newcomers (George, 2002; Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005), it appears that information regarding Canadian norms for self-presentation and self-promotion may not be effectively addressed from the experiences of the participants in this study. It seems important to provide immigrants utilizing these services with information on effective self-marketing and promotion during the job hunt and interview process. Information that effectively contrasts the cultural norms of humility prevalent among many cultures with Canadian self-presentation norms that many participants identified as “arrogant” would be an important part of making such education effective. Immigrants need to know how their previous

experiences may diverge from what is expected in Canada and the advantages associated with making adjustments.

The participants in the present study actively sought out help in how to adapt their self-presentation to make it more congruent with Canadian expectations after they became aware that their initial ways of presenting themselves were not serving themselves well in the Canadian labour market. The steps they took to adapt likely contributed to their eventual career success. To date, no studies have focused on skilled worker immigrants' perceptions of, and lack of familiarity with, self-promotion for employment purposes so this aspect of the research has uncovered a new and important area for emphasis in the labour market integration of immigrants.

### Overcoming Career Challenges

Despite the career challenges participants encountered, they were able to navigate them successfully and re-enter their pre-migration occupations in Canada. While career success can be conceptualized in both objective and subjective terms (Judge & Bretz, 1994), very few studies have actually studied career success among professional immigrants. The few extant studies (Amundson et al., 2011; Hakak et al., 2010) have focused on subjective career success, which is defined as a feeling of accomplishment and doing one's best (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). The present study is unique in that it focuses on both subjective and objective dimensions of career success, specifically regarding the extent to which participants overcame career challenges (subjective career success) and were able to successfully enter the Canadian labour market

specifically in their pre-migration occupations (objective career success). The ways in which these participants overcame career challenges are discussed in the context of the current literature in the following sections.

### *Taking Risks*

Participants took a variety of risks prior to migrating to Canada, such as studying or working abroad, as well as during their resettlement process, including avoiding their ethno-cultural community in order to improve their language skills, learning the Canadian norms for self-promotion, and self-advocacy with regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, and employers.

A sizeable number of participants studied or worked abroad from their countries of origin prior to migrating to Canada. Perhaps there was a subconscious idea of immigration within these individuals that would later materialize into migration to Canada. These participants possessed some understanding and experiences of the challenges that would await them in Canada. Many immigrants engage in a complex decision-making process that begins long before the actual migration (Messias, 2002) involving “push factors” or negative conditions in the country of origin and “pull factors” of attractive qualities in a specific location (Gmelch, 1980, p. 140). The findings of this study provided unique insights about the characteristics of immigrants that are objectively successful, in the sense that they have sought out prior experiences to prepare themselves for immigration. Future studies should examine prior international experience among skilled worker immigrants in Canada to explore whether this is a contributing factor to successful career re-entry.

A key theme in the present study was the participants' avoidance of their ethno-cultural community during the resettlement process with the purpose of improving their language skills. Language plays an integral role in the adjustment process in the host country (Stewart et al., 2008) yet language barriers continue to be one of the most common challenges for immigrants as they seek employment (A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women, 2007; Arthur et al., 2010). Interestingly, the participants who attended language classes noted that they did not have any classmates from their countries of origin, so they were forced to speak English in class in order to communicate.

While these second-language programs are helpful, they are not suitable replacements for learning a language through development in a specific culture (Arthur & Merali, 2005), making second language learning particularly challenging when it occurs in adult life. Participants addressed this challenge by consciously deciding not to befriend individuals from their ethno-cultural communities until they achieved a high level of proficiency in English. Ethnocultural community avoidance is a new finding that may increase opportunities for English language fluency, but may contribute to feelings of isolation and reduce opportunities for social support during a distressing time

The majority of participants did not know how to market themselves in a manner that would capture the attention and interest of Canadian employers. They described initially utilizing strategies they used in their countries of origin only to discover that these approaches were ineffective in Canada. Participants who utilized the services of settlement agencies for career guidance reported that these

services were helpful and not difficult to locate, a finding that is unsupported by previous research (Khan & Watson, 2005; Mwarigha, 2001). Perhaps participants knew exactly what they required assistance with and were able to convey this information to settlement/career agency staff due to more advanced English language skills. Alternatively, participants described receiving individualized attention from settlement/career agency staff (with the exception of one participant), which may have contributed to their overall satisfaction with settlement/career services.

Participants recalled attending networking events, workshops in their pre-migration field, and even approaching individuals or businesses unrelated to their profession in order to build their professional network. Some attended networking events sponsored by their ethno-cultural community with the purpose of meeting individuals in their pre-migration occupation. Sue and Sue (2008) have noted that one of the barriers to successful integration in a new society is a lack of social and professional networks. Ibarra (1993) noted that it is difficult for minority individuals to create ties that are homophilious, that is, that are composed of people similar to themselves due to the small number of minority group members in today's organizations. When these networks are homophilious, they typically do not involve high-status contacts since the similar others who are present in organizations are typically not in positions of authority. Nevertheless, strong and homophilious connections have been demonstrated to possess important benefits for minority group members by acting as sources of trust and support (Woolcock, 1998) and, in the case of immigrants, informing them of employment

opportunities that will ultimately help them to enter the local labour market (Boyd, 1989; Hagan, 1998). However, it should be noted that previous studies have not addressed whether they compensate for the problems faced by professional immigrants due to their lack of access to high-status contacts in organizations (Hakak et al., 2010). Despite their initial fears and reservations, participants in this study made a conscious effort to build their professional networks.

Numerous examples of engaging in assertive communication/self-advocacy with post-secondary institutions, regulatory bodies, and former employers with the aim of not having to re-take as many courses during their re-certification and/or re-credentialing process, to ask for occupational and monetary raises, and to advocate for themselves in situations involving discrimination were identified. Immigrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in society (Sue & Sue, 2008); many fear that if they speak out against discrimination or unfair treatment, their immigration status will be compromised. Participants did not appear to fear jeopardizing their immigration status because they knew what their human rights were and chose to speak out against perceived injustices.

Participants suggested that their eventual comfort in utilizing assertive communication with institutional bodies (e.g., post-secondary institutions, professional regulatory bodies, etc.) and employers contributed to their successful pre-migration occupation re-entry in Canada. No other studies have identified self-advocacy or assertive behaviour among skilled worker immigrants as a factor related to career success, but this finding makes intuitive sense as the self-

advocacy evident in the participants' narratives helped them to directly address various barriers they were facing.

### *Adaptive Flexibility*

Participants described the importance of being flexible to their career re-entry success. For example, adaptive flexibility involved accepting menial jobs and working shifts that the majority of Canadian-born individuals would find undesirable and likely reject. Participants viewed their employment in survival jobs or entry-level positions as stepping stones to re-entering their pre-migration occupations. Many studies have demonstrated that immigrants are forced to work survival jobs (Aghakhani, 2007; Chen, 2008; Hayfron, 2006; Lee et al., 2001; Merali, 2008), with the majority remaining in these jobs for decades without ever working in their pre-migration profession (Aghakhani). Some immigrants change occupations altogether as they discover that they must start over in order to achieve comparable levels of employment and income with their similarly-trained Canadian-born counterparts (Girard & Bauder, 2005).

Participants acknowledged that if they wanted to see an improvement in their occupational status, they would have to make sacrifices, no matter how difficult or demanding they would be. An important consideration of adaptive flexibility includes locus of control, which is a generalized expectancy regarding the degree to which individuals control their outcomes (Sue & Sue, 2008; Weiten, 1998).

There are two types of loci of control: external and internal. Individuals with an external locus of control believe that their successes and failures are

dictated by external factors, such as luck, fate, or chance (Sue & Sue; Weiten). On the other hand, individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their successes and failures are determined by their abilities and actions (Sue & Sue; Weiten). Locus of control should be viewed on a continuum. For example, while the acknowledgment of systemic barriers against successful career re-integration is important (external locus of control), skilled worker immigrants can choose to improve their fluency in the host country's official language or work hours that non-immigrants wouldn't accept to increase their employability, etc., (internal locus of control). While an external locus of control may relieve some of the stress that individuals experience in light of challenges, it may also lead to feelings of powerlessness (Marshall, 1991). Participants seemed to switch to an internal locus of control while still acknowledging the need for systemic changes in the Canadian immigration system. It was an internal locus of control that seemed to enable them to recognize what they had control over (e.g., linguistic proficiency) and to accept what was out of their control (job requirements set forth by employers).

### *Reframing*

Participants utilized reframing by intentionally shifting their perspective which, in turn, appeared to change their feelings, thoughts, and actions. Considered a cognitive strategy, reframing allows individuals to find some good in difficult situations and modify their goals in order to maximize their chances of attaining a successful outcome (Beck, 2011). For some participants in this study, reframing entailed changing their perspective on the re-credentialing process.

While they were dismayed with the requirements of re-certifying in their pre-migration occupations, they focused on the desired outcome of what re-certification would provide for them (e.g., stable employment in their pre-migration occupation, higher income, stability, etc.).

Other participants wanted to prove that they were just as intelligent and capable as Canadian-born individuals and wanted to demonstrate this through attaining high marks in their re-certification courses and examinations. These participants sought meaning in the challenges they were facing, which helped them move forward. The Pakistani women in Khan and Watson's (2005) study demonstrated appreciation for some aspects of Canadian society, which was also found in this study. Moreover, Duggleby and Wright (2005) found that the participants in their study sought meaning in their challenges and experiences, which allowed them to recognize and appreciate the value of the difficulties they had faced.

#### *Making Career/Family Compromises*

Participants carefully considered whether re-credentialing was the right step to take, as well as when to pursue it and what they would need to compromise in order to achieve it. Often, this meant a temporary decrease in their standard of living. For married participants, this meant taking turns with the re-credentialing process. Decredentializing has been a long-standing issue in Canada in preventing career entry and mobility among skilled worker immigrants (Bauder, 2003; Dolin & Young, 2004). The credentials possessed by immigrants lose their value over time as a result of gate keeping by organizations exercising

cultural and normative controls (Richmond, 1984). As a result, many immigrants do not achieve comparable levels of earnings with similarly-trained Canadian-born individuals (McDonald & Worswick, 1998).

Re-credentialing is not easy for the majority of skilled worker immigrants as was demonstrated in this study. Many participants compromised their physical and mental health in order to work in survival or entry-levels jobs and/or complete their re-credentialing process, which increased their risk of physical and mental health problems, a finding also discussed by Dean and Wilson (2009) and Lee et al. (2001). Some professions, such as medicine, are notorious for training entry barriers (Wong & Lohfeld, 2008) while other professions, such as teaching, have attempted to implement creative and innovative ways to facilitate access of skilled worker immigrants to their profession in Canada (Schmidt et al., 2010, Young, & Mandzuk, 2010).

### *Aiming High*

Despite the professional and personal challenges they faced, the skilled worker immigrants in this study did not give up their attempts to re-enter their pre-migration occupation. Their career identity was an important and salient part of who they were in their countries of origin, and who they continue to be in Canada. Despite the regression to a previous life role among these participants (e.g., Worker to Student; Super, 1992), the specific importance they attached to each of their life roles after arriving in Canada appeared to be an important factor in their decision to pursue re-entry into their pre-migration occupation.

Participants knew that despite the considerable amounts of time and resources

they spent on language training and re-credentialing, it was for the pursuit of their ideal role (Super, 1969, 1990) of worker in their pre-migration occupation in a new country. For some participants, they wanted to serve as a role model for their children and members of their ethno-cultural community that success is possible, no matter how insurmountable the challenges appeared to be. Super's theory of career development appeared to most effectively capture the immigrants' experiences.

It is important to explain the exceptionality of Glenn's case prior to discussing the study implications. Even though he met the inclusion criteria for this study, Glenn's experiences as a skilled worker immigrant were markedly different from the other nine participants. Glenn migrated to Canada from an English-speaking western country (the United States) with an arranged offer of employment. As a result of this offer of employment, he was able to begin working in Canada immediately.

Despite his arranged offer of employment in his pre-migration occupation in Canada, Glenn still experienced some career challenges during his tenure as a university professor. Glenn's experiences challenge our assumptions that only immigrants from non-Western countries experience career challenges. Glenn's story serves as a reminder that the new cohort of federal skilled workers migrating to Canada after July 1, 2011, will still experience career challenges, regardless of how quickly they begin working in Canada and their country of origin.

## Implications

The intention of the present study was to address significant limitations in our current understanding of skilled worker immigrants' pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences in Canada. Specifically, this study endeavoured to understand how skilled worker immigrants experience career challenges and overcome occupational barriers over the course of their resettlement experience. To date, no studies have been conducted to answer these specific questions with skilled worker immigrants. Research in the area of the career transition experiences of skilled worker immigrants has instead focused on their reactions in response to unemployment and underemployment (Man, 2004), taking survival jobs for financial reasons (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson, 2005; Merali, 2008), emotional distress (Baker, Arseneault, & Gallant, 2004), physical illness or injury (Lee et al., 2001), employer discrimination (Oreopoulos, 2009), and the process of re-credentialing or academic upgrading (Lerner & Menahem, 2003), notably in education and medicine (Beynon et al., 2004; Wong & Lohfeld, 2008) at a single point in time. Although these perspectives inform our understanding of the occupational and educational barriers skilled worker immigrants face, they only describe skilled worker immigrants' reactions to unemployment and underemployment. They do not necessarily inform our understanding of how to assist skilled worker immigrants to be successful in re-entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada, or how to guide them in their career decision-making at different points in their resettlement process, which would enlighten counsellors and the counselling field, in general. This study is of particular

importance since skilled workers who enter their pre-migration occupation in Canada are likely to have initially faced problems with unrecognized foreign credentials, unemployment, underemployment, or employer discrimination. Their experiences can be particularly informative for counsellors wanting to learn about how to assist skilled workers with career decision-making.

Based on the emerging research findings and the way in which this study was conducted, several considerations for assisting skilled worker immigrants are proposed for counsellors and policy makers. First, important considerations for how counsellors can guide skilled worker immigrants in their career decision-making at different points in their resettlement process are offered. Even though the participants in this study did not seek counselling at any point during their career trajectories, their experiences can inform counsellors working with skilled worker immigrants. These suggestions are also meant to provide insight into effective ways of working with skilled worker immigrants who may be unfamiliar with counselling and the benefits it can provide, provided that the counsellor possesses the required knowledge and skills to work with immigrant populations. Second, policy implications are discussed.

### *Counsellor Competency*

It is advisable that counsellors familiarize themselves with the relevant cross-cultural counselling literature (e.g., Arthur & Collins, 2010; Cheatham et al., 2002; Grant, Henley, & Kean, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2008) in order to develop their competency in working with immigrant populations. Part of providing culturally appropriate counselling services involves counsellor self-awareness of

their own values and biases, particularly when working with immigrants who are typically marginalized and underutilized and prematurely terminate counselling when compared to individuals from the dominant culture (Arthur et al., 2010; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005; Sue & Sue). While most counselling programs have taught their students that their biases or values should not interfere with their ability to work with clients, such a warning typically remains at a cognitive level (Sue & Sue).

Counsellors may be unaware of how their biases and values about immigrants impact their understanding and effectiveness working with this population. For example, a counsellor may think that the immigrant client's problems would largely be solved if only they would become more proficient in English. This type of assumption negates the reality that many immigrants experience in their host country such that improving their linguistic skills becomes secondary when impending financial needs and family responsibilities take precedence over linguistic mastery (Aghakhani, 2007). It is advised that counsellors examine their own attitudes and beliefs about immigrants and whether their own biases may be inadvertently harming the counselling process.

Counsellors are also advised to familiarize themselves with relevant community settlement agencies and provincial and federal associations that specialize in the evaluation of foreign credentials. Settlement services aim to facilitate the successful settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees into the social, cultural, economic, and political life of Canada. Some examples of the services provided by settlement agencies include: translation of documents,

assistance with locating and filling out forms and applications, ESL classes, assistance with job training or finding employment, and providing information about the host society's education system, health care, recreation opportunities, and other community services. Furthermore, counsellors should be prepared to refer their skilled worker immigrant clients to associations that evaluate the foreign credentials of professional immigrants (e.g., International Credential Assessment Service of Canada, International Academic Credential Evaluation and Assessment Services, Foreign Credentials Referral Office, etc.). Counsellors are advised not to spend time providing settlement services when the settlement needs of their clients can be met by settlement agencies in their community. Instead, counsellors should utilize their expertise in the process and facilitation of change with their skilled worker immigrant clients.

### *Confidentiality Issues*

Research has demonstrated that immigrants underutilize and prematurely terminate counselling due to the biased nature of the services (Arthur & Merali, 2005; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005). In order to develop rapport with immigrant clients, counsellors should possess knowledge regarding the immigration process, the barriers that many immigrants are likely to face, and the difficulties integrating into a new society, including occupational barriers (Arthur & Merali, 2005), such as those described by the participants in this study.

Moreover, many immigrants may be unfamiliar with, or mistrust, confidentiality in the counselling process due to the political climate in their countries of origin and the self-policing environment which affects the ways in

which members of specific communities interact with one another and outsiders, even in exile. It is not uncommon to hear immigrants express suspicion about revealing personal information and whether or not the information will be given to the government to be used for dire purposes (Sue & Sue, 2008). The reliance on questioning that is commonplace during a counselling intake interview may result in immigrant clients viewing the counsellor with a high degree of suspicion.

These fears of personal and political persecution are justified and must be addressed in the first session by the counsellor (Yakushko et al., 2008); otherwise the therapeutic alliance will be affected. Studies have demonstrated that therapeutic alliance is the strongest predictor of a successful therapeutic outcome (Ahn & Wampold, 2001; Safran & Muran, 1996). In order to create a safe therapeutic space that is culturally and personally affirming, counsellors should clearly explain the limits to confidentiality in counselling, as well as convey a sincere desire to better understand immigrant clients and their cultural background (Yakushko et al.).

### *Format of Counselling*

Counsellors may encounter immigrants at different trajectories of their resettlement process in Canada. Given the importance that the participants placed on social support, counsellors may want to consider offering their services in a group format, which would allow the development of connections with others in similar situations, thus providing them with support from their peers (Yakushko et al., 2008). Having immigrants at different trajectories of their resettlement experience may provide guidance and support to individuals who are still

contemplating whether to pursue re-entering their pre-migration occupation to meet individuals who are in the process of re-credentialing, for example. A group format, however, would likely exclude those immigrants who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations. In this instance, it may be helpful for the group members if the counsellor asked a skilled worker immigrant who has successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupation to attend one group session. This would provide immigrant clients with a role model who has experienced the multiple challenges they are facing (e.g., re-credentialing, grief and loss, etc.), as well as an opportunity for normalization, which may be more powerful in a group versus individual counselling setting (Yalom, 2005).

### *Goal-Setting*

Individuals typically enter counselling without having a specific goal in mind. Usually, they articulate general feelings of anxiety, confusion, or malaise and would like these feelings to disappear. Individuals from non-dominant ethno-cultural groups typically access counselling services when they reach a crisis point (Sue & Sue, 2008). For immigrants, their physical and mental health and relationships may be affected by the challenges of resettlement in a new society (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Hernandez, Denton, Macartney, 2007).

When immigrants access counselling, it is essential that the counsellor explain to them the importance of goal-setting. By its nature, goal-setting implies dissatisfaction with one's present condition and a desire to reach a different outcome (Locke & Latham, 2006). Goal-setting should be a collaborative process between the counsellor and clients with the counsellor ensuring that proper goal-

setting indicators are present. Research has indicated that failures in goal-setting may be attributed to errors such as not matching the goal to the performance measure, not providing feedback, not obtaining goal commitment, not measuring the individual's personal (self-set) goals, not conveying task knowledge, setting a performance goal when a specific high-learning goal is required, not setting proximal goals when the environment is characterized by uncertainty, or not including a sufficient range of goal difficulty levels (Locke & Latham, 1990). For example, if a client's goal is to re-enter his/her pre-migration occupation, the counsellor should ensure that his/her goals reflect the SMART principle of goal-setting: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Goals should address things that are within the client's control. Counsellors should also discuss with the client possible obstacles that may make it difficult to achieve their goals and how they plan to overcome them. It may be helpful for clients to brainstorm ideas and solutions for dealing with obstacles (Yakushko et al., 2008).

### *Holistic Approach*

The career trajectory of skilled worker immigrants is different from that of the native-born population; consequently, career counselling must reflect the former group's specific realities (Chen, 2008) as identified by the participants in this study. For example, immigrants may be forced to accept employment in menial jobs due to impending financial needs (Aghakhani, 2007) or may change careers altogether due to unrecognized foreign credentials (Beynon et al, 2004; Khan & Watson, 2005). Counsellors should also be aware that even if an immigrant client's presenting issue in counselling is career-focused, underlying

feelings of anger, disappointment, or sadness are likely to be present. Merely addressing the career component is insufficient; a holistic approach encompassing the skilled worker immigrant's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health is recommended.

An important part of counselling immigrants is allowing them to share their immigration and resettlement story. Counsellors should listen carefully for themes presented in this study in the client's story. Counsellors may inquire about how the client experienced career challenges. Counsellors should be careful not to move too quickly into problem-solving or the helplessness that immigrants experience as they remain unemployed or underemployed by eliminating distorted automatic cognitions (Beck, 1987) or irrational beliefs (Beck, 1995) as is the norm in counselling approaches in North America; telling their story should be done at a pace that the client is comfortable with.

Allowing clients to share their stories provides an opportunity for the counsellor to utilize normalization by delineating the parallels between the client's experiences and the experiences of other immigrants, in general. Such an approach may help immigrant clients realize that they are not alone, their reactions to occupational and settlement challenges are normal and not unusual, and that other immigrants are experiencing similar reactions and feelings. Normalizing immigrant clients' experiences relieves any blame from the individual and provides an opportunity to address not only the systemic barriers they face as they consider re-entering their pre-migration occupation, but also an opportunity for the grieving process to begin, which is an important part of the

resettlement process among newcomers (Arthur et al., 2010). The counsellor should also inform the client that it is acceptable, and may even be helpful, to share any negative perceptions they may hold against the host society and that the counsellor will not be offended by such critiques. This may be especially important if the counsellor visibly belongs to the majority culture of the host society.

The counsellor may also consider asking the client if s/he is more comfortable telling part of or all of his/her story in his/her mother tongue. Linguistic barriers often place immigrant clients at a disadvantage. Counsellors perform their work primarily through verbalization and clients are expected to be able to verbalize their thoughts and feelings to counsellors in order to receive help (Sue & Sue, 2008). Given that the majority of counsellors are monolingual, clients for whom English is their second language, speak with an accent, or otherwise have a limited command of English are placed at a disadvantage in counselling. Using an interpreter is not always feasible and poses certain limitations, such as inaccurate interpretation, cultural differences in mental health concepts, and the possibility of the interpreter possessing their own agenda that will affect the interpretation and subsequent alliance with the counsellor (Sue & Sue; Waxler-Morrison et al., 2005).

### *Loss and Reconstruction*

Skilled worker immigrants will likely have experienced a variety of losses as a result of migration, including the devaluation of their credentials and work experience, culture, career, family, friends, socioeconomic status, self-confidence,

and self-respect (Dean and Wilson, 2009; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Khan & Watson, 2005). Loss is an unavoidable part of migration (Lee & Westwood, 1996).

Counsellors are encouraged to address these losses prior to any discussion of immigrant clients' attempts to re-enter their pre-migration occupation. Unresolved grief and loss may affect their mental and physical well-being (Kazemipur & Halli, 2000).

When an immigrant client has accepted and processed the grief and loss of their career identity, the counsellor may introduce the idea of reconstruction. For some clients, this may be an opportunity for rebirth, as was the case for one participant in this study. For many others, however, reconstruction may involve numerous challenging tasks requiring considerable time and resources. It is important that the client and counsellor engage in an open and honest discussion of what reconstruction involves (e.g., re-credentialing, temporarily working in an entry-level position in order to gain re-entry into their pre-migration profession, etc.). The process of reconstruction may lead some immigrants into a different, but equally satisfying (and successful) career path (Amundson et al., 2011).

Career success has been defined in both subjective and objective terms (Judge & Bretz, 1994). Subjective career success refers to a feeling of accomplishment and of putting forth one's best efforts (Mirvis and Hall, 1994) while objective career success refers to the observable and measurable achievements (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005). A recent study examining the transition experiences of successful Chinese immigrants in Canada utilized a subjective definition of career success (Amundson et al., 2011). The present study

focuses on both the subjective and objective dimensions of career success by examining the success stories of skilled worker immigrants from a variety of occupations regarding the extent to which they perceive their ability to enter the Canadian labour market in positions that are commensurate to their education, skill level, and expectations, as well as their ability to have re-entered their pre-migration occupation.

During the reconstruction process, counsellors are advised to utilize Super's (1969, 1990) constructs of multiple life role participation when working with skilled worker immigrant clients. Specifically, counsellors should point out that even though the client successfully achieved integrated life-role participation in their country of origin, achieving similar life-role status during the resettlement process in the host country may not be possible for a period of time. Clients should be informed that they may need to temporarily go back to a previous role (e.g., from worker to student) and may be required to neglect other roles (e.g., leisurite, spouse, parent, or homemaker) at various points of the resettlement process, such as during re-credentialing or recertification process. Counsellors should normalize this experience as many skilled worker immigrants possessed a strong occupational self-concept (Patton & McMahon, 2006; Zunker, 2002) in their countries of origin and came to Canada experiencing the Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect, which is the belief that the education and work experience acquired by immigrant professionals outside of North America will secure them gainful employment in their pre-migration occupations in their host society.

Counsellors are advised to discuss Super's concept of "emergent career decision-making" (p. 201), which is "the process where successive career decisions by people are sharper and finer and may be different at different times in their lives" (Patton & McMahon, p. 56). After arriving in Canada, skilled worker immigrants may make different decisions about how to respond to unemployment and underemployment compared to how they would respond at a later stage in their settlement process. For example, even though re-credentialing to enter one's pre-migration occupation in Canada may not be feasible for immigrant professionals with young children, these individuals may choose to re-train after the children reach school-age, accepting their unemployment or underemployment as a short-term predicament. During this time, they may choose to focus extra time or resources on other life roles, such as citizen, parent, spouse, or homemaker.

One way in which counsellors can assist skilled worker immigrants to achieve a more desirable life role integration and participation is by helping them distinguish between things they cannot change that are outside of their control (external locus of control) versus the things they can change that are within their control (internal locus of control). One way to do so is by orienting them to an internal locus of control. It is helpful to acknowledge that while their predicament is unfavourable and may take longer to change than they had anticipated, they possess the choice to change some aspects of the situation. Clients should make a list of all possible courses of action they can take in order to influence what is within their control (e.g., English language acquisition, networking, learning how

to write resumes and cover letters appropriate for a North American job market, etc.). It is important for clients not to evaluate or judge what they write; the point of this exercise is to simply list all of the possible options that are within their control. It may be helpful for clients to present this task to their spouses, other family members, or friends in order to obtain more ideas that they had not initially considered.

Once this list of options has been generated, clients can then evaluate each item and decide on the best course of action. For example, if improving fluency in English is an important item on the list, counsellors should then help clients brainstorm the best course of action to take in order to move towards improved linguistic fluency (e.g., location and hours of classes, subsidized child care options, where to purchase class materials, etc.). The goal of this exercise is to demonstrate to clients that they have more options within their control than they may have initially realized, thus maximizing the chances of orienting clients towards an internal locus of control. Such an approach even provides added health benefits as studies have demonstrated that individuals with an internal locus of control are less likely to develop health problems compared to individuals characterized by an external locus of control (Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2008; Roddenberry & Renk, 2010) and more likely to succeed academically (Yazdanpanah, Sahragard, & Rahimi, 2010), which is helpful for skilled worker immigrants who plan to pursue re-credentialing or recertification in their pre-migration occupations.

*Encouragement of Occupational Risks*

If the client's goal is to re-enter their pre-migration occupation, the counsellor should encourage him/her to take occupational risks. Occupational risks include avoiding members of their ethno-cultural community during the resettlement process in order to improve their fluency in the host society's official language, learning Canadian norms for self-promotion, volunteering within their pre-migration profession, networking within and outside of their pre-migration profession, and learning effective communication and assertiveness skills when dealing with employers, post-secondary institutions, and their profession's regulatory bodies.

Participants in this study who were not proficient in English made a conscious decision to avoid members of their ethno-cultural community during their resettlement process in order to improve their proficiency in English. Previous studies have demonstrated that lack of proficiency in the host country's official language to be a significant barrier to immigrants' successful settlement (Arthur et al., 2010; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Scassa, 1994). Only one participant spoke English as his mother tongue; the rest possessed varying levels of fluency and the majority encountered some challenges related to their proficiency and accent. While research has demonstrated that applicants who speak with an accent in job interviews are viewed less positively by the interviewer compared to applicants without accents (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Purkiss et al., 2006), participants in this study ensured that they improved their fluency in English, despite continuing to speak English with an accent.

Similarly, while having a local accent may be advantageous in certain professions, accents have little impact on performance in most occupations (Scassa, 1994).

While this suggests that skilled worker immigrants' career integration may be compromised, continuing to improve one's proficiency in English was clearly an important factor that contributed to the occupational success of the participants in this study. While immigrants who are isolated from members of their ethno-cultural community are less likely to be noticed by mainstream Canadians and by health care professionals compared to a large community of immigrants and refugees from the same country of origin (Baker, 1993), it appears to have been an important factor for participants in this study to have re-entered their pre-migration occupation. Despite decreased opportunities for social support during the initial settlement process, as well as feelings of loneliness and isolation, counsellors are advised to suggest and discuss the benefits of this option to their skilled worker immigrant clients.

Counsellors are also advised to teach immigrant clients how to promote their skills to Canadian employers in a way that maximizes their chances of getting noticed. Self-presentation in resumes, cover letters, and job interviews may differ markedly from their country of origin. Many participants in this study noted that they needed to change their attitude towards self-promotion while they were applying for jobs. The Canadian norms for self-promotion were not something they were accustomed to in their countries of origin; in fact, some participants noted that such behaviour would result in automatic dismissal of their application. Moreover, they noted that it would be considered narcissistic to brag

about one's accomplishments when a reference letter from a former manager or supervisor could have provided a realistic and accurate assessment of their skills. Some participants sought the assistance from settlement agencies and a career centre located at a post-secondary institution in order to learn more effective occupational self-promotion strategies.

It is suggested that counsellors discuss the importance of networking with their immigrant clients or directly refer them to specific employment networking groups or events. Some skilled worker immigrants may not feel comfortable networking until their proficiency in the host country's official language improves, as was demonstrated by a few participants in this study. Counsellors should emphasize that networking is not only limited to attendance at formal networking events; it can be done in places that appear the least relevant to their professions, such as at the grocery store, pharmacy, etc. One particularly advantageous way in which skilled worker immigrants can network is by volunteering in their pre-migration profession. Some participants in this study did this, which resulted in increased contacts and, in one instance, a full-time position. The networking possibilities are many and varied; the client should be encouraged to think creatively so as not to become reliant on the counsellor for ideas.

### *Communication Skills Training*

It is suggested that counsellors consider engaging immigrant clients who are members of dual career couples in dialogues with their spouses regarding family decision-making about each spouse's re-credentialing and occupation re-entry process. Participants who migrated to Canada with their spouses took turns

re-credentialing or recertifying in their pre-migration occupations. This arrangement provided steadier income from the working spouse while the participants completed the re-credentialing or re-certification process. It should be noted that during the stressful time of resettlement, some immigrant families from patriarchal cultures may adhere more strongly to their cultural tenets of gender role expectations in the host society (Shavarini, 2004). In these situations, counsellors should assess the couple's relationship functioning, communication styles and patterns, and previous decision-making strategies. The counsellor should not impose his/her own ideas of what constitutes fair and equitable turn-taking with respect to the re-credentialing or re-certification process. It is important for counsellors to allow clients and their spouses to arrive at their own decisions about how to maximize positive career outcomes in their families, and which members will make sacrifices at what points in time to support one or more of them in their pre-migration occupation re-entry in Canada.

It is recommended that counsellors discuss communication, particularly cultural communication differences that exist between the host country and the client's country of origin. In some cultures, directly challenging an individual in a position of authority is frowned upon whereas in other cultures, such behaviour is not only considered acceptable, but encouraged (Waxler-Morrison et al., 2005). Some of the participants in this study shared stories of discrimination, being asked to take irrelevant courses in their pursuit of re-credentialing, and being treated as less than competent in their occupation. They utilized assertive communication, which enabled them to reach a satisfactory outcome. Counsellors can also play an

important role in effective workplace socialization in relation to cultural norms with clients, and can role-play various kinds of challenging intercultural interactions at work for clients to problem-solve around.

### *Diversity Training and Consulting*

Counsellors may act as diversity consultants and provide diversity training, which are programs or educational or developmental initiatives that aim to increase participants' cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (King, Dawson, Kravitz, & Gulick, 2010). Diversity training is based on the assumption that the training will benefit an organization by increasing the inclusion of different ethno-cultural groups, protecting against civil rights violations, and promoting better teamwork (Madera, Neil, & Dawson, 2011).

Diversity training programs are recommended for organizations seeking to hire skilled worker immigrants as apprentices or interns in order to help them acclimatize to Canadian workplace norms and expectations. Given the diversification trend in Canadian workplaces and the potential contributions that counsellors may provide these organizations, it is critical that counsellors, employers, managers, and workers seek to improve their multicultural competencies along three dimensions encompassing beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991) prior to designing and implementing diversity training programs.

Similar to counsellors' examination of their own attitudes and beliefs about immigrants and whether their own biases may be inadvertently harming the counselling process, such an examination is strongly recommended for employers

and managers to investigate whether their own biases may be inadvertently hindering immigrant employee recruitment, retention, and promotion (Sue, 1991). For example, counsellors, employers, and managers should examine their beliefs and perceptions regarding differences in accented speech, dress, and communication styles in the workplace. An expansion of awareness regarding employers' and workers' own culture and the cultures of other ethno-cultural groups is needed recommended to avoid stereotyping that may hinder employee recruitment, retention, and promotion (Sue). Movement toward awareness of one's own biases and values, respecting and valuing differences, and becoming comfortable with cultural differences are necessary components for inclusion in a diversity training program.

Counsellors and employers should ensure they acquire the relevant knowledge regarding their own and other ethno-cultural groups' history, experiences, values, worldviews, and social norms (Sue & Sue, 2008). These factors are critical in understanding the ways in which members of specific ethno-cultural groups may perceive education, career, achievement, work, and career choice (Arthur & Collins, 2010). The greater the depth of knowledge an employer or counsellor possesses about various ethno-cultural groups, the more likely the company or program will be successful in incorporating diversity. Furthermore, understanding racism and prejudice, as well as the organizational barriers impeding cultural diversity in the workplace, is suggested (Sue, 1991).

Skill development involves creating the foundation for communication (Sue, 1991). Effective managers and workers are able to send and receive both

verbal and non-verbal messages appropriately and accurately. One of the career challenges encountered by the participants in this study was the differences between workplace norms and communication styles in Canada and those in their countries of origin. Interventions aimed at not only strengthening one's ability to send and receive both verbal and non-verbal messages, but also to be able to recognize and respond to both verbal and non-verbal messages, are suggested.

It is important to ensure that diversity training programs contain a strong anti-racism component (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989) and are tailored to institutional and individual needs (Sue, 1991). Each organization is unique with respect to work, corporate, and extracurricular cultures (Schein, 1990). Organizations are also at different stages in their receptivity and implementation of cultural diversity goals. A universal training program cannot meet the complexity of diversity in the workplace. Depending on the specific goals chosen by employers or managers, it is recommended that counsellors address the functions (i.e., recruitment, retention, and promotion) and barriers (i.e., cultural communication styles and characteristics, interpersonal-attitudinal prejudice and discrimination, and systemic barriers) in an organization where diversity training and/or intervention would be most beneficial.

### Considerations for Policy Makers

In 2011, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced major changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program. Specifically, individuals who submitted an application under the Federal Skilled Worker Program on or after July 1, 2011,

will be assessed for eligibility according to new criteria (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b).

In order for an application to be determined as eligible for processing, the applicant must include results of his/her official language proficiency examination, and fall into one of the following two categories: (a) possess a valid offer of arranged employment, (b) possess one year of full-time, continuous employment or equivalent part-time paid work experience in the last ten years in one of 29 eligible occupations listed under the National Occupation Classification list, or (c) for International students enrolled in a PhD program in Canada, they must have completed a minimum of two years of study, be in good academic standing at the time of their application, and have not received an award which requires them to return to their home country to apply their knowledge and skills, or who graduated from a PhD program in Canada no more than 12 months before the date their application is received and did not receive an award which required them to return to their country of origin (or did, but satisfied the terms of the award; Citizenship and Immigration Canada). Individuals planning to migrate to Québec are required to follow a separate selection process prior to having their application finalized by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009f).

As of July 1, 2011, a maximum of 10,000 federal skilled worker applications were considered for processing over the following 12 months. Within this limit, a maximum of 500 federal skilled worker applications per eligible occupation under the National Occupation Classification list will be considered

for processing each year while PhD applications are subject to a separate annual limit of 1,000 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012c). Individuals will be notified, in writing, and issued a refund of their processing fee if they do not meet the above criteria.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2012b) decided to temporarily cease acceptance of federal skilled worker applications for an indeterminate period of time in order to determine the efficacy of these new changes. These changes, however, do not assist the thousands of immigrants who migrated to Canada under the points system of the Federal Skilled Worker Program prior to 2011. The unemployment and underemployment these individuals face often lasts decades (McDonald & Worswick, 1998; Reitz, 2005). For individuals who migrated to Canada under the points system, it may be more difficult to leave their jobs (even if they are poorly paid) in favour of re-credentialing and improving language skills (Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Despite the fact that skilled worker immigrants who migrate to Canada under the new Federal Skilled Worker Program possess an arranged offer of employment, they will still face many of the same challenges that individuals from the points system cohort face, such as financial challenges, lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, discrimination, lack of knowledge regarding Canadian norms for self-presentation, assertiveness, and self-advocacy, and limited linguistic proficiency. These important factors are not mentioned in the new criteria of the Federal Skilled Worker Program and should

be conveyed to individuals wanting to migrate to Canada under the Federal Skilled Worker Program.

Several suggestions are provided below regarding policy changes that would maximize the chances of skilled worker immigrants successfully re-entering their pre-migration occupations in Canada. The literature also provides suggested changes to current policy related to skilled worker immigrants in Canada. Innovative ideas should be welcomed at a time when the downward trend in the employment status of skilled workers continues at an alarming rate (Reitz, 2001, 2005).

#### *Full Disclosure*

Canada's former immigration points system for selecting skilled worker immigrants led them to expect that they would obtain employment commensurate with their education and experience after their arrival (Hakak et al., 2010; Oreopoulos, 2009). The participants in this study felt misled by the Canadian government because the qualifications that allowed them entry into the country were subsequently considered unacceptable for obtaining employment in their pre-migration profession.

While the utilization of the points system to select skilled worker immigrants has led to the highest levels of education and skill set among immigrants (Reitz, 2001, 2005), these immigrants continue to face downward economic and occupational mobility (Arthur et al., 2010). The occupational demands are clearly not congruent with the Federal Skilled Worker Program (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008). Even though individuals who do not meet

the selection criteria are notified in writing and refunded their processing fee, this still does not guarantee that the credentials and experiences of those individuals whose applications were successfully processed will be recognized by their professional regulatory bodies and Canadian employers. More importantly, the recent measures taken by the federal government to reduce the processing time of applications from skilled worker immigrants by assessing for eligibility according to new criteria still does not account for the high number of professional immigrants who are still not gainfully employed in their pre-migration occupations. The federal government should very clearly state that the criteria used to determine eligibility for migration to Canada are not the same criteria that will ensure employment in one's pre-migration profession in Canada.

#### *Foreign Credential Evaluation from Overseas*

Currently, the credentials of skilled worker immigrants in Canada can only be evaluated from within Canada, which means these individuals have already left their countries of origin and, in many cases, used up all of their resources for the application and processing fees, mandatory medical examinations, and settling into a new country. As part of the recent changes to the eligibility criteria for the Federal Skilled Worker Program, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has created the Foreign Credentials Referral Office which aims to provide information, path-finding and referral services on foreign credential recognition with the aim of assisting internationally trained workers to begin working in Canada in a more timely manner (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012d). Part of the services provided by the Foreign Credentials Referral Office includes

the development of a website for the International Qualification Network, which will document successful procedures for foreign credential recognition for both regulated and non-regulated occupations. At the time of the dissertation defense, the developers of the International Qualification Network are creating a comprehensive resource for past and present foreign credential recognition activities, projects, programs, and tools with the aim of assisting stakeholders (e.g., professional regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, Canadian employers, etc.) avoid costly duplication while strengthening their own foreign credential ideas (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

Even under the new criteria for the Federal Skilled Worker Program as well as with the creation of the new International Qualification Network, credentials are still not evaluated prior to migration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). This upheaval can be easily avoided if skilled worker applicants could get their credentials evaluated from their countries of origin prior to being allowed to apply to immigrate to Canada, a suggestion that has already been provided by other researchers (Alboim et al., 2005). More importantly, however, it provides the applicant with an accurate appraisal of the chances of their education being recognized and being provided with steps they would need to follow prior to migrating to Canada to ensure that their credentials would be recognized.

#### *Non-Discriminatory Credential Recognition*

Currently, no uniform system or standardized method exists to evaluate the foreign qualifications, training, and work experience of skilled worker

immigrants; rather, different professional regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and provincial credential evaluation services all conduct their own assessments. The lack of recognition of professional immigrants' foreign credentials has been deemed as "the biggest single learning recognition problem in Canada today" (p. 29; Conference Board of Canada, 2001). Evaluating skilled worker applicants' credentials from overseas as part of the application process would provide them with a more realistic and accurate awareness of the value of their education in Canada. This step may reduce the number of applications the Canadian government receives even further. It is clear that consistency, fairness, and accountability are required for evaluating the foreign credentials of immigrant professionals and such standards should not be influenced by labour market conditions (Alboim et al., 2005; Wayland, 2006).

Part of accountability measures must include an independent appeal process should applicants wish to contest the decisions of professional regulatory bodies or educational institutions (Wayland). The same credentials that allow a skilled worker immigrant to migrate to Canada should not prevent them from obtaining suitable employment commensurate with their education and experience post-migration. It is unclear whether the initiatives of the International Qualifications Network, which is currently being developed by the newly created Foreign Credentials Referral Office through the federal government, has established an appeals process as part of their priorities on foreign credential recognition.

*Fair Treatment*

Skilled worker immigrants are often placed in a disadvantaged position during the resettlement process. With unrecognized credentials and experience, they are vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and the system that welcomed them into the country. Many immigrants are fearful about speaking up against the mistreatment they receive for fear of losing their job or compromising their immigration status (Shavarini, 2004). The majority of participants in this study described feeling like second-class citizens in Canada. They described feeling marginalized as they attempted to access the job market, something which other researchers have found (Amundson et al., 2011; Chen, 2008; Hakak et al., 2010; Khan & Watson, 2005). The full economic integration of immigrants should be a priority for the federal government if they are serious about improving skilled worker immigrants' economic integration. The recent changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program are but a small step in maximizing the chances of success for the individuals who migrate to Canada under the new eligibility criteria. Despite these efforts, the federal government could still do much more to assist newcomers with occupational and economic integration in Canada.

### *Employer Incentives*

Many participants in this study reported that a lack of Canadian work experience was one of the central career challenges they experienced during their resettlement process, a finding that has been described in other studies (Alboim et al., 2005; Arthur et al., 2010; Khan & Watson, 2005). One participant was particularly outraged about this requirement, labelling it "discrimination" and deeming it almost impossible to overcome as one "cannot buy Canadian work

experience.” This participant’s sentiments have been echoed by other researchers (Alboim et al.; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Galabuzzi, 2005). It is suggested that the federal government implement a public awareness campaign to shed light not only on the barriers and challenges skilled worker immigrants face, but also to provide public support for facilitating their occupational integration into the Canadian labour market. Employers, in particular, should be targeted as many skilled worker immigrants possess considerable education and experience that could be valuable to their companies (Conference Board of Canada, 2004).

One way to encourage employers to hire skilled worker immigrants is the creation of a paid apprenticeship program that would benefit both employers and skilled worker immigrants. An apprenticeship program would provide skilled worker immigrants with the Canadian experience they require in order to improve their chances for employability (Wayland, 2006). The federal government can increase the likelihood of employers hiring skilled workers as apprentices by implementing a financial matching system that would allow employers to pay half of the skilled worker immigrant’s salary, with the federal government matching the contributions of the employers up to a specific amount, with the aim of hiring the skilled worker immigrant at the end of the apprenticeship. Such a program would provide employers with a reduced financial commitment, tax breaks, the opportunity to utilize the skills of a skilled worker immigrant, identify potential areas of weakness or growth that would impact the skilled worker immigrant’s successful re-entry into their profession, and provide the skilled worker immigrant with mentorship opportunities and local knowledge and connections in their pre-

migration profession. Clearly, such an initiative requires careful coordination between the federal government, employers, educational institutions (who should be made aware of, and promote, such programs), and professional regulatory bodies.

At the time of the dissertation defense, the federal government announced the Federal Internship for Newcomers Program, a brand new initiative that aims to provide new immigrant professionals with temporary Canadian work experience and training opportunities with federal government departments as well as other public and private sector organizations (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012e). Interns are hired as casual employees for a period of 90 working days with the possibility of an extension for an additional 90 working days. While the first cohort of interns has not yet been accepted at the time of this writing, internships will be offered in categories such as: science, policy, project management, administration, communications, and computer science. Interns will be provided with mentors for the entire duration of the internship.

The aims of this internship program are to have newcomers understand the hiring process, learn about Canadian workplace culture and expectations, network, and attend orientation and training sessions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012e). Eligibility criteria for this program include: being a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, having lived in Canada for less than ten years, possessing a good command of English (or French if the applicant resides in Québec), possess a post-secondary degree (with the exception of administrative internships whereby it is considered an asset), be registered and successfully

undergo mandatory screening for employment readiness by one of the program's identified immigrant-serving organizations, and either reside or work in Vancouver or Victoria (or within a 75 kilometre radius), Toronto (or within a 125 kilometre radius), or Ottawa/Gatineau (or within a 125 kilometre radius) or have graduated from the World University Service of Canada's Student Refugee Program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

If an applicant has met the eligibility requirements, s/he will undergo additional screening which includes an in-person interview and language assessment, a referral to the appropriate assessment/licensing bodies for a credentials assessment, and a referral to employment readiness training, if required (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012e). Once the applicant has successfully passed the screening process, s/he may apply online. Passing the screening process does not guarantee an internship as the number of applicants far exceeds the number of internships available (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). It should be noted that the deadline for the first round of screening was May 18, 2012; therefore, at the time of the dissertation defense, the first cohort of interns had not yet been selected. Therefore, statistics and demographic information for these individuals were not available.

While the Federal Internship for Newcomers Program is a new initiative that has not yet accepted its first cohort of interns at the time of the dissertation defense, there appears to be some promise for assisting immigrant professionals from a limited number of occupations and industries to learn about, and begin, the integration process into Canadian workplaces. It is evident from the limited

information provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2012e) that several improvements to this program can be made. The processing time for permanent resident cards varies weekly; therefore, past processing times are not indicative of future processing times (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012f). This has financial implications for skilled worker immigrants who may be left unemployed or underemployed for an undetermined amount of time after their initial arrival.

Currently, applications are only being accepted for a very limited number of geographic areas (i.e., three of Canada's largest gateway cities). Statistics have demonstrated that immigrants overwhelmingly choose to settle in large metropolitan areas, especially Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver (Schellenberg, 2004). The most recent available data demonstrate that in 2001, virtually all immigrants who had arrived in Canada over the previous ten years (94%) resided in large metropolitan cities and only 6% resided in smaller cities or towns or in rural areas (Schellenberg). Considerations should also be made for skilled worker immigrants who may choose to settle in remote locations as there is often a shortage of professionals (e.g., physicians, medical specialists, dentists, etc.) in these locations (Lockyer, Fidler, De Gara, & Keefe, 2010).

Finally, future program expansion should include a wider range of occupations and industries in order to keep up with the demand of applications. Even with the reduction of applications under the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the number of internships available still does not meet the demand for this service. If managed and implemented properly, Federal Internship for Newcomers Program has the potential to expand to Canadian employers who are

willing to hire a skilled worker immigrant as an intern, similar to the paid apprenticeship program described earlier, with benefits that include providing employers with a reduced financial commitment (as the federal government would pay for half of the intern's salary in a financial matching system), tax breaks, the opportunity to utilize the skills of an intern, provide the intern with mentorship opportunities and local knowledge and connections in their pre-migration profession, and identify potential areas of weakness or growth that would impact the intern's successful re-entry into their profession.

#### Future Research Directions

The topic of the successful career re-entry experiences of skilled worker immigrants has received very limited attention (Amundson et al., 2011; Hakak et al., 2010). Skilled worker immigrants comprise a substantial portion of the Canadian population and, unfortunately, are overrepresented in menial jobs. The majority of existing studies have focused on their reactions in response to unemployment and underemployment (Man, 2004; Yakushko et al., 2008), taking survival jobs for financial reasons (Aghakhani, 2007; Khan & Watson, 2005; Merali, 2008), emotional distress (Baker, Arseneault, & Gallant, 2004), physical illness or injury (Lee et al., 2001), employer discrimination (Oreopoulos, 2009), and the process of re-credentialing or academic upgrading (Lerner & Menahem, 2003). The current study provides an examination of the career trajectories of skilled worker immigrants who successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada, how they experienced career challenges, and the factors that enabled them to successfully do so.

The Pre-Migration Career Confidence Effect, a unique term which I have coined, was a predominant theme in this study, as well as in other studies (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Khan & Watson, 2005; Lee et al., 2001). What is unique about this group of participants is that their career confidence did not falter, despite the multiple occupational and settlement challenges they faced over the course of their career trajectories. Future studies should examine how skilled worker immigrants who have re-entered their pre-migration occupations maintained their career confidence in the midst of occupational and settlement challenges.

Researchers should consider examining whether prior international experience outside of skilled worker immigrants' countries of origin is a contributing factor to their successful career re-integration in the Canadian labour market among other groups of immigrants. The majority of participants in the present study had studied or worked outside of their countries of origin prior to migrating to Canada or had significant cross-cultural exposure even in their home countries. To date, no studies have investigated the role of international experience in successful career re-entry.

It is suggested that future studies attempt to understand a wider cross-section of skilled worker immigrants who successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupation in Canada across age, gender, countries of origin, occupation, and ethno-cultural group. For example, gender is known to be relevant to underemployment, with female immigrants being more likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to male immigrants (Dean & Wilson, 2009). In the present study, five out of the ten participants were female. In some

cases, there was a turn-taking process in families, where spouses supported each other's career re-entry experiences and this led to each of their success. Unique factors may emerge for each gender or for professional couples if such cases are more specifically studied. It would be worthwhile to track the career trajectories of skilled worker immigrants from a variety of ethnic and occupational backgrounds in Canada over time in order to identify the strategies they utilized in order to overcome occupational and settlement barriers. For instance, it is possible that a phenomenon similar to the "glass ceiling" occurs among specific sub-populations or for specific occupations. In fact, previous research indicated that a perceived glass ceiling effect is present among Latin American immigrants (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002).

As well, understanding the personality types of migrants (e.g., the 'migrant personality'; Boneva & Frieze, 2001) and how it facilitates a successful career re-entry experience in Canada would facilitate a deeper understanding and appreciation of how they experience career challenges and, more importantly, how they overcome these challenges and re-enter their pre-migration occupations. To date, the only studies that have examined the successful transition experiences of professional immigrants have not defined what constitutes 'success' (Amundson et al., 2011). Furthermore, they have focused on a narrow group, such as Latin American graduates of Canadian MBA programs rather than ethnically-mixed samples (Hakak et al., 2010), and, despite claiming to focus on successful transition experiences, still focused primarily on hindering factors while providing

limited information on perceived success factors (Amundson et al., 2011; Hakak et al.).

In this study, I found that the participants went from ‘survival mode’ (as one participant stated) and experiencing cognitive dissonance to problem-solving mode. Despite accurate and realistic appraisals of their circumstances, future studies should examine how skilled worker immigrants come to evaluate their situations as this would further facilitate our understanding of the specific cognitions and factors that shape their decision-making processes about whether to remain underemployed or attempt to re-train in their pre-migration occupations.

With regards to ethno-cultural community avoidance during the resettlement process, more research is needed to understand how this can assist skilled worker immigrants to successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupation and how it may affect social support and psychological health. The majority of skilled worker immigrants settle in Canada’s largest gateway cities (i.e., Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal) where survival job opportunities are greater in number and ethnic and social networks are better developed (Arthur & Merali, 2005). While immigrants fare worse than native-born Canadians in gateway cities, they do experience marginally higher earnings than their non-gateway immigrant counterparts. While income and unemployment rates are higher for immigrants in gateway cities than they are for native-born Canadians, the gateway/non-gateway disparity is minimal. Other studies have demonstrated that culturally isolated immigrants experienced considerable anxiety learning English, finding suitable employment, and building new social networks (Baker et al., 1994). Future

studies should consider examining the economic and social benefits and drawbacks of ethno-cultural community avoidance during the resettlement process.

While recent changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program will result in a decline of individuals migrating to Canada under this category, it does not guarantee they will successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupation. Further research is required in order to understand how skilled worker immigrants successfully overcome the career and settlement challenges they face in their resettlement process and how they successfully re-enter their pre-migration occupation in Canada, particularly under the recent changes of the Federal Skilled Worker Program.

#### Researcher's Experience

To hear the personal stories of loss and triumph that the participants in this study experienced was not only humbling, but an incredible privilege. As I conversed with each participant, I felt myself being drawn into their world; their struggles, their frustrations, their trials, their joys, their successes. Numerous times, I thought about what I would do if I were in these participants' situations; I quickly became overwhelmed at the thought of having my education and work experiences discounted for no other reason than because they were obtained outside of Canada. The twelve years I've spent in post-secondary education...gone. The years of experience accumulated in various clinical and counselling settings...gone. Having to start from the bottom, in a country where the official language is not my mother tongue, where I am most likely to initially

begin working in a mind-numbing, unstimulating menial job, elicits a wave of emotions within me. Yet being a witness to the stories of these participants enhanced my understanding and professional view of successful career transitions among immigrants. These participants have succeeded in a system that is designed to make skilled worker immigrants fail. This is something that deserves not just the attention from researchers and counsellors, but *all* Canadians. As Canadians, it is our responsibility to ensure that fairness and equality are for everybody, regardless of where one was born, completed their education, and obtained their work experience.

Throughout this document, I have attempted to articulate my role and position as a researcher and the methods by which I obtained participants' stories. I recognize that being a researcher of colour may have allowed me to engage more effectively with the participants throughout this process.

### Concluding Remarks

This qualitative study explored the pre-migration occupation re-entry experiences of ten skilled worker immigrants from a variety of ethnic and occupational backgrounds residing in Canada. Findings suggest that despite the educational and occupational barriers they were presented with, such as loss, lack of occupational challenges, discrimination, career insecurity, re-credentialing and recertification challenges, cognitive and compensation dissonance, they overcame multiple challenges during their resettlement process and successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Canada.

The factors that contributed to the career success of these participants that have not been found in previous studies include previous international experience or significant cross-cultural exposure in participants' countries of origin prior to migration, adaptive flexibility to increase one's employability, ethno-cultural community avoidance for better employment outcomes (but possibly poorer mental health outcomes in the short-term), spouses taking turns re-credentialing to support each other's career re-entry experiences, and learning and utilizing the Canadian norms for self-promotion and self-advocacy. Other factors that have contributed to the success of skilled worker immigrants and have been found in previous studies (e.g., Hakak et al., 2010; Khan & Watson, 2005; Amundson et al., 2011) include seeking local credentials, networking, and family and community support.

The novel findings of this study are significant given that the majority of skilled worker immigrants who migrate to Canada do not re-enter their pre-migration occupations. While this small group of skilled worker immigrants have been able to achieve what many who have migrated to Canada have not, it is important to shed light on the factors that have contributed to their success, how counsellors can assist this group, and the steps the federal government can take in order to facilitate their pre-migration career re-entry process in order to maximize the human capital these individuals bring to Canada every year.

I would like to provide a quote from Natalia which captures the reality of the lives of skilled worker immigrants in Canada:

*Think of something. Just think of yourself right now moving to France and you don't manage the language completely, so it's hard for you to speak in*

*the language. You have a wife and three kids at home. You are the one who has to provide. Wife doesn't have the language, kids cannot be left at home, they're too little; they're not going to school yet, so nothing you can do. But you need to pay the rent, transportation, food for the kids, clothes for the kids, and you have your profession that is not recognized.*

*So you start looking and looking and after eight months being begging for a job, finally you got something moving the carts in Safeway. And your supervisor is, 'Are you lazy? Can you move? After hearing all those kind of things, how would you feel? And if that's the only job you were able to secure at that point, are you going to be complaining to your supervisor? Are you going to say 'Screw you; I'm going to accuse you of discrimination? You shut your mouth and once you are able to move to something else, that's when you start telling the story.*

Despite the numerous challenges Natalia and the other participants in this study faced, they successfully overcame them and reclaimed their professional identities, even if things did not work according to how they had envisioned them prior to migrating to Canada as Nester described:

*As an immigrant you are more in doubt for anything than a local and you have to show that you can do your job, and you have to show it right away. And you have to be very strict on how you show like that. So you have to be always conscious that what you want to do. And in the short term, you have to show that capacity. If that doesn't work, then you have to make the corrections that you need to in order to be aligned with what you are, what your credentials say. Some people really, they focus on "I want this to happen specifically this way." Life doesn't work like that. You get there and you get maybe a little bit disappointed because it was not as ideal as you thought it was. But you got there. You did get there. You get there and you get maybe a little bit disappointed because it was not as ideal as you thought it was.*

As Abraham stated, no matter how bleak the future may look, "just be persistent. You just have to take those challenges because you know you can do it. You have to have that drive and an outlook towards the future."

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## Appendix A: Study Description/Advertisement

### University Study on Immigrant Professionals Who Have Found Jobs in their Field

A study is being done at the University of Alberta to learn about immigrant professionals' work experiences in Canada.

The purpose of the research is to:

- (1) Understand what kinds of career changes and challenges immigrant professionals who have now found jobs in their field went through since the time they came to Canada
- (2) Learn about how and when immigrant professionals decide to try to get back into their professions instead of taking jobs outside of their fields
- (3) Learn about what has helped them to get back into their profession in Canada

This study is being done by Anoosha Avni, a PhD student at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali.

You can take part in this study if you:

- Came to Canada as an Independent Immigrant (Skilled Worker)\*
- Came to Canada when you were 25 years old or older
- Have lived in Canada for at least 10 years
- Have found a job in your profession in Canada, even if it took a long time and you had to go back to school

If you choose to take part in the study, you will talk with Anoosha about your experiences. If you want to talk in your own language, an interpreter will be provided at no cost. The talk will be about one to three hours at a time and place that works best for you. You will be given \$30.00 for being in the study.

If you want to take part in this study, please call Anoosha at: \_\_\_\_\_ or email her at [anoosha@ualberta.ca](mailto:anoosha@ualberta.ca)

\*The recent changes to the economic class of Canada's immigration system label Independent Immigrants who have applied to come to Canada based on their employability and education Skilled Workers, whereas these individuals were referred to as Independent Immigrants prior to 2002. Since the study aims to recruit participants who entered Canada much prior to 2002, the term Independent Immigrant is used here.

## Appendix B: Information Sheet

This study is about understanding what has helped immigrant professionals get back into their professions in Canada and the career changes and challenges they have faced. This study is being done by Anoosha Avni, a PhD student at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali. Her study will help career counsellors try to meet the needs of immigrants who are trying to get back into their professions. This sheet provides information about the study and what is expected of me as a participant.

1. I will talk with Anoosha by myself. I can talk to her in English, French, Persian, or Dari. If I want to talk to her in another language, she can get an interpreter for me.
2. The meeting will take 1 hour to 3 hours and will happen at a time and place that is best for me. I will be asked to talk about my experience looking for work in Canada from the time I got here until right now. I will be asked about the career changes I went through, the problems I faced, and how I overcame these problems. I understand that if I have a lot to talk about, we may meet again for the same amount of time whenever it is best for me.
3. I know that my talks with Anoosha will be tape recorded, unless I tell her that I do not want to be tape-recorded. If I choose not to have the talks tape-recorded, she will write down what I say instead. If our talks are tape recorded, my real name will not be anywhere on the tape because she will use a made-up name for me instead. I will be allowed to make up the false name she uses for me.
4. I know that after our talk(s), Anoosha will type out what we talked about from the tape and will put the made-up name on the typed pages. We will meet again for about one to three hours so she can tell me what she understands from my interviews and I can tell her if I see things the same way or differently. The tape and my real name will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Anoosha's home office.
5. Anoosha may make presentations or write articles about what she has learned from this study in order to help counsellors working with immigrant professionals. Some of my words may be used in the presentations or articles. Nobody will know that the words are mine because she will use the made-up name and not my real name.
6. Talking about my job experiences might make me feel stressed or worried. If this happens, I know I can get free help if I tell Anoosha what is happening.
7. I understand that I will receive \$30.00 for being in this study.

8. I know that it is up to me whether or not I choose to take part in this study. Even if I sign this form, I can still stop taking part in this study at any time without any questions or problems.
9. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns, or want to know more about this study, I can leave a message for Anoosha at the University of Alberta at (780) 492-5245 or send an email to [anoosha@ualberta.ca](mailto:anoosha@ualberta.ca). I could also call her supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, at University of Alberta at (780) 492-1158.
10. The plan for this study has been reviewed by the Ethics Board at the University of Alberta that makes sure people taking part in research are treated properly. This Board is called Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB). If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study, I can call the head of this Board at (780) 492-3751.

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form (written)

## Agreement to Participate

This study is about understanding what has helped immigrant professionals get back into their professions in Canada and the career changes and challenges they have faced. This study is being done by Anoosha Avni, a PhD student at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali. Her study will help career counsellors try to meet the needs of immigrants who are trying to get back into their professions. If I check off all of the boxes and sign this form, it means I understand these things about the study:

- I know I will meet with Anoosha by myself for one to three hours and I can talk to her in English, French, Persian, Dari, or in another language with the help of an interpreter.
- I know she will either tape-record what I say and then type it out or write down what I am saying while we talk, depending on what I feel comfortable with.
- I know that she will use a false name for me during the interview and that I can choose this false name.
- If I have a lot to talk about, Anoosha and I will meet again for one to three hours.
- I know she will keep everything from the interview (the tape, notes she made, what she typed from the interview) in a locked filing cabinet in her home office.
- I know she may make presentations and that if she uses my words, nobody will know I said them because she will use the made-up name.
- I know that if I feel stressed or worried when I talk about my job experiences, I can get free help if I tell Anoosha.
- I know that I will receive \$30.00 for being in this study.
- I know that even if I sign this form, I can still stop taking part in this study at any time without questions or problems.
- If I have questions or concerns about this study, I can leave a message for Anoosha at the University of Alberta at (780) 492-5245 or send an email to [anoosha@ualberta.ca](mailto:anoosha@ualberta.ca). I can also call her supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, at University of Alberta at (780) 492-1158.
- I know that the plan for this study has been reviewed by the Ethics Board at the University of Alberta that makes sure people taking part in research are treated

properly. This Board is called Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB).

- ☐ If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study, I can call the head of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Name of participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_