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A Narrative Inquiry into the Professional Identity Shifts of Skilled Immigrants

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by

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Abstract

The challenges and barriers that skilled immigrants face in Canada lead many of them to forego pursuing employment in their fields of expertise. This unexpected disruption in their professional lives has been known to have a profound effect on their sense of self that has been coined a loss of professional identity. This loss has been associated with negative impacts to their well-being, including feelings of frustration, hopelessness, depression, and a strong sense of betrayal by the Canadian government. The bulk of the research on this population has focused on understanding the barriers that thwart their labour market integration. Comparatively, few studies have explored how skilled immigrants negotiate this loss and reconstitute their professional sense of self. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the professional identity shifts of skilled immigrants. Using narrative inquiry, I documented the stories of seven skilled immigrants about their job search experiences and their impact on their view of themselves as professionals. In addition, I borrowed elements from critical discourse analysis to explore the role that discourses about skilled immigrants in Canada played in how participants made sense of their job search experiences. Data collection involved a 90-minute semi-structured interview with each participant. The themes that emerged from each interview were organized into a short narrative of each participant's career experiences pre and post migration. Across-case analysis of these narratives revealed common threads of prosperous careers in their home countries; expectations of professional success in Canada; a rupture in their professional lives; the rekindling of their professional selves; and resisting hopelessness in the face of great difficulties. Reflecting about these common threads led me to conclude that participants' stories communicated a sense of perseverance and hope, but their accounts were mired with tensions tied to the unhelpful influence of discourses about skilled immigrants on their attempts at professional integration. In

an effort to avoid relinquishing their careers, participants resisted being construed as deficient and attempted to negotiate the requirement of Canadian experience. From these broader themes I drew implications for employment counsellors, the immigrant-service sector, and investigators whose research focuses on this population.

Keywords: Skilled immigrants, narrative inquiry, professional identity, career counselling

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Dedication

To my mother, with whom words seldomly needed to be spoken.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Canada faces a serious shortage of skilled labour fueled by an aging population that is leading to a drop in the labour force participation rate (Employment & Social Development Canada, Statistics Canada, 2019). This shortage, which is expected to continue for the next decade, hinders the country's economic potential by restricting employers from being able to grow their operations to remain competitive on the world stage (Cocolakis-Wormstall, 2018; The Conference Board of Canada, 2019). Canada, therefore, has become increasingly reliant on immigration to address both its population and labour force challenges in order to maintain its global competitiveness and economic vitality (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

Canada is recognized worldwide for its immigration system and is considered to be one of the top three desired destinations worldwide by potential migrants (Kovacs et al., 2020). The total number of immigrants in Canada has been rising steadily since the 1980s. Between 2004 and 2015, Canada opened its doors to approximately 250,000 immigrants each year. In 2016, the number of immigrants reached an all-time high of 7.5 million, or 21.9% of the country's population (Statistics Canada, 2017). The importance of immigrants in the labour market is evidenced by their increased participation. For example, between 2016 and 2017, immigrants of core-working age (25-54 years) accounted for 34% of the national employment gains (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). Furthermore, the Conference Board of Canada, a non-profit thinktank organization, has indicated that without immigration Canada would face not only a shrinking labour force, but also difficulty funding social services and shrinkage in the country's projected annual economic growth (The Conference Board of Canada, 2019). With regard to immigration, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (2020a) has stated that,

> "our health-care system relies on immigrants to keep Canadians safe and healthy. Other industries, such as information and technology companies and our farmers and producers, also rely on the talent of newcomers to maintain supply chains, expand their business and, in turn, create more jobs for Canadians" (para 2).

Looking to the near future, the present multi-year immigration plan is set to welcome approximately 1.2 million immigrants between 2021 and 2023, of which nearly 60% will be skilled immigrants (IRCC, 2020b). The importance of economic migration for Canada is further evidenced by the government's continuous development of new programs specifically targeted at skilled immigrants, one of the latest of which is The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. This is a community-driven program in which participating rural communities may assess skilled immigrant applicants and recommend that they are offered permanent residence based on their fit with the economic needs of their community (IRCC, 2020b). Immigration is therefore one of Canada's core strategies to drive the country's economic growth and prosperity, including targeting skilled immigrants with advanced educational qualifications to address specific needs in the labour market (Boyd & Alboim 2012; Cocolakis-Wormstall, 2018).

The government of Canada's permanent resident program has thirteen economic classes, the largest of which is the Federal Skilled Worker Class (FSWC). Applicants through the FSWC are assessed based on their ability to become economically established in Canada (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019a). The most significant change in recent years to Canadian immigration policy pertaining to the FSWC was the introduction in 2015 of the Express Entry electronic application management system. Express Entry was introduced with the purpose of streamlining the application process for FSWC applicants (IRCC, 2018). This streamlining addressed a longstanding backlog of applications, increased the degree of flexibility

the government has to select candidates according to their professional profile, and improved the level of responsiveness of the permanent resident program to labour market needs (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020c). Under the FSWC, applicants are evaluated using a Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) that assigns each candidate a score based on their skills, education, English/French language ability, and work experience (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020c).

The application process through Express Entry requires applicants to create an online profile to establish their eligibility for one or more of the economic classes (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019b). Those who meet the criteria for one or more programs are placed in a pool of pre-screened candidates and are assigned a score according to criteria of the CRS. Every few weeks, a Ministerial Instruction is published that dictates the number of invitations to apply for permanent residence that will be offered under each class. Invitations are then sent out to candidates in descending order based on their CRS score until the number of invitations specified in the ministerial mandate is met (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019b). Candidates who do not receive an invitation or who decline an invitation remain in the candidate pool for 12 months and those who do not respond are removed from the pool (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019b). Those who receive an invitation are given 60 days to submit an online application for permanent residence. The last step of the process involves the review of each permanent residence application by immigration officers, who are responsible for verifying that applicants meet the criteria of their chosen program, their CRS score, and the admissibility of accompanying family members (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019b). The implementation of Express entry reduced

processing times for permanent residence applications from three years on average to approximately six months (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019).

Since its introduction of Express Entry, the number of applicants through the economic classes has risen steadily. For example, the number of submitted profiles increased from 250,156 in 2017 to 332,331 in 2019, with the rate of eligibility also increasing from 65% to 72%, respectively (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019c). The sociodemographic characteristics of candidates remained relatively stable across these three years: More than half of the candidates who were offered permanent residence were between the ages of 20 and 29; close to 45% held a post-secondary credential of three years or longer, a master's degree or an entry-to-practice professional degree; more than one third had five or more years of work experience outside of Canada; and at least 40% had one year or more of professional experience in Canada (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019c). Nearly 60% of invitations were offered to applicants from India, China, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Government of Canada, 2019c).

Canada's immigration system prioritizes the admission of skilled immigrant applicants with advanced educational achievements and skills, because of their ability to become economically established (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019a). In addition, the implementation of Express Entry is meant to ensure that "…Canada continues to benefit from immigrants with diverse skills and experience needed to grow our economy" (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019d, p. 35). However, Canada's immigration system does not guarantee the successful integration of skilled immigrants.

In their integration process, skilled immigrants face a number of challenges of which the most commonly cited is finding adequate employment (Statistics Canada, 2007). Ironically, the

capacity of immigrants to integrate depends largely on their vocational and career adjustment experience (Chen 2006). Additionally, "across many cultures, a person's occupation and career status is considered the most important part that identifies who the person is" (Chen, 2008, p. 20). Consequently, the inability of skilled immigrants to find adequate employment is associated with feelings of frustration, disappointment, a sense of betrayal, and an inability to reclaim their professional status and identity (Chen, 2008; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). The challenges that skilled immigrants face to find gainful employment include devaluation of their credentials, language issues, a lack of culture familiarity, and discrimination. The difficulty of overcoming these challenges may explain why 30% of skilled immigrants admitted to Canada between the years 1984 and 2006 chose to relocate elsewhere (Statistics Canada, 2006). The existence of these barriers is a critical and longstanding issue that continues to hinder skilled immigrants' full integration into Canadian society.

This Study

There is a large body of research that has examined the challenges faced by skilled immigrants in their attempts at economic integration. A smaller body of literature has focused on the impact that poor economic integration, namely under and unemployment, have on this population's wellbeing. However, the number of studies that have focused on the impact of their struggles on their sense of self is sparse. The sparsity of the literature about this topic is of concern because skilled immigrants' loss of identity has been associated with feelings of frustration, unhappiness, anxiety, and poor integration into their communities (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2017). To address this gap in literature, I conducted a narrative inquiry to capture the stories of skilled immigrants about their professional integration experiences and the impact of these experiences on their sense of self. The specific question that guided my inquiry was: *what*

stories do skilled immigrants tell about their shifting professional identities in their attempts to establish their careers in Canada? Additionally, I explored the possible role that discourses or broad narratives about skilled immigrants play in participants' understanding of their professional lives in Canada. To address this second question, I supplemented my analysis with aspects of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Overview of Chapters

This first chapter presents the issue of Canada's labour shortage and the role of skilled immigrants in tackling it. I then acquaint the reader with my inquiry and its importance to our understanding of the experiences of this population. The second chapter constitutes a review of the literature concerning the challenges to the professional integration of skilled immigrants and the impacts of these challenges on them. In the third chapter, I present my research puzzle, my methodological approach and its theoretical foundations, my processes to capture and analyze participants' stories, and the criteria on which I gauged the quality and rigour of this inquiry. The fourth chapter presents the common themes in participants' stories and a critical analysis of the contextual elements that added to their difficulties. In the fifth chapter, I reflect about participants' accounts in relation to the broader literature and discuss the strengths, limitations, and implications of this inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The nature of my research question guided my review of the literature which focused on two main areas: the experiences of skilled immigrants in the Canadian labour market and the study of identity, including that of professional identity in relation to this population. This chapter is divided into five sections: challenges and barriers for skilled Immigrants in the Canadian labour market; the labour market outcomes of skilled immigrants; and the impacts of poor market outcomes on the wellbeing of skilled immigrants. Following these sections, I provide a brief overview about the history of identity studies in the social sciences. I conclude this chapter with a survey of the literature concerning the professional identity of skilled immigrants.

Challenges and Barriers for Skilled Immigrants in the Canadian Labour Market

Licensing Requirements and the Devaluation of Foreign Credentials

In Canada, close to 20% of occupations are regulated by a licensing body. These regulatory organizations set their own standards and practices (Banerjee & Phan, 2014). Over 40% of skilled immigrants seek employment in regulated occupations such as engineering, nursing, medicine, and post-secondary teaching (Ortiz & Lowe, 2015; Zietsma, 2010). In addition to having experience in the same professions in their home countries, these skilled immigrants must prove that they meet Canadian standards of practice in order to be awarded a license to practice in their respective field. The purpose of licensing requirements is to ensure good standards of practice by raising the skill level of those within the profession, raise wages by restricting entry into and limiting competition within a profession, and siphon incompetent practitioners to protect the public's safety (Banerjee & Phan, 2014). Despite the apparent benefits of licensing requirements, some have argued that professional regulatory bodies may

disadvantage immigrants by requiring their understanding of subtle cultural and social norms as part of the licensing process and by making entry into regulated professions too costly (Federman et al., 2006; Girard & Bauder, 2007). Indeed, skilled immigrants have reported that occupational licensing processes are for them long, confusing, and prohibitively costly (Malatest & Associates, 2010), thus representing an added hurdle to practice in their professions (Hall & Sadouzai, 2010; Novak & Chen, 2013; Premji & Shakya, 2017). The repercussion of this hurdle is evident in that the rates of employment of skilled immigrants and Canadian-born workers in regulated occupations are 24% and 62% respectively (Zietsma, 2010). This difference has been found to remain at 25% after 10 years of skilled immigrants having landed. It is important to note that immigrants who studied for a regulated occupation in English-speaking countries like Ireland, Australia, and the United Kingdom, have similar employment rates in that occupation compared to those of Canadian-born, whereas immigrants who obtained their education in non-English speaking countries such as Ukraine, Algeria, Cuba, and South Korea, have the lowest employment rates in their fields compared to Canadian-born professionals (Zietsma, 2010). This finding suggests an association between skilled immigrants' country of origin and their ability to become integrated into their profession. Close to 35% of immigrants awarded permanent residence in 2019 were from India and China, which are considered to be developing countries where 10% or less of the population speaks English (IRCC, 2020a).

The majority of skilled immigrants arriving in Canada are highly accomplished, with over 40% listing a master's degree as their highest level of education and several years of work experience (Ortiz & Lowe, 2015). Despite their high educational attainment and professional experience, the non-recognition or devaluation of their foreign credentials and work experience by employers and professional regulatory bodies leads skilled immigrants to experience a host of

negative professional outcomes that include underemployment, reduced earnings, unemployment, and downward social mobility (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Guo, 2009). Data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey shows that, in 2019, at 9.2%, the unemployment rate of university-educated very recent immigrants (0 – 5 years since immigration) was almost double that of recent immigrants (5 – 10 years since immigration) at 5.4% and three times higher than that of the Canadian-born at 3.0% (Wong, 2020). Overall, the cost of the underutilization of skilled immigrants' potential has been estimated to be over 11 billion annually. This cost is calculated in lost earnings of immigrants who are working jobs that are below the level of equally qualified non-immigrants (Reitz et al., 2014).

Both federal and provincial governments have tried to address the issue of foreign credential recognition. In the case of provincial governments, several provinces have adopted legislation concerning the requirements of regulated professions. For example, the government of Ontario's Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act addresses skilled immigrants through the establishment of the Access Centre for Internationally Trained Individuals (ACITI). This is an information and referral service tasked with assisting skilled immigrants through professional accreditation processes. The ACITI also researches trends and issues related to registration process of skilled immigrants and supports government branches, community agencies, educational institutions, and employers, through the provision of information and training about fair registration practices (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2006). The federal government for its part has designated five specific entities to carry out Educational Credential Assessments (ECA) to provide skilled immigrants with an equivalence of their foreign credentials prior to their landing (IRCC, 2020b). The federal

government has also made it a requirement for skilled immigrants to have an ECA as part of their permanent residence application and to be awarded points for their education towards their ranking under the CRS (IRCC, 2020b). Such efforts, along with others like prioritizing skilled immigrant applicants who have received an employment offer, are aimed at offering permanent residence to those who are most likely to "hit the ground running once they arrive by integrating quickly into our labour market." (IRCC, 2012, para 5).

There have been changes to immigration policy throughout the years aimed at preventing discrimination against immigrants which are described by Dirks (2006). These include the introduction of an applicant point system in 1967 in which race, colour, or nationality were not factors, but rather work skills, educational levels, and language ability. Another notable development was the passing of a new Immigration Act in 1976 which prioritized family reunion, diversity, and non-discrimination in Canada's immigration policy. Nonetheless, some argue that biases exist in Canadian immigration policy that contribute to the devaluation of skilled immigrants' foreign credentials. These biases create systemic and structural barriers that exacerbate the issue of devaluation of skilled immigrants' foreign credentials (Osaze, 2017). Guo (2009) draws on critical theory and postmodernism to explain the origins of foreign credential devaluation. To Guo, the difference in how foreign credentials are perceived is the result of a "deficit model of difference" in which minor differences between cultures (e.g., food, dance, festivities) are trivialized. However, substantive differences such as foreign education and work experience that challenge the social, cultural, ideological, or economic order of the dominant group and resist assimilation, are perceived by many of its members as undesirable and are treated as such (Guo, 2009). The co-existence of this negative ideology with Canada's democratic principles of justice, equality, and fairness, comprises a phenomenon termed

"democratic racism" (Guo, 2009). The conflicting nature of these two co-existing ideologies renders the Canadian government unable to make meaningful social, economic, and political changes to better the situation of immigrants, as the implementation of such policies would be considered a threat to liberal democracy (Guo, 2009). This results in skilled immigrants being left with the unfair expectation of having to conform to the norms, values, and traditions of Canada, and having limited access to jobs that are not commensurate with their education and professional experience (Avni, 2012; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Guo, 2009; Premji & Shakya, 2017).

Intersectional Experiences of Discrimination

Skilled immigrants report experiences of discrimination while searching for employment as a result of their race, gender, language skills, ethnicity, religion, and lack of work experience in Canada. These aspects of their social identities intersect to create what Chaze and George (2013) describe as interlocking oppressions that deny skilled immigrants access to professional employment.

Rates of discrimination towards immigrants have been estimated using field experimental studies, wherein fictionalized characters who are racially or ethnically dissimilar but otherwise matched on job-relevant characteristics apply for the same job. A recent meta-analysis of 97 field experiments of race and ethnic discrimination across nine countries in Europe and North America is particularly illustrative: in Canada, White Canadian-born were likely to receive 25% more callbacks for interviews than non-White individuals who held similar job-relevant characteristics (Quillian et al., 2019). In contrast, the number of callbacks received by non-White immigrants was significantly lower regardless of their place of origin (i.e., Africa, Middle East, Asia). These findings remained significant and largely unchanged after the authors controlled for

a possible publication bias, a potential issue inherent to meta-analytic research. The authors of this meta-analysis also examined local unemployment rates and immigrants' share of the local population but found that neither accounted for the discrimination rates found in their analysis (Quillian et al., 2019).

Discrimination may also be studied by examining self-reports from individuals who claim to have experienced discrimination. Hakak et al. (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Latin American MBA graduates searching for employment. According to these authors, their participants reported experiencing differential treatment by employers due to their accents, non-White status, and lack of Canadian experience. To them, such treatment constituted a subtle yet impactful form of discrimination that disadvantaged their participants in their job search. In a similar study, Chaze and George (2013) carried out in-depth interviews with 20 foreign professional engineers who reported having experienced discrimination while searching for a job and while being underemployed. These participants shared about experiences of perceived discrimination as a result of intersecting personal and group characteristics that led to them being: (a) told to refrain from using their native names while searching for jobs; (b) passed on for job opportunities due to a lack of Canadian experience; (c) consistently assigned low-level tasks that were not assigned to non-immigrant colleagues of the same rank; (d) treated with indifference by co-workers; (e) and having their complaints of unfair treatment at the hands of their colleagues be ignored by their employer (Chaze & George, 2013). Fang et al. (2013) examined data from the 2005 national Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) conducted by Statistics Canada. Based on their findings the authors concluded that being foreign negatively affected the probability of skilled immigrants finding professional employment, even after

controlling for individual differences in age, education, minority status, job tenure, industry, and economic region.

Experiences of discrimination are particularly prevalent among immigrant women, especially those from visible minority groups (Dixon, 2015; Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2017). Immigrant women face great difficulty in securing employment, both professional and low-skilled, as a result of their intersecting social positions (e.g., gender and religious affiliation). Together, these attributes channel immigrant women into highly feminized and racialized occupations or exclude them from the labour market altogether (Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Lightman & Gingrich, 2012; Premji & Shakya, 2017). Using data from Statistics Canada's 2009 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, Lightman and Gingrich (2012) examined the impact of the intersection of personal attributes on economic exclusion. Their results showed that compared to controls (i.e., households where the major income earner was a Canadian-born male), households where the major income earner was a woman who had recently immigrated were 2.5 times more likely to have an income that was below Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure (i.e., 50% of the median household income in Canada). In turn, the inability to find employment leads some immigrant women to pursue higher education. In a sample of 31 female and 30 male sub-Saharan African immigrants, Creese and Wiebe (2012) found that twice as many women compared to men sought further education in response to their difficulty finding employment. The type of education sought by female participants were occupation-specific diplomas in semi-professional fields (e.g., nursing assistant or long-term care aide). Although some women were able to find jobs after their graduation, none of them were able to become employed in managerial positions or in professional jobs that were reflective of their educational attainment and professional experience in their home countries.

Premji and Shakya (2017) explored how gender, class, migration, and racialization intersect to contribute to immigrant women's under/unemployment. In their findings, the authors discussed how Muslim women, for example, reported experiencing discrimination throughout the job search process and in their workplaces as a result of wearing a hijab. In addition, some Muslim women talked about being in spousal sponsorship arrangements in which their partners prevented them from seeking and retaining employment. Sociocultural barriers such as bearing most of the household and childrearing responsibilities, having small social networks, no access to affordable childcare, and a restricted ability to commute to certain areas, were also found to limit these women's employability. Moreover, their efforts to negotiate new gender roles in favour of their careers may conflict with values held by their ethnic communities (Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2017). Therefore, in the case of immigrant women, family and ethnic communities may constitute barriers as opposed to networks of support to their employability (Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2017). Altogether, these challenges experienced by immigrant women result in markedly poor employment outcomes that include short periods of employment, long periods of unemployment, and low-skilled jobs with poor working conditions and pay (Premji & Shakya, 2017).

The Issue of Language

Language proficiency is one of the eligibility criteria for all economic class immigration programs, and it is an important determinant of skilled immigrants' adjustment experience, including in the world of work (Yost & Lucas, 2002). In addition to lack of Canadian work experience, skilled immigrants cite language difficulties as the greatest obstacles to achieving their professional goals (Guo, 2013; Ku et al., 2018; Majerski, 2019). Language proficiency encompasses abilities in reading, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing. Skilled

immigrants are likely to struggle, particularly in the professional realm, if their ability in one or more of these four dimensions is not well developed (Lee & Westwood, 1996). Moreover, due to the cultural component of language, a lack of awareness about cultural norms related to professional interpersonal communication may compound their struggle (Chen, 2008). In the workplace, difficulties with language proficiency may interfere with their capacity to communicate effectively in presentations, write reports, negotiate with clients, and resolve conflict (Chen, 2008).

Having an accent may also exacerbate issues of communication. On the one hand, it may provoke anxiety and diminish skilled immigrants' confidence in their own professional capacity (Frank, 2013). On the other hand, having an accent may give others an unjust negative impression of skilled immigrants' language proficiency that is not reflective of their actual language abilities (Lai et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some have argued that expecting skilled immigrants to minimize their accent and develop their awareness of professional communication norms places on them an unfair burden. These expectations further perpetuate a lack of tolerance for differences that do not prevent skilled immigrants from communicating effectively (Lai et al., 2017). Others consider language to be a tool used to exclude skilled immigrants in the labour market by constructing them as deficient and 'othering' them in a way that devalues their skills and abilities for the purpose of maintaining established relations of power (Slade, 2008).

Although some may contest the latter view of language as a tool for exclusion and instead argue it to be a necessary requirement for employment, what is apparent is the pervasive impact of language-related issues on skilled immigrants' professional integration (e.g., Avni, 2012; Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Hakak et al., 2010; Majerski, 2019; Premji & Shakya, 2017).

Soft Skills and the Requirement of Canadian Experience

Beyond language-related issues, skilled immigrants have been known to struggle finding and retaining employment due to not having well-developed soft skills. Despite the common use of this term, different meanings ascribed to it make its actual definition elusive (Drolet et al., 2015; Guo, 2015). Some have surveyed employment counsellors from immigrant-serving agencies, who have offered various meanings to this term, including "employability skills, essential skills, interviewing skills, communication skills", (Drolet et al., 2015, p. 16). Sakamoto et al. (2010) consider soft skills to be constitutive of culturally embedded norms that are not clearly defined, which poses a challenge for skilled immigrants who are expected to demonstrate their capacity to act in accordance with these norms. Guo (2015), on the other hand, described the notion of soft skills as:

> the whitening of immigrants through the promotion of 'Canadian' ways of thinking, acting, and behaving. The expected outcome of this process is the formation of white, docile corporate subjects, who will depart from their past deficiency, 'embrace' the Canadian norms, and become a 'real' Canadian (p. 246).

Together with hard skills—technical knowledge and abilities—soft skills comprise what is referred to as Canadian experience, a common but significant barrier cited by skilled immigrants. Skilled immigrants' understanding of what constitutes Canadian experience has been found to vary according to the length of time they have resided in Canada (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Newly arrived skilled immigrants conceive of Canadian experience as a tangible form of knowledge that can be acquired through exposure to the Canadian workplace, whereas skilled immigrants who have been in Canada for some time view it as a nuanced expectation by employers about their capacity to fit in the workplace. These seasoned skilled immigrants will go to great lengths to

show that they have Canadian experience by deliberately trying to speak and behave in ways that they believe match the expectations of employers, even to the point of downplaying their individual expressions of culture, including the way in which they speak in English (Sakamoto et al., 2010).

The fact that skilled immigrants are required by some employers and licensing bodies to have Canadian experience puts them in a quandary: they need Canadian experience to be employed or licensed, but they cannot get Canadian experience without employment or licence (Guo, 2013). As a result, some pursue volunteering opportunities in an effort to acquire what they consider to be Canadian experience (Premji & Shakya, 2017). In fact, the government encourages immigrants to volunteer as a way to gain Canadian experience, enhance their English/French skills, grow their social network, develop professional references, and showcase their willingness to "work hard" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012, p. 47). However, the reality is that volunteering opportunities often take the form of activities in places such as hospitals, libraries, and schools, or providing support to other immigrants through activities organized by immigrant-serving agencies (Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi, 2015). Such opportunities fail to engage skilled immigrants in activities that are actually related to their professions and that employers would consider "real work" (Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi, 2015, p.100). Some immigrant-serving agencies provide unpaid internships opportunities in partnership with employers. These unpaid work placements, however, have been criticized for disguising what otherwise should be paid work and for not being recognized by professional licensing bodies for the purpose of accreditation (Guo, 2009; Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi, 2015). In addition, the lack of remuneration associated with unpaid internships is for many skilled immigrants a barrier given

their reliance on a few months-worth of savings to afford their living expenses while they become employed (Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi, 2015).

Kua et al., (2018), who explored the concept of Canadian experience from a discursive perspective, argue that newspapers construct Canadian experience as a challenge that skilled immigrants have to overcome by developing their language skills and enhancing their soft skills. However, because of the lack of clarity surrounding the meaning of Canadian experience, skilled immigrants are pushed towards any and all opportunities to acquire it regardless of their cost or outcome. This lack of clarity is also problematic because it allows for the requirement of Canadian experience to be used arbitrarily on specific groups of people who may be thought of as foreign and different, for the purpose of excluding them from the labour market. Consequently, the discourse of Canadian places the burden of responsibility on skilled immigrants to conform to Canadian norms. The resulting outcome is such that this discourse accomplishes immigrant inferiority in the public domain without acknowledging the historical context of racism and colonialism that brought about the inequalities present in Canadian society (Kua et al., 2018).

The Labour Market Outcomes of Skilled Immigrants

Data collected over the last 30 years indicates that skilled immigrants fare worse than their local counterparts in the labour market, a trend that continues to the present day (Statistics Canada, 2007). The gap in the employment rate of immigrants and Canadian-born in 2017 was found to be 9.3% and research shows that it takes approximately 16 years for immigrants to have an employment rate comparable to that of Canadian-born (Statistics Canada, 2007; Yssaad & Fields, 2018). The difference in the employment rate is largest for recent immigrants who have been in Canada five years or less and for skilled immigrants who wish to become employed in a

regulated profession. According to Banerjee and Phan (2014), after four years in Canada only 34% of skilled immigrants seeking employment in a regulated field report having succeeded. Contrary to assumptions of consistent labour market integration for immigrants across time, Lightman and Gingrich (2012) found that immigrants who have been in Canada for 11-20 years are 1.8 times more likely than their Canadian counterparts to be unemployed for 25 or more weeks of the year.

Some of the indicators of labour market outcomes discussed in the literature pertaining to skilled immigrants are wages, underemployment, and working conditions. Historically, the earnings of skilled immigrants have been lower than those of Canadian-born, a difference attributed to the devaluation of foreign human capital and the difficulty immigrants have with English or French language proficiency (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Fong & Cao, 2009). These barriers limit their access to professional employment opportunities, forcing them to take on 'survival jobs' that offer low wages (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Premji & Shakya, 2017). Skilled immigrants have been found to be overrepresented in precarious jobs that offer poor job security, no benefits, and involuntary part-time work with low wages (Avni, 2012; Hira-Friensen, 2017; Premji & Shakya, 2017). It is estimated that foreign education credentials have, on average, a return on earnings of less than one third of that of a degree earned in Canada (Alboim et al., 2005). Consequently, many skilled immigrants find themselves in jobs that are marginally related to their former occupations in their home country (Premji & Shakya, 2017). According to Lightman and Gingrich (2012), the difference in earnings between immigrants and their local counterparts is present across age groups (i.e., 18-29, 30-49, and 50-64). Given that this gap in earnings has increased over the last two decades, and that an increasing number of immigrants are non-white, it has been suggested that racial discrimination may play a role in the wage

disparity that exists between immigrants and non-immigrants (Picot & Hou, 2009). Recent immigrants have the lowest annual income compared to Canadian born. According to Lightman and Gingrich (2012), recent immigrant households are 2.5 times more likely than households where the major income earner is Canadian-born to have an income after tax that is below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Measure.

Some have hypothesized that social networks play an important part in the ability of newcomers to attain employment. Recent immigrants are likely to have small homogenous networks of friends who are of the same ethnic background and only offer access to low-income employment opportunities (Fong & Cao, 2009; Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, their ability to grow their networks beyond their ethnic communities for the purpose of finding professional employment may be hampered by their language proficiency (Majerski, 2019). As a result, it reportedly takes skilled immigrants approximately two decades to develop a professional network that is similar in size and professional diversity to that of their Canadian-born counterparts (Majerski, 2019).

The Impacts of Poor Market Outcomes on the Wellbeing of Skilled Immigrants

The impact that poor labour market outcomes have on skilled immigrants permeates different aspects of their wellbeing. In terms of their mental health, skilled immigrants' experiences of under and unemployment are associated with feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, unhappiness, worry, tension, irritation, and frustration (Avni, 2012; Dean & Wilson, 2009). Unemployment has further been shown to lead immigrants and their families to become isolated and it leads skilled immigrants to feel unproductive which negatively affects their self-esteem (Premji & Shakya, 2017).

Negative physical impacts of underemployment on skilled immigrants include somatic pain, poor sleep, and increased blood pressure. It has been hypothesized that these issues are the result of poor or highly demanding working conditions that may include long working hours, standing for long periods of time, lifting heavy boxes, and repetitive movements (Avni, 2012; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Premji & Shakya, 2017). Subedi and Rosenberg (2015) surveyed 146 skilled immigrants in Ottawa, who were employed in low-skilled jobs such as taxi drivers, convenience store clerks, and gas station attendants; on average they had been in Canada for approximately nine years and had spent over five years underemployed. Their results showed that 80% of participants considered themselves to be underemployed, close to 56% of them rated their health as *fair* or *poor*, and 24% rated their mental health as *fair* or *poor*. These researchers theorized that mental health issues were likely underreported as participants were likely to have difficulty gauging their mental wellbeing as accurately as their physical health. The results of this study further showed that the longer participants had been underemployed the more likely they were to rate their physical and mental health as *poor*, with each added year of underemployment increasing the likelihood of participants rating their physical and mental health as *poor* by close to 11%. Participants in this study additionally faced considerable financial hardship. Whereas the average median income of a Canadian family in the same year was $49,551 (Statistics Canada, 2019), the average annual income among participants in this study was $29,605/year. This finding was particularly worrisome because 74% of participants were married with children.

Another study that examined the impact of labour market outcomes on immigrants' wellbeing was that of Chen et al., (2010), who carried out a longitudinal study using secondary data from 2685 immigrants who completed the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada

(LSIC). In their analysis, these authors examined the incidence of overqualification based on level of education, previous work experience, and occupational expectations upon arriving in Canada, and its association with changes in self-reported general health and mental health. Those who took part in the LSIC were interviewed three times over a four-year period—baseline, six months, two years, and four years. The result of this study showed that over-qualification based on education was endorsed by 51.6%, experience by 44.4%, and expectations of employment in Canada by 42.8% of the sample. Furthermore, experiences of overqualification across all three dimensions were associated with a reported decline in mental health between waves one and three. This association was significant even after controlling for immigration category, ethnic origin, age, gender, marital status, and educational attainment. Furthermore, the number of participants who had initially rated their general health as *excellent* dropped from 45.5% to 25.3% between waves one and three; those who rated their general health as *fair/poor* increased from 1.87% to 5.67% between waves two and four; and those who reported experiencing emotional/mental health issues increased from 5.4% to 26.9% between waves two and four.

In sum, the results of the studies presented in this chapter thus far show that skilled immigrants face a host of challenges and barriers to their professional integration that have detrimental impacts on their physical and mental health. Similar to other newcomers, they must also contend with the tangible and intangible losses associated with migration, including having to adjust to entirely new surroundings and overcoming the loss of family and friends (Basma & Gibbons, 2016; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Research has also shown that the impacts of skilled immigrants' struggles extend to their sense of self. Prior to discussing these impacts specific to

skilled immigrants' identity, I will first provide a summary about the history of the study of identity that led to present understandings of it, including that of professional identity.

A Brief History of the Study of Identity

The study of identity in the social sciences and humanities in the recent past dates back to the 1950s and Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which is organized around the core question: How does a person compose a life centered in the self—a life recognized by self and others as having a certain uniqueness and distinctiveness? (Sorell & Montgomery, 2009). Erikson conceptualized identity as a subjective individual experience or personal project that develops across eight predictable stages from birth to death. At each stage the individual faces specific, patterned problems or dilemmas the resolution of which help to shape the person's sense of self, along with the influence of those in the individual's social realm (e.g., family, friends, partners), whose relationships convey important societal and cultural messages (Sorell & Montgomery, 2009; Wetherell, 2010). Building on Erikson's ideas about identity development, James Marcia proposed a highly influential framework of identity statuses—foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement—and two measures—the Identity Status Interview and the Ego Identity Incomplete Sentences Blank—to operationalize and gauge the formation of a person's identity (Kroger & Marcia, 2011).

Other researchers studying identity at the time focused specifically on the influence of an individual's group membership (e.g., nationality, religion, ethnicity) on their sense of self. This line of research emphasized how an individual is defined by their social group membership, and how their identity is marked by social differences and their position of advantage or disadvantage in relation to others, which ultimately affects how they view themselves and their place in the world (Wetherell, 2010). This focus on 'social identity' was marked by some scholars' growing

interest at the time in racial and ethnic identities, and it grew stronger over time fueled in part by the feminist critique of biological determinism and the politics of the 1960s. These criticisms went on to create the conditions for a crossing of paths between identity research and the civil rights movements of the time, an intersection that gave rise to new avenues of research in the field of identity studies. As a result, the study of identity became a "place where collective action, social movements, and issues of inequality, rights and social justice come into focus and demand attention" (Wetherell, 2010, p. 4).

By the 1960s, researchers had come to understand that identity holds both personal and social meaning as a "personal striving for coherence rooted in individual biography and…in struggles within shifting fields of competing and aligning social groups" (Wetherell, 2010, p. 10). These bifurcated notions of personal and social identity led researchers to the question of how subjectivity and social relations come together. Attempts to answer this question made identity studies important to understanding the relation between individuals and society. In the 1970s, social psychologists such as Henry Tajfel and John Turner, developers of social identity theory, argued for the interplay between social group membership and an individual's psyche. It was their opinion that a person's unconscious drives color how they interpret social content, which in turn influences their behaviour. Moreover, an individual's experience of themselves, they thought, is heavily influenced by the social groups with whom they identify. Propositions like this one about the relation between personal and social identity sought to preserve the influence of both social influence and personal agency by considering the individual free to change, but also mirroring the expectations and perspectives of significant others and of the broader society (Wetherell, 2010). From this perspective, identity is therefore considered to be an

ongoing process of the coming together of personal self-understanding and the ways in which one thought to be viewed by others.

In the 1980s, social and economic changes led to new directions in identity research. Globalization and the resulting transnational communities made it necessary for scholars to resort to new theoretical paradigms to be able to account for the multiplicity and diversity present in the accounts of individuals from different social groups (Wetherell, 2010). Furthermore, insights about cultural differences gained from anthropological studies led identity researchers to become interested in the variability that exists in the accounts about identity of individuals belonging to different cultures (e.g., individualistic and collectivist) (Wetherell, 2010).

More recent theoretical standpoints about identity have led postmodern scholars to critique longstanding, traditional psychological theories founded on positivist assumptions. These new paradigms instead conceptualize identity as a contingent, plural, fragmented, and sometimes contradictory entity (Wetherell, 2010). Postmodern scholars believe that theories of identity development, such as that of Erikson, do not account for contextual and historical factors that influence this process; do not represent the experiences of members from underprivileged groups; and reflect almost entirely the perspectives of White, middleclass, European and American men (Sorell & Montgomery, 2009). These perceived limitations led these scholars to move away from attempting to establish new theories about identity for the purpose of making generalizations about human development; instead they shifted their focus towards presenting stories or narratives about people's lived experiences (Sorell & Montgomery, 2009). The narrative conceptualization of identity in this study represents an adoption of this latter postmodern view of identity development. My specific focus on professional identity warrants a

survey of the literature about skilled immigrants and their identity development as they seek to become established professionally. The studies presented in the following section illustrate how the aforementioned various perspectives about identity and identity development continue to influence conceptualizations of identity, including the professional identity of skilled immigrants.

Professional Identity of Skilled Immigrants

There have been some studies that have focused on skilled immigrants' sense of self in relation to their careers and how it is impacted during the process of trying to become established in their professions. I have grouped these studies according to how the authors of each study conceived of identity—more so as a relative stable part of a person's intrapersonal construct or a social phenomenon that is context-dependent and malleable.

Zikic and Richardson (2016) investigated the impact of immigration and of institutional forces present in the Canadian labour market on skilled immigrants' professional identity. These authors drew on Ibarra's (1999) conceptualization of professional identity as a relatively fixed and lasting set of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences that encompass how individuals define themselves in relation to their profession. Data collection in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 58 immigrant professionals in Ontario, of whom 32 were international medical professionals (IMPs) and 26 were international IT professionals (IITPs). Analysis of the interviews showed IMPs facing a challenging regulatory environment characterized by multiple regulatory bodies and a lack of clarity about the accreditation process. Those IMPs who had reached the equivalency exams in the accreditation process described facing institutional gatekeepers, who controlled access to residency programs and who favored local graduates regardless of their examination scores, level of competency, and experience. As a

result of this arduous accreditation process, IMPs in their study faced the possibility of having to give up pursuing a career as doctors, which created for them what these authors described as an identity crisis characterized by a sense of loss and discontinuity with whom they were before immigrating. IITPs who, on the other hand, faced less stringent barriers to be able to become employed in their field saw their process as one of adaptation in which their professional identity was put on hold. To them, taking on a survival job or an entry-level IT job represented an opportunity to gain exposure to the Canadian way to be able to meet the demands of future prospective employers. Consequently, unlike IMPs, IITPS experienced feelings of growth and fulfillment that, to the authors, signaled a process of identity development and enrichment. Zikic & Richardson thus showed how more or less stringent regulatory requirements in their participants' profession affected their sense of self, both directly by impacting their ability to become accredited and indirectly through their view of their underemployment.

Similarly, Aten et al. (2016) drew on a personal notion of identity to explore the cognitive processes that influence how skilled immigrants perceive the barriers that marginalize them professionally and the professional opportunities they see for themselves. These authors conceptualized identity as a dynamic system that mediates how individuals interpret significant personal and interpersonal processes, and in turn shapes their perception of their environment, including the possibilities available to them (Weick et al., 2005). In their analysis of transcripts of interviews with 13 engineers from Philippines, these authors concluded that there were patterns to the variation in how their participants perceived contextual barriers and career options. These authors organized this variation according to three mobility self-narratives—migrant, migrant professional, and mobile professional—that differentiated participants based on the degree to which they endorsed adaptation; the level of importance they placed on

professional integration; and their degree of attachment to Canada. These authors further argued that, in their assessment of their situational context, skilled immigrants may "exercise some agency by selecting those who they imbue with the legitimacy to validate their perceptions and might also take actions to shape perceptions of others within the situational context" (Aten et al., 2016, p. 209). Because of this, these authors emphasized the importance of making host country agents from whom skilled immigrants seek guidance, like those employed in immigrant-serving agencies, aware of their capacity to influence skilled immigrants' mobility self-narratives and in turn their perceived career opportunities. This study from Aten and colleagues thus highlighted that the way in which their participants thought about themselves and their situational context influenced their perception of contextual barriers and their capacity to overcome them.

Shan and Guo (2013) investigated how skilled immigrants from China mediated professional differences and negotiated their professional identities in their attempts to integrate into the Canadian labour market as professional engineers. Their understanding of identity development was one that results from a dialogical relationship between subjective experience and social experiences (Holland & Lave, 2001). From their interviews with 20 skilled immigrants, the authors learned that, due to licensing requirements, some of their participants had to pursue jobs that were lower in the hierarchy of their profession or had to opt out of the engineering profession altogether. Furthermore, in their attempts to become employed, their participants had to forego aspects of their culture and become familiar with new cultural rules in order to make themselves seem as employment-ready. Taking up these new cultural norms made their participants aware of the secondary status of their own cultural norms in Canada and created a discrepancy between their self-presentation and their sense of themselves. As a result, these authors concluded that, for their participants, the process of negotiating cultural differences

while navigating the labour market involved learning to be desirable candidates, managing the loss of their professional identity, and trying to reconstitute their sense of self. Therefore, in this study, Shan & Guo showed that their participants' identity work was socially mediated and highly contingent on institutional recognition, which directly affected their employment opportunities and status.

Hilde and Mills (2017) interviewed 19 skilled immigrants from Hong Kong and examined their identity work as they tried to manage competing senses of their experiences in Canada. According to these authors, their participants carried out identity work to resolve a sense of ambiguity they felt that was associated with being in an ambivalent psychological space or in-between state of mind. While in this state, their participants oscillated between their own sense of self and a perceived dominant sense of being an immigrant in Canada. In terms of identity work, these immigrants had to contend with and reconcile competing discourses of integration and exploitation, which produced for them conflicting self-understandings of being useful and useless members of society. Moreover, their sense of identity went back and forth between being good but not good enough to enter their fields, being Chinese but distancing from this identity, which is considered deviant by the dominant culture, and being legally Canadian but not feeling like full members of society. In their findings, these authors further described how their participants' process of sensemaking intensified as they tried to understand skill discounting and the devaluation of their credentials. For some, their inability to come terms with these experiences led them to feel depressed and to experience suicidal ideation. In turn, these participants adopted a lesser professional identity to stabilize from these shocks. Hilde & Mills results thus showed that their participants' identity construction was influenced by the discourses that they embraced or distanced themselves from in different situations. In addition, the notion of

an in-between-self helped to explain the mental health issues experienced by some of their participants.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins a description of my research puzzle and how I arrived at it. Following this, I present my own narrative beginnings that make clear how my background shaped my desire to pursue this study and my justifications for pursuing this research. I then introduce my research approach—narrative inquiry—including its epistemological and ontological assumptions, and narrative identity which I used to make sense of participants' accounts in relation to my research question. After, I present the materials I used to carry out my interviews with participants, my process for data collection, and the steps I followed to analyze their accounts. This is followed by a description of the touchstones presented by Clandinin and Caine (2013) as a means to judge the quality of a narrative inquiry. I conclude this chapter with an introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and how I drew elements from it to address the second question of my study.

My Research Puzzle

My survey of the literature in the previous chapter details the challenges and barriers encountered by skilled immigrants as they attempt to enter their professions in Canada. These challenges and barriers lead skilled immigrants to underemployment and unemployment, outcomes associated with a host of deleterious impacts on their wellbeing. The cost of their poor labour market outcomes, however, extends beyond their health, with estimates of their lost income amounting to more than $30 billion a year, the equivalent of 2% of Canada's GDP (Royal Bank of Canada, 2011). Given that skilled immigrants are a large and growing demographic in Canada, these findings underscore the importance of their labour market integration not only for their wellbeing and integration, but also for the economic prosperity of Canada. Despite notable progress having been made in the last ten years with respect to skilled

immigrants' labour market outcomes, many of them continue to struggle greatly to enter their professions. The question thus arises about how struggling to establish their careers impacts their professional sense of self, and how they manage possible shifts in their professional identity due to their struggles while they try to become employed in their professions. There have only been a handful of studies that have specifically examined professional identity shifts in this population. Alongside these proposed questions, researchers have also yet to explore the possible role that discourses or circulating narratives about skilled immigrants in Canadian society play in the way members of this population understand themselves and their careers. The answers to these questions are important for our understanding of how current resources for this population can be further developed or reformed to better assist with their economic integration and support their wellbeing. These answers are also relevant to enrich our understanding of the impact that our government and its policies and as we as a society have on the individual experience and lives of members of this population. Therefore, my research puzzle centered around the question: What stories do skilled immigrants tell about their shifting professional identities while attempting to establish their careers in Canada? In addition, I also sought to explore the possible role that discourses or circulating narratives about skilled immigrants play in how they made sense of their careers.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a central, defining feature of qualitative research. Because qualitative texts contain interpretations that are based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics of the author(s), the writing of a qualitative text cannot be separated from its author(s), how it is received by readers, and how it impacts those who take part in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, who qualitative researchers are as people inevitably shapes their writing and

reflexivity consists of being open and forthcoming in their views, attitudes, and ways of thinking that are relevant to the topic at hand. In the case of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that "it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealised, inquiring, moralising self" (p. 62). The process of narrative inquiry is characterized by ongoing tension between the researchers' own narratives and the research process. As such, this tension requires narrative researchers to become "autobiographically conscious" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46) of their own narratives and be vigilant of possible tensions that may arise between their own narrative histories and the research process that they are undertaking (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, reflecting on our role in our inquiries makes us more "wakeful and open" and contributes to "shifts in relational knowing and being" (Dubnewick et al., 2018, p. 413). I will now discuss my own narrative beginnings, including the stories in my life and those of others that I have come across that shaped this inquiry.

My Narrative Beginnings

The reverberations of my past experiences as an employment counsellor to skilled immigrants and of my own family's experiences as refugees in Canada constitute my narrative beginnings and the origins of this study. The accounts of participants resonated with the stories of my former skilled immigrant clients, who arrived in Canada with similar professional aspirations only to find themselves being deskilled, having their credentials devalued, and being asked for Canadian experience. In the same way, my own father, a successful business man in Colombia, struggled to establish himself as a professional in Canada due to a host of challenges, including unfamiliarity with Canadian sociocultural norms, an intermediate command of English, racism, and a dearth of employment resources for professional newcomers at the time of our

landing. Ultimately, my father became underemployed out of necessity and forfeited his career, which stirred in him a feeling of regret that has haunted him for many years.

During the four years that I worked as an employment counsellor I met many skilled immigrants struggling to find professional employment. Although they faced common challenges, no two clients were the same—each of them had a unique story to tell and required a tailored approach to their specific needs. Watching many of them persist in the face of continued failure made me wonder, "How do they do it?" I always wondered what they thought of their struggles after having been successful in their home countries, and how their many failed job search attempts impacted their view of themselves. Something else about my experiences as a job search counsellor that stayed with me was the difference that a helping hand from an established professional could make in furthering my former clients' effectiveness in their job search, or in reenergizing them to carry on in their efforts. Working with my former clients, I realized that although they had a lot to offer not only as professionals but also as people, helping them be the best they could required more than just the support of service providers. I slowly began to feel a calling to raise awareness about skilled immigrants' struggles and the value that they could add to our society if they were well integrated. At the same time, I wanted to share about how difficult it was for professional newcomers to feel like they would never be able to establish themselves professionally in Canada.

Narrative Inquiry

In this study, I employed narrative inquiry to explore the accounts of skilled immigrants attempting to establish their careers in Canada. Narrative research, broadly defined, focuses on reconstructing the experiences of individuals in relation to others and to their broader social environment (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Contemporary narrative research, including narrative inquiry, cuts across different disciplines and consists of an "amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods" (Chase, 2005, p. 651), all gravitating around a common interest in autobiographical accounts as told by those who have lived them. Narrative researchers, nevertheless, differ in their understanding of what constitutes stories, the types of stories they choose to focus on, and the methods they employ to carry out their analysis. According to Chase (2005), the roots of contemporary narrative research can be traced back to the work of sociologists and anthropologists in the early 20th century, such as Paul Radin and William I. Thomas, who prioritized the life history, a qualitative research method that focuses on the study of extensive autobiographical narratives, in oral or written form, of a person's life. Later on, the first and second feminist waves revitalized the study of personal narratives by bringing to the forefront the narratives of African Americans and those of women whose lives had been largely ignored in the social sciences (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry specifically has its origins in the late 1980s early 1990s in the educational research work of F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, who first used it to describe the personal stories of teachers.

Narrative inquiry is rooted in a specific view of experience as a storied phenomenon, meaning that people are thought to use lived and told stories to structure and make sense of their lives (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Experience is further thought to be "unfolding over time, in diverse social contexts and in place, and as co-composed in relation" (Caine et al., 2014, p. 575). Distinct from other forms of narrative research, however, adopting narrative inquiry as one's research approach requires an understanding of narrative inquiry as both the methodology and phenomenon of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). In order to attend to what it considers to be the fundamental qualities of experience, narrative inquiry makes use of a metaphorical three-

dimensional space throughout all stages of the research process, from the development of the research question, selection of participants, data collection, to writing of a manuscript (Clandinin, 2006). The use of three-dimensional narrative space allows investigators to attend to people's experiences as taking place over time and building on each other, in a specific place or series of places, and in social interactions with others and a larger milieu (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Moreover, the relational aspect of three-dimensional narrative space brings forth how the personal and social aspects of experience are intertwined and how individual experiences are shaped by broader social, cultural, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2006).

Ontology and Epistemology

The terms ontology and epistemology refer to different but related aspects concerning reality in relation to research methodologies and the paradigms that underlie them. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and what exists in the social world; in other words, what is true or real and therefore knowable (i.e., what is reality?) (Dieronitou, 2014). Epistemology on the other hand concerns with the nature of knowledge (i.e., objective or subjective) and how knowledge can be obtained (i.e., how do I know reality?). Aside from these assumptions about reality, a methodology is underpinned by a particular research paradigm. A research paradigm can be thought as the worldview or belief system that guides those who adopt a specific methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Epistemological Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry. In order to address the epistemological and ontological tenets of narrative inquiry it is important to first situate this research approach within the paradigm of qualitative research, which seeks to understand phenomena and the meaning it holds for individuals and their lives (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) described four narrative turns that move those who adopt a narrative approach away from positivistic assumptions about knowing, specifically in relation to reliability, objectivity, generalizability, and validity. These turns can be used to situate narrative studies epistemologically in the wider landscape of narrative research according to which turns the researchers embrace in their work. It is important to note that these four turns do not necessarily take place in any particular order and may happen successively or simultaneously two, three, or four at a time depending on the researchers' commitment to a narrative epistemology. These narrative turns also shift the relationship between researchers and research participants, types of data collected, aim of research studies, and what researchers embrace as forms of knowing. Narrative inquiry embraces all four turns by conceptualizing researcher-researched relationship as interactive, highlighting the value of particular experience, situating knowledge in the context of a specific place and time, and being open to various ways of knowing.

In regard to the first listed turn, objectivity, narrative inquirers commit to an understanding of the research process as a relationship that emerges between researchers and the researched. In adopting this turn, researchers thus move away from viewing themselves as objective and removed from the research process, recognizing instead that who they are will inevitably have an impact on the interactions that form their inquiry. These interactions are likely to change both researchers and the researched alike resulting in learning and growth for both

(Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In spite of recognizing their inability to distance themselves from the subject(s) of their inquiry, researchers should act with integrity and seek to produce research that is meaningful and that reflects trustworthiness and rigour (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

The second narrative turn, reliability, involves moving away from numbers toward textual data. From a positivistic standpoint, presenting data in the form of numbers allows researchers to establish the reliability of their findings and make a claim about their validity (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Those who embrace this turn, however, recognize that part of the richness of human experience may be lost when words are converted into numbers for the purpose of analysis (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Instead, they are interested in verbal accounts related to their research objective, which leads them to adopt a relational stance with their participants, focus on the particular and specific, and value different perspectives (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Following the collection of verbal accounts, narrative inquiry's three-dimensional analysis "allows researchers to both present and interrogate findings and allows the narrative inquirer to represent the contingent, nuanced, and symbolic aspects of the findings" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 20).

The third narrative turn, which is related to generalizability, refers to a shift away from pursuing findings that are generalizable to focusing on the specifics of participants' stories for the purpose of understanding experience as it happens in a specific place and at a specific time (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Individual stories allow space for those who are not subject matter experts to contribute and serve as munition for leaders to draw on as evidence to argue the need for social and political change (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The last of the four turns, validity, involves moving away from one way of knowing the world and instead being open to multiple ways of understanding. This turn requires thinking

beyond the traditional focus in the social sciences on numbers, proving facts, and developing theories about the workings of the world. Narrative inquirers instead "recognize the tentative and variable nature of knowledge…[and] accept and value the way in which narrative inquiry allows wondering, tentativeness, and alternative views to exist as part of the research account" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25). Therefore, rather than looking to establish the validity of their findings, they strive for resonance and trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Ontological Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry. The ontology of narrative inquiry is based on Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy, which makes three critical assumptions about the nature of experience. First, from a Deweyan perspective, experience is considered to be "the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiries, narrative or otherwise, proceed" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38). Contrary to other understandings of experience, for example, that of Husserlian phenomenologists who believe there to be a reality beyond all representations of it, Dewey's notion of experience is that of "a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Therefore, it can be said that Dewey's narrative ontology is relational as opposed to transcendental. As such, narrative inquirers are active participants in the co-creation of knowledge by observing, listening and living alongside their participants (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

A second fundamental assumption embedded in Dewey's ontology concerns the continuous nature of experience across time. Based on this assumption, the goal of a narrative inquiry is not to uncover a transcendental unchanging reality, but rather the inquiry is itself part of a stream of experiences that form new relations with past experiences and become integrated

with future ones. From this perspective, the initial conditions or boundaries of a narrative inquiry are themselves a form of relation that should be examined throughout the course of the inquiry.

A third critical assumption about the nature of experience according to Dewey's pragmatic ontology is the importance of the social aspect of knowledge. Stories, which are the object of study in narrative inquiry, come about from the convergence of social influences, a person's inner sense, their surroundings, and of their own personal background (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). From this perspective, stories do not constitute reflections of broader social realities, but rather are social realities in and of themselves, and the lived experiences contained within them are a worthy source of knowledge. It follows from the social emphasis of Dewey's pragmatic ontology that narrative inquiries do not focus exclusively on personal experience, but also explore grand social, cultural and institutional narratives that delineate how personal experiences are formed, shared, and enacted, albeit with the ultimate goal of understanding individuals' stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of narrative inquiry described above are at the roots of this study and present throughout its phases. In regard to epistemology and the four turns toward narrative, I prioritized participants' individual experiences as a rich source of knowledge worthy of being explored in its own right. The semi-structured format of the interviews I carried out and the open-ended questions that I asked of participants' elicited their personal stories, which became textual data for analysis and interpretation. My foregoing of an objective stance and adoption of an interactive approach to relating with participants, while still acting with integrity, recognized the cooperative nature of knowledge creation and how both participants and I would learn and grow as a result of taking part in this inquiry. The attention to place and chronology in the design of my interview guide contextualized the findings of this

study to a specific place and time, and the use of three-dimensional narrative space allowed me to organize, present, and analyze participants' accounts with rigour. Lastly, by considering the touchstones of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) throughout the different stages of the research process, I strived to arrive at findings and interpretations that were resonant and trustworthy.

In regard to ontology, my conceptualization of experience was influenced by Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in that I considered participants experiences to be happening across time and building on each other in a continuous stream. In line with the relational aspect of Dewey's ontology, I took part in the creation of knowledge by taking on the role of curious observer and actively listening to participants as they shared their stories. Furthermore, my analysis and interpretation of their stories involved examining both participants' own thoughts and feelings about their professional lives, as well as their interactions with their social contexts.

Narrative Identity

My study draws on a narrative conception of identity to explore shifts in the professional identities of skilled immigrants as a result of their struggles to be recognized as professionals and become active participants in the labour market in Canada. The concept of narrative identity aligns with postmodern assumptions about the plural and contextual nature of identities. A narrative understanding of identity sees people as story-telling beings whose sense of self is grounded in the stories that are part of their lives. Dan McAdams, a psychologist and narrative researcher, describes narrative identity as "an internalized and evolving life story…[that] brings order and logic to the chaos of experienced life" (McAdams, 2018, p. 361). A story of identity reads like a novel, contains settings, scenes, characters, plots, and themes, and "it situates a person in the world, integrates a life in time, and provides meaning and purpose" (McAdams,

2018, p. 361). The process of how people make meaning out of their own stories results from their attempts to articulate what they believe their stories say about who they are (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

The notion of narrative identity shares an ontological connection with Dewey's theory, which highlights the social, temporal, and continuous dimensions of experience, as well as with narrative inquiry's three-dimensional space—temporal, personal-social, and place. Clandinin (2006) described teachers' identity stories in her research about the lives of teachers as "multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living" (p. 9). Therefore, a person's self-story is influenced by their place in society and by the interconnectedness of different events in their lives. Moreover, the development of a narrative identity or personal life story happens within the parameters of a specific cultural context and of particular groups (e.g., family, peers) (McAdams, 2013).

Narrative identity is the story about "how I came to be the person that I am becoming" (McAdams, 2018, p. 364). From this understanding, identity stories serve a function of integration. First, stories of identity integrate a person's enduring subjective experience of themselves across multiple and diverse situational contexts (McAdams, 2018). Second, stories of identity integrate a person's sense of self temporally; the self of yesterday with the self of today, which is the same self that aims or hopes to become a different self in the future (McAdams, 2018). Another function of personal stories is to promote social relationships; people connect by sharing stories about their lives with one another. Personal stories also provide insights on how to handle a situation, (e.g., a difficult decision) based on memories of similar events that happened in the past. Stories of the self may also serve the function of boosting a person's morale and of helping to sustain their positive self-esteem (McAdams, 2018).

In taking on a narrative notion of identity, I sought to understand how participants' sense of self developed from the unfolding of their professional lives in their home countries and how it was transformed through their efforts to pursue their careers in Canada. The ways in which participants made meaning out of these experiences provides insight into how their understanding of themselves shifted in response to changing circumstances in their professional lives. Therefore, the questions and prompts contained in my interview guide were meant to elicit rich accounts from participants for the purpose of exploring how they integrated their professional experiences pre and post immigration and how these experiences impacted their sense of self.

Materials

Demographic Form

Prior to the start of the interviews, I asked participants a series of questions about their demographics, their educational and professional background, their employment status in Canada, and the employment services that they had accessed (Appendix A). The purpose of these questions was to help me get to know them better, to help stimulate our conversations, and to help me create professional introductory profiles of each of them which I included at the start of the chapter that follows.

Interview Guide

The design of my interview guide was based on the three-dimensional narrative space that is characteristic of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006). Specifically, my questions were organized in chronological fashion, starting with participants' careers in their home countries, followed by an exploration of the circumstances surrounding their decision to immigrate and their expectations about their professional life in Canada, their job search experiences in the

Canadian labour market, the impact of their experiences as skilled immigrants on their view of themselves, their prospects as professionals, and their reflections about their decision to immigrate. Each of the sections contained several probes to help orient participants to share not only about significant turning points in their stories, but also about their thoughts, interpretations, and emotions about such turning points (Chase, 2005). In my follow up questions, I did my best to prioritize staying close to their stories while also moving forward to the remaining questions in my interview guide (Chase, 2005). Before moving one from one section of the interview guide to the next one, I resorted to the test of visualizability described by Chase (2005) to encourage participants to elaborate on the different aspects of their stories in order to help paint a richer picture of their experiences and their meaning. This test involved asking participants about the who, what, and when of their experiences.

MacArthur Subjective Social Status Scale

The fourth section of the interview guide focused on possible shifts in participants' professional identities. Given the social dimension of narrative identity, I wanted participants to share with me about how their perceptions of their social status might have been impacted by their careers in Canada compared to their home countries. My supervisor and I had explored possible ways in which I could invite a discussion with participants about their social status, after which I searched the literature for established ways to incite such a conversation with participants. In my search, I came across the MacArthur Subjective Social Status (SSS) Scale, which is a single-item measure of a person's own perceived social status in relation to others on the basis of income, education, and occupation (Adler et al., 2000). Previous research has found these to be three domains commonly cited by people who were asked to rank their status in relation to that of others in their communities (Adler & Stewart, 2007). The MacArthur SSS

Scale has been used to measure subjective social status among different cultural and immigrant groups (Franzini & Fernandez, 2006; Garza et al., 2017; Leu et al., 2008; Ostrove et al., 2000). My survey of the literature indicated that the challenges that skilled immigrants' face in their careers in Canada impact the three domains targeted by this scale. Therefore, my use of the MacArthur SSS Scale was aimed at helping me capture possible shifts in participants' professional identities by discussing changes to their perceived social status based on the three dimensions of this scale, which are associated with their careers.

Using the instructions outlined below, I asked participants to rate themselves on the MacArthur SSS Scale both in their home countries and Canada. I first presented each of them with two sheets of paper placed side-by-side. Each sheet of paper contained the drawing of a ladder (i.e., the MacArthur SSS Scale) and one of the sheets was titled "Home Country" and the other one was titled "Canada". I then read them a set of instructions that I developed based on the instructions provided by Adler et al., (2000) for the use of this scale:

> *Think of the ladder on the left as representing where people stand in your home country, and the ladder on the right as representing where people stand in Canada. At the top of the ladders are the people who are the best off in both societies– those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off – those who have the least money, least education, the least respected jobs, or no job. The higher up you are on the ladders, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.*

Upon reading this set of instructions to participants, I then asked them to place an "X" on the ladder labeled "Home Country" to signal where they thought they stood in relation to others in

their home country. I then asked them to place an "X" on the ladder labeled "Canada" to signal where they thought they stood in relation to others in Canada. Following this, I queried them about their markings being on the same or different rungs on the two ladders and about the impact of their placements (i.e., their perceived social status across the two societies) on their sense of self.

Data Collection

Upon being granted ethics approval by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, I shared a copy of my recruitment flyer (Appendix C) with the University of Calgary's Newcomer Research Network, an interdisciplinary community of researchers whose work focuses on advancing knowledge and intercultural practices with newcomers. I then posted the recruitment flyer on my own social media profiles (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn) and I shared a soft copy of the same flyer with my professional contacts, who were employed in different immigrant-serving agencies in Calgary. In order to further promote my study, I also developed an online recruitment advertisement (Appendix B) to share with participants who expressed interest in sharing information about the study with other skilled immigrants in their network.

Eligibility Criteria

Initially, I aimed for participants to have immigrated through the Federal Skilled Worker program (i.e., as skilled immigrants) since 2015. My reason for choosing 2015 as the cut-off year was that it was in that year that IRCC rolled out the Express Entry online application system and I wanted participants to be able to comment about their experience of this new application system. Among the proposed benefits of Express Entry, according to IRCC, were an improved selection process based on Canada's labour market needs and reduced application processing

times. Unfortunately, only one of the eight people who contacted me about participation had applied to immigrate in 2015 or later. The other seven people, six of whom became participants, had indeed come to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker program, but had submitted their applications before the Express Entry system was implemented. Therefore, given my need to recruit participants and the limited number of people who contacted about participation, I chose to desist from requiring potential participants to have applied through Express Entry. Instead, I asked participants about their immigration experience more broadly. The second inclusion criterion for prospective participants was to have been actively trying to re-establish their profession in Canada (e.g., applying for jobs, completing additional trainings, becoming accredited). This requirement was meant to ensure that those who participated had had experience attempting to enter their professions in Canada and thus could speak to how this process impacted them.

Recruitment Procedure

Prospective participants first contacted me through email, LinkedIn, or Facebook, to express interest in taking part in the study. Upon receiving an expression of interest, I reiterated that participation entailed an approximately 90-minute interview about their experiences as skilled immigrants and introduced the University of Calgary as a possible location for the interviews to take place. Upon receiving confirmation about their willingness to participate, I sent participants an email containing the date and time of their interview (in accordance with their availability) and a map to help guide them to location in the U of C campus where their interview would take place.

In my communications with participants I encouraged them to ask any questions they may have about the study and their participation. When participants arrived for their interview, I

provided them with a copy of the consent form (Appendix D) and allowed them ample time to review the form, as well as encouraged them to ask questions about its content. When participants indicated that they had finished reading the consent form and had no other questions about its content, I summarized for them their rights as participants, the steps involved in participating, my responsibilities as the researcher, and what my efforts would be to safeguard their confidentiality throughout the research process.

After participants signed the consent form, I provided them with a $25 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation for their participation and reiterated that they could withdraw from the study at any point. I started by asking participants to complete the demographic information form (Appendix E) after which the interviews started. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and all of them were audio-recorded, which I later transcribed *verbatim*. The interviews began with a brief introduction to orient participants to tell their story in a chronological fashion:

> *Thank you for your willingness to share your experiences with me. Our conversation today will focus on your experiences as a skilled immigrant. My questions are meant to help us construct a story about your life as a professional, from the time you were back home until now, as well as into the future. Let's start with your professional life back home.*

The recordings of the interviews were stored in my personal laptop under password protection and I deleted them after transcription was completed. The transcripts were password protected and all identifying information in them was removed. The interview transcripts and my impressions of the interviews together comprised my initial field texts. Some of my participant's email responses about their restories also became part of my field texts.

Data Analysis

Upon completing the transcription of all the interviews, I began the process of analysis one transcript at a time. There is no set manner in narrative inquiry to analyze data. The steps described below follow the procedural guide offered by Chase (2005) to analyze and interpret participants' stories in a manner that is congruent with the principles of narrative research.

For each transcript the first step of analysis involved reading the transcript several times to become immersed in the participant's story and become aware of turning points or recurring threads in it. I then proceeded to summarize the participant's story in the margins using codes that reflected the content of their story in relation to the framework of three-dimensional narrative space. The number of codes in each transcript was approximately 120.

Once a transcript was coded in its entirety, I transferred the codes onto a separate document where I organized them using a chart with three columns that were labelled "Event", "Personal", and "Social". These headings were derived from the three dimensions of narrative inquiry space—temporality, sociality, and place. The Event column contained a series of short captions listed in chorological order that summarized in a few words notable points about the participant's story in relation to the topics contained in my interview guide (i.e., their careers in their home country, the circumstances surrounding their decision to immigrate, their expectations of their professional life in Canada, their job search experiences in the Canadian labour market, the impact of their experiences as skilled immigrants on their view of themselves, their prospects as professionals, and their reflections about their decision to immigrate). The Personal and Social columns contained codes related to notable points in the participant's story that were listed in the Event column. Codes that reflected the participant's thoughts, values or feelings were listed under the Personal column, and those that reflected interactions with others or their larger social

milieu were listed under the Social column. Each three-dimensional chart was approximately eight single-spaced pages.

Once all the codes were added to the three-dimensional chart, I created a *restory* or narrative of the participant using the codes contained in their three-dimensional chart. The restories were my interim texts and each one was approximately four single-spaced pages in length. I sent each participant their restory as part of the process of negotiation that is intrinsic to narrative inquiry. Participants were given two weeks to provide feedback about how well their restory captured their experience and to request changes to its content to more accurately reflect their story. Three of my seven participants asked for minor changes to the content of their restory, while the other four accepted their restory without requesting any changes to it. Upon completing the requested changes, I proceeded to search for convergence and divergence within each narrative. The final step of analysis involved cross case analysis comparing the restories for the purpose of finding common themes across participants' experiences that touched me and spoke to me in relation to my research puzzle.

Qualitative Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Caine (2013) described a series of touchstones that narrative researchers should use to gauge the quality of their inquiries. These touchstones are: relational responsibilities; in the midst; negotiation of relationships; narrative beginnings; negotiating entry to the field; moving from field to field texts; moving from field texts to interim and final research texts; representing narratives of experience in ways that show temporality, sociality, and place; relational response communities; justifications—personal, practical, and social; and a commitment to understanding lives in motion.

Relational Responsibilities

As narrative inquirers, we carry out our work in a collaborative fashion that allows us to co-create and negotiate the living and telling of stories with our participants. We must also approach our work with an "attitude of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care" (p. 169). Relational ethics, which are at the heart of narrative inquiry, require us to be responsive to issues of equity and social justice. Narrative inquiry further prioritizes a relational knowing and understanding of experience that requires us to attend to the lives of our participants in a way that is reflective of the continuous interplay during the research process that leads to the co-creation of field texts and research texts. My approach to participants before, during, and after the interviews, was one of openness and honesty, respect and collaboration, and being non-judgemental. Further, the spirit of this inquiry is to attend to an ongoing problem faced by many skilled immigrants, who continue to struggle and are in need of guidance and support to avoid having to forego their careers, which constitute an important part of their lives and dictate, to a great extent, the quality of their integration experience into Canadian society.

Narrative Beginnings

As mentioned above, autobiographical narrative inquiry involves reflecting on our personal stories in relation to our inquiry before, during, and after it is concluded. This reflective process is meant to help us understand the origins of our research puzzle and the social and political context that shaped our understanding of the topic of our inquiry. This reflexive exercise will also help to make clear the justifications of our inquiry. In my narrative beginnings, I shared candidly about my personal justifications for this inquiry. My wish to embark in this research was born out of my professional experience working with skilled immigrants and the commitment that I feel to continue to advocate for them in my academic work.

In the Midst

As narrative inquirers we enter our work in the midst of the happenings in our personal and professional lives, which we enact within certain institutional narratives (e.g., graduate student, member of a research project or academic community), as well as in the midst of broader social, political, and cultural narratives. Our participants' lives are also unfolding and their lives, like ours, are shaped by social, cultural, and institutional narratives. While designing our inquiries, we should try to imagine ourselves in the midst of our participants' lives and while doing so attend to the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place that guide the way we conceptualize experience. As discussed, several experiences in my life converged to propel me to pursue this inquiry, In addition, the social justice philosophy of my master's program and the support and encouragement of my thesis supervisor to pursue a study of my own design also emboldened me to carry out this study. At a broader level, the issue of immigration continues to change the landscape of Canada today and is one of national importance as evidenced by the development of new programs such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. These reflections, along with the insights that I gained from my review of the literature on the topic of this study, served as the basis for its design.

Negotiating Relationships

Our inquiries constitute a process of exploration of our research puzzle and of negotiating our relationship with participants for the co-creation of interim and research texts. Therefore, it is critical that we are continuously mindful of our ethical responsibilities and the potential that there is form harm to our participants (Josselson, 2012). Because of the relational nature of narrative inquiry, it is likely that both us and our participants will experience a shift as a result of our inquiry. It is important that we reflect about these shifts as part of the social and practical

justifications of our inquiry. I informed myself about relational ethics and how to carry out interviews effectively through relevant readings (e.g., Chase, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These readings were instrumental to how I crafted my interview questions, how I asked questions of participants during the interviews, and my consideration of possible ethical issues throughout the research process. These issues included but were not limited to informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences or implications for participants.

Negotiating Entry into the Field

The word *field* refers to the relational space in which our inquiry takes place and which we ongoingly negotiate with our participants. A narrative inquiry may begin with listening to our participants' stories (e.g., interviews), or alternatively, living alongside them as their stories are unfolding as part of their social milieu (e.g., becoming embedded within a community to which our participants belong). My awareness of my position arguably as both an insider and outsider in this study, was my starting point from which I reflected on my possible influence on the space that participants and I would create for this inquiry to take place. Through personal reflection and conversations with my thesis supervisor, I sought to become aware and stay mindful of the possible influence on the research of: (a) my personal and professional background, (b) my knowledge of the literature about issues faced by skilled immigrants, (c) and my awareness of how skilled immigrants have been portrayed in the media and are viewed by some employers.

Moving from Field to Field Texts

As we begin to engage with our participants, we also begin to co-create field texts. Field texts, more commonly known as data, may take the form of texts, artwork, photographs, and documents, among other possibilities. In this study, the manner in which I asked questions of

participants was intended to help them describe in detail significant turning points in their journeys. I further strived to describe these events in their restories and in my final research text in a way that would allow readers to depict an image in their minds of those events that were of significance to participants and how they came to view themselves as professionals in Canada.

Moving from Field Texts to Interim and Final Research Texts

The creation of interim texts and final research texts is an iterative process. Throughout these iterations we should maintain a relationship with our research participants for the purpose of negotiating the content of field, interim, and final research texts. The purpose of developing interim texts is to help us condense and make sense of a greater number of field texts. The process of reading and rereading our field texts while attending to three-dimensional narrative space allows us to delve deeper into our participants' experiences to better their meaning. My interim texts consisted of a restoried narrative about each of participants that highlighted meaningful moments and turning points in their stories. The process of creating final research texts requires us to attend to the personal, social, and practical justifications of our inquiry. My approach to this research puzzle was a critical one in the sense that my analysis involved exploring possible circulating narratives that may have had an influence on participants job search experiences and their professional identities. In being critical, I sought to go beyond our present understanding of the barriers and poor labour market outcomes of many skilled immigrants to make this inquiry practically and socially justifiable.

Representing Narratives of Experience in Ways that Show Temporality, Sociality, and Place

The iterative process that we follow to develop our interim and final research texts should reflect our attention to the three dimensions of narrative inquiry. Doing so is necessary for us to produce insights that are truly reflective of the complexity of our participants' experiences.

It is also important that our final research texts do not communicate a sense of finality, but rather incite readers to retell, rethink, and go on to relate with others and inquire into others' lived experiences in ways that are ethical and collaborative.

Relational Response Communities

Having the support of a response community is encouraged at all stages of the research process. Sharing about our inquiry with people whose opinion we value and trust can help us recognize ways in which our own background shapes our research puzzle and influences our interpretations of our participants' experiences. Having a diverse response community (e.g., interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, intergenerational) will enrich our understanding in by, for example, informing us of methodological and theoretical developments relevant to our inquiry, instructing us about how to form ethical and responsive relationships with our participants, and gaining more perspective about our own journey in the context of our inquiry. My response community consisted of my thesis supervisor and other graduate students in her lab. While designing and exploring my research puzzle, I had ongoing conversations with my supervisor and shared with fellow lab members about the development of my study. These discussions helped to elevate the methodological coherence, quality of design, and trustworthiness of this inquiry. Another benefit of these discussions was my becoming aware of personal biases that I held about participants and their experiences. These biases may have otherwise inadvertently hindered my capacity to remain open and curious during the interviews, or may have led me to over-interpret participants' experiences in ways that were not grounded in their stories.

Justifications—Personal, Practical, and Social

As it is the case with research endeavours more broadly, narrative inquirers need to answer the questions "so what?" and "who cares?" in regard to their research. To be able to

personally justify our work, we must reflect on our narrative beginnings and present to the readers an autobiographical inquiry in relation to the phenomenon of interest in our study. This autobiographical account should make clear who we are in relation to our topic, our participants, and the relevant literature. The practical justification for our inquiry should address the question of "so what?" and like our personal justification, it should be considered from the time we are designing our study. In developing my autobiographical inquiry, I made sure to attend to the criteria outlined above to make clear my personal justification. Along with my interactions with my response community, reflecting about my narrative beginnings also deepened my analysis and helped to make clear the practical and social justifications of this inquiry.

Considering the relevance of our work in regard to issues of social justice and equity gives practical significance to our work. While composing our final research texts, we must return to and discuss the practical implications of the insights we gained from our inquiry. During the process of creating my research question, I asked myself how I could develop a research study that would move us beyond our current understanding of the experiences of skilled immigrants. I aimed for this study to be one that highlighted the need for more equitable treatment of skilled immigrants and how all parts of our society can have a positive impact on their successful integration.

The third form of justification to consider is theoretical significance, which is constituted of theoretical justification and social action and policy justifications. Theoretical justification refers to the methodological contributions of our study for the development of narrative inquiry as a methodology, e.g., "making visible epistemological and ontological understandings, the development of methods, as well as explorations of the uses of narrative inquiry in fields outside of education, where narrative inquiry has been predominantly utilized" (Clandinin & Caine, p.

175). Policy justifications refer to how the insights gained from our inquiry that may contribute to public discourse and policy development. Moreover, referring to policy development, the results of our study may help us better understand the "complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies often inherent in policies and their implementation" (Clandinin & Caine, p. 175). My exploration of circulating narratives present in participants' accounts and their relevance to their understanding of their careers and professional selves, yielded implications with regard to social action and resource and policy developments.

Attentive to Audience

Narrative inquirers find themselves having to balance issues of voice and audience. In this process, we should strive to represent the multiplicity of voices present in our participants' accounts. More specifically, while developing our research texts, we must prioritize our participants—who should remain the most influential voice—while also thinking about possible audiences and how to develop research texts to which they would be most receptive. In the case of this study, documenting the multiple voices present in participants' accounts involved fleshing out themes based on commonalities across their stories, while also discussing those of them who in any give instance did not 'fit a pattern' found in others' accounts. In asking participants about their experience of participating in this inquiry, I sought to capture possible shifts in their perspective of their experiences as a result of having shared their story with me. The answers that I received from some of participants were indicative of their participation having been a growth promoting experience through which they came to view their experiences in a more positive light.

Commitment to Understanding Lives in Motion

As narrative inquirers we recognize that our work takes place in the midst of our lives and those of our participants, both which are in motion and unfolding across time. Because of this, we make a commitment to attend, both in our interim and final research texts, to the temporality of experience. In order to do so, we must strive to build relationships, be open to stories unfolding in unexpected ways, and allow for the element of surprise. We must also recognize that there is no one story nor is there a final story because people are always in the process of becoming. The notion of temporality was an important consideration in how I structured and worded my interim and final texts. This notion also guided my revisiting of the interview transcripts and restoried narratives iteratively to allow for new themes to emerge.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to explore the possible role that discourses or circulating narratives about skilled immigrants play in participants' understanding of their professional lives in Canada, I supplemented my analysis with elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) refers to a group of approaches that study the role of discourse in society. As a research methodology, CDA focuses on "relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). Being a critical approach to the study of discourse, CDA goes beyond describing discourses to demonstrate "how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 12). Critical discourse analytic approaches vary in their conceptualizations of discourse and in methods of analysis, but share five common features: everyday discursive

practices are thought to contribute to the reproduction and development of social and cultural processes and structures; discourse is considered to shape and is shaped by social structures; language should be analyzed in the context of social interaction; discursive practices create and reproduce unequal relations of power between social groups; critical research is not neutral but is aimed at social change for the benefit of those who are oppressed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011).

The basic assumptions of CDA are founded on a critical realist epistemology in which language is understood to construct social realities. These constructions, however, are limited by possibilities and limitations inherent in the material world, part of which is non-discursive in nature. Non-discursive constraining elements include the physical nature of objects, physical spaces, and institutional structures (Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007). Hence, for critical realists, the material world is not reducible to discourse, nor its meaning only understood discursively; rather, the nature of the material world is not dependent of, but in relation with discourse. In the same way, social practices are thought to influence though not determine the discourses that arise within the material world. Therefore, critical realism combines constructionist and realist stances to argue that meaning is made in interaction though non-discursive elements also impact it (Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007).

In practice, CDA brings together text analysis and social theory to examine force, power, and relations in the context of non-discursive economic, cultural, and political processes. The process of analysis involves a back and forth between the micro analysis of texts through the use of tools of linguistic, semiotic, and literary analysis and macro analysis of social formations, institutions, and power relations constructed in these texts (Dieronitou, 2014). I drew on elements of CDA and its features to extend the nature of my analysis beyond the retelling of participants' stories and attended critically to the discourses they drew on in their reflections

about Canada and their experiences as skilled immigrants. My goal was to examine how participants drew on discourses that are relevant to skilled immigrants, such as that of Canadian experience (Ku et al., 2019) or the ideal immigrant (Root et al., 2014), to make sense of their professional experiences (Sims-Schouten & Willig, 2007; van Dijk, 1995). In doing so, I also intended to highlight the possible oppressive impact of these discourses on them as professionals. Narrative inquiry indeed explores broader social and cultural narratives that shape and are shaped by the lives of individuals, and three-dimensional narrative inquiry space reflects the social dimension of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explained, "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals' experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (p. 42). However, this exploration is carried out focusing on the perspective of participants and their ascribed meaning to their experiences. As Caine et al. (2018) argued, the starting point for narrative inquirers is their lives and the lives of their participants, and their focus throughout should be on their participants' stories and on understanding their lives in relation and unfolding over time and space. However, from a narrative inquiry standpoint, to share in participants' experiences for the purpose of creating knowledge relationally would require me to have lived alongside them extensively in their natural setting, which was beyond the scope of this study. Borrowing from CDA for part of my analysis allowed me to shift some of the interpretive authority to explore the influence of discourses about skilled immigrants, while still being grounded in participants' experiences.

There is a tension in drawing from CDA to examine participants' final reflections because of the differing objectives of these two approaches. CDA, on the one hand, examines

social problems; by studying particular discourses within specific social and linguistic contexts, critical discourse analysts make clear the issue to be examined for the purpose of addressing promoting social change (Souto-Manning, 2014). Narrative inquiry, on the other hand, warns against denying people their voice by focusing on specific social issues and associating individuals with social problems at the outset. Beginning a inquiry in such a way, Caine et al. (2018) argue, risks writing people's stories for them to fit preestablished problems in a way that makes their individual experiences invisible and misses the very issues that needs to be addressed.

Despite its suitability to investigate questions in social sciences (Forchtner, 2017), there are common criticisms of how some researchers make use of CDA. These include ideologies being ascribed onto data rather than revealed through it, an unequal balance between social theory and method, and analyses lacking in textual or linguistic analysis (Rogers, 2013). Souto-Manning (2014) also points to CDA being employed without a strong connection to linguistic concepts and features that lead to the assumption that what is critical to researchers is also critical to participants. In addition, an overemphasis on how systems colonize everyday lives through institutional discourses fails to consider how individuals influence systems through their appropriation of discourses in their narratives. In responses to these potential issues, Souto-Manning argues for the combination of narrative analysis and CDA. According to this author, stories or narratives are a means through which it is possible to investigate the relationship of everyday talk and the construction of social and cultural norms and institutional discourses. Furthermore, combining narrative analysis and CDA can lead to a more specific understanding of the power and effects of institutional discourses in society by examining how they are used in conversational narratives. Using predominantly a critical discourse analytic approach, Souto-

Manning demonstrated the merging of these two approaches to explore the influence of institutional discourses on the narrative of a Brazilian woman who was forced to drop out of school as a child, as well as in the stories of a small group of preschool teachers in the US, who questioned the longstanding rules passed down to them by administrators in their school (2014, 2006).

Upon concluding my analysis of participants' stories with regards to their shifting identities, I turned to the last section of the interviews in which I asked them to reflect about their lasting views about Canada and their professional experiences. It was this portion of the data that I examined using elements of CDA to hypothesize about how participants' choices of language positioned those involved, constructed the relation between skilled immigrants and Canadian society, and reinforced or challenged established orders of power, dominance, and inequality. Subjecting the rest of the data as well to this form of analysis would have exceeded the scope of this project. In order to carry out this analysis, I interrogated participants' concluding comments using the following questions: "How is the text positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning?" (Janks, 1997, p. 329). Although CDA views social practices as being tied to specific historical contexts (Janks, 1997), my analysis does not reflect the relevant historical context that made available the discourses that shaped participants' responses, nor the contextual factors or social conditions that influenced their choice of language (Janks, 1997).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Professional Profile of participants

Wei (mid-thirties)

Wei immigrated from East Asia in April 2019. He obtained a PhD in a social science in his home country and worked as a university faculty member for two years before he immigrated. At the time of this study, Wei had very recently become employed part-time as a tutor. Wei's professional aspirations in Canada did not involve becoming a faculty member because of how competitive reportedly the market is in academia. Still, he foresaw different career possibilities for himself, one being working as an economist for the government helping to develop social policy, or a consultant for industrial organizations in highly competitive markets. At the time of this study, Wei had been job searching for a couple of months but had only had one interview for a job related to his field of expertise which was not successful.

Santiago (early forties)

Santiago immigrated from South America in July 2015. He immigrated on his own but traveled back to his home country in April 2018 to become married and sponsor his partner. In his home country, Santiago attained a post graduate diploma and was employed as a civil engineer heading a team of twelve professionals that included architects, urban planners, sociologists, and other civil engineers. He amassed twelve years of international work experience as an engineer before he immigrated. Santiago believed that he would find employment in Canada with relative ease because there was a supposed talent shortage of professionals with his knowledge and skillset. His job search lasted seven months, and at the time of our interview Santiago had been employed as a civil engineer for over two years, albeit in a position that ranks much lower than the one he last held in his home country.

Mikhail (late thirties)

Mikhail arrived in Canada from Eastern Europe in July 2016 with his wife and daughter. In his home country, he accomplished a master's degree and worked in the field of supply chain management for 13 years. His last job before immigrating was as a supervisor of eight supply chain staff and the liaison for the company's multiple international projects. Mikhail's hope for his career in Canada was to become employed at a company where he could contribute his professional experience and grow as a professional for many years as he had done with his last employer. At the time of our interview, Mikhail had secured his third temporary job in Canada as an analyst, a position noticeably lower in the hierarchy of his field compared to his former job in his home country. Before securing his first job in Canada Mikhail was in the market for nine months looking for employment in his field.

Salma (mid-forties)

Salma was a single mother who immigrated from Africa with her teenage son in June 2015. She arrived in Canada with a bachelor's degree in translation and linguistics and 15 years of experience in the fields of teaching, translation, and interpretation. Her last job in her home country was as principal of a pre-school of 50 staff. Her professional goal in Canada was to return to the field of translation and interpretation. Having seen both of her fields in the list of needed professionals in Canada before she immigrated led her to feel confident that she would find multiple opportunities to work in these areas. Salma managed to secure employment in the not-for-profit settlement sector eight months after her landing, but was laid off after two years due to funding cuts. At the time of our interview, she had been looking for employment as a translator, an interpreter, and in the immigrant-service sector for several months, though unsuccessfully.

Ayaan (mid-thirties)

Ayaan and his wife immigrated from the Middle East in February 2015. In his home country, he successfully completed a bachelor's degree in applied accounting and accrued 11 years of experience, the last three of which he worked as the head of the finance department of a growing pharmaceutical company of close to 100 employees. Based on the fact that he had been offered permanent residence as a skilled immigrant, Ayaan thought that there would be a strong demand for his skillset in the Canadian market. However, he learned from his friend who landed before him that, having no Canadian experience would disadvantage him in the eyes of employers. As a result, Ayaan expected to start his career in Canada in an intermediate role in his field. Ayaan searched for employment for nine months without success before he found an entry-level job in his field. At the time of our interview, Ayaan had been working for one year for the provincial government and had recently been promoted to a managerial role. This role, however, carried with it much less responsibility than the one he last held in his home country.

Maxim (mid-thirties)

Maxim arrived in Canada in June 2014 with his expecting wife and two young children. Before immigrating, Maxim had attained a master's degree in business management and had worked for nine years in the field of marketing and media. He established and became the CEO of a successful online news media company that grew to employ 16 people and became the largest of its kind in his home country in North Asia. His professional success in his home country led him to expect that he would find employment in his field in Canada with relative ease. Maxim spent eight months searching for a job before he became employed in a junior role in his field. At the time of our interview, he had recently started working in a middle

management position which was the most senior role he had held in Canada, though of much less responsibility compared to his last job before he immigrated.

Jing (mid-thirties)

Jing and her husband landed in Canada in April 2016. Before immigrating, she completed a master's degree in linguistics and worked for two years in the areas of applied linguistics and translation in her home country in East Asia. Jing was younger than most of the other participants and she had much less professional experience. Unlike other participants, her professional aspirations were vague, though her familiarity with the barrier of Canadian experience had led her to speculate that she would encounter great difficulty finding employment in her field. She had also learned that the fields that she was aiming to work in, namely translation and interpretation, mostly involved freelancing work. Jing's professional experience in Canada up until the time of our interview mainly involved employment in the immigrant-service sector, in which she had worked for two and a half years in roles marginally related to her professional background. Jing had less to say about her professional experience in her home country and her struggles to find employment in Canada compared to other participants. However, she shared in detail about experiencing and witnessing instances of racism, and how her cultural background and experiences as a woman impacted her educational and career prospects.

Professional Identities in their Home Countries

Given the attention of narrative inquiry to chronology and my study's focus on participants' professional identities, the first portion of my analysis will concentrate on their stories about their professional lives before immigrating to Canada. The following sections will

paint a picture of participants' careers in their home countries, including their accomplishments and the meaning they derived from their professions.

Defined Professional Roles

At the start of the interviews, participants and I discussed about their careers in their home countries including their job responsibilities, the degree of independence of their position, and what a typical day looked like for them at work. Their descriptions of their jobs allowed us to create a picture of their professional lives before their immigration, and to bring forth their personal stories of themselves as professionals in their home countries. The following is a quote of Mikhail describing what a typical day was like for him at work, "Oh, it was pretty busy it was meetings with the customers to understand their needs to understand what are their problems…" Ayaan, who in his last job headed the financial department of a fast-growing health-related company for three years, shared about the many responsibilities he had to juggle:

> I was doing full cycle accounting…managing their cash, managing their treasuries…so I was basically managing the company's financial processes, cost cutting, budgeting, you know financial analysis, board meetings with the CEOs explaining them how we should cut down cost, more sales, you know? So I was basically managing the finances of the whole company.

In his job as CEO of the largest online news media company in his home country, Maxim responsibilities were many and they cut across different areas, including negotiating with clients, working with editorial staff, monitoring readership indicators and the company's finances——as he put it, "you know, running the business."

Overall, participants described having busy and enriching professional lives with jobs that had complex yet well-defined responsibilities. Their stories were those of professionals who understood their contributions to their teams, employers or business, and their societies.

Leaders Who Wielded Influence

While reading this initial portion of all the restories together I was struck by the fact that most of participants, regardless of their countries of origin and varied years of work experience, held positions of leadership in their jobs. Being entrusted with positions of leadership spoke to the success that each of them had attained in their own field before coming to Canada. For example, Salma, whose professional experience included interpretation and translation but also education and management, shared about having managed a preschool of fifty staff and the many responsibilities associated with this role, such as hiring teachers and support staff, developing the educational curriculum, meeting with parents, and helping to keep her staff "comfortable" and "happy" to encourage them to do their best. Santiago described his position of leadership and the power he had as an influencer among his colleagues, "I was the head of a team…of 12 people…civil engineers, architects, urban planners, sociologists…our task was to propose a new way of land use planning for the entire city for the next for the next twelve years…" Mikhail described his leadership role in which collaborated with colleagues from other countries, "I managed my team…[and was] also working on global projects with my Italian colleagues, Romanian colleagues, Slovak colleague, Spanish colleagues… I supervised a team of eight staff."

From their descriptions of their work it also became evident that most of participants wielded influence as professionals in some way, whether it was that their opinion was sought out and trusted by their colleagues, or that their work made a palpable difference in their societies.

Professional relations with colleagues, clients, or students (in the case of participant one who was a university lecturer in his home country) were present in all of their accounts and thus became an important point in my reflections about their professional identities and the meaning of their careers in their lives. The relevance of these relations to how participants spoke of themselves as professionals was indicative of how their professional self-stories were developed in relation to others, and how the success of these relations contributed to the sense of meaning they drew from their careers making them an important part of their lives.

Participants' descriptions of their jobs and their professional accomplishments were not only detailed but some of them were also filled with emotion. The following is a quote of Santiago sharing about a very large and successful fourteen-year project that he took part in the goal of which was to overhaul the transportation system in his home city to favour cyclists and pedestrians, "…we proposed three hundred kilometers of…bike paths…they build 80 of these three hundred…[which is the goal] for 2030… also…we proposed electric bikes for the hills and also bike elevators…I am so proud of that". Mikhail also spoke about a memorable professional accomplishment in his home country, "I started in a company which was creating manufacturing power equipment: turbine generators, transformers, and sending them all over the world…during that work…I'm so proud that I helped to construct two power plants in [foreign country]." In the case of Salma, speaking about her professional experience of two years as the principal of pre-school before she left for Canada she said, "I liked [that job] very much."

These emotions that participants ascribed to their past jobs or highlights in their careers, some of which were enjoyment and a strong sense of pride, were telling of the importance of their careers to their overall sense of fulfillment in their lives.

Stories Characterized by Continuity and Growth

The professional self-stories of participants were ubiquitously characterized by continuity and growth across time. Before immigrating to Canada, participants amassed years of professional experience (in some cases over ten years), in which they progressed in their careers moving up the professional ladder in their respective fields. In some cases, participants ascended to roles of greater responsibility with the same employer and in others they changed employers into more senior positions.

Mikhail described the successful progression of his career over eight years with the second of two employers, "I started as a [entry-level position] and gradually progressed through my career. I went to [foreign country] to study processes and bring them back to implement best practices…that's how I made my way made my way to [senior-level position]." Salma also described the progression of her career in the fields of translation and interpretation and educational management across 15 years, "I started to teach English... then…I started to work as a translator in a publishing and distribution house…[translating] into English mainly IT books…then I worked with a facility that produces gelatin…[doing] chemical translation …[then] I accepted another job at a preschool." Ayaan took great pride in the progression of his career from audit junior at one of the Big Four accounting firms to becoming the head of finance at a growing pharmaceutical company.

Their continuous growth and development as professionals were signature characteristics of their professional self-stories that I believe contributed to them being confident in their ability to succeed as professionals in Canada.

Expectations about their Professional Success in Canada

When asked about their decision to immigrate, participants shared about wanting a better life for themselves and their spouses or families. Although they expected to face challenges securing professional employment, they understood there to be a talent shortage and thus a strong demand in Canada for professionals with their skillset. Santiago exemplifies the expectations of professional success that most of participants had:

> I didn't know until I was here because in your immigration process you are a skilled worker in a short list of professions that Canada needs, so you think, oh Canada needs me so I'm gonna find a job right away once I arrive…I qualify because there is a shortage of my kind of people in Canada so there's a job waiting for me. But, once you land here you realize that is not true… I have friends they came after me and um some they came before me and it's mostly the same experience.

Similarly, because interpreters and translators were on the list of needed professions, Salma thought she would be offered a position by multiple employers "and I will choose between them." The statements above show how the immigration process shaped their expectations of success. Some participants considered immigrating to other countries like Australia and New Zealand, but ultimately settled on Canada citing reasons such as an easier and quicker immigration application process, less professional accreditation requirements, and more acceptance of racial diversity. Those who had friends or family already living in Canada knew of the struggles of many skilled immigrants in the labour market due the requirement of many employers of Canadian experience. However, these participants embraced the idea of starting in Canada in a lower position relative to their professional standing in their home countries in order to gain the coveted Canadian experience that would allow them to climb up the professional

ladder over time. Still, none of participants foresaw the challenges they would face in their job search and that it would take them approximately nine months to secure an entry-level job in their field. Their experiences in the labour market thus differed widely from their expectations.

Catalysts for a Diluted Sense of Self

The stories that participants shared of their professional lives before immigrating to Canada painted a picture of individuals with prosperous careers. In the first portion of the interviews, participants spoke with passion and confidence about their work history and professional accomplishments. However, as our conversation progressed it revealed stories of struggle in which participants' narratives of their professional selves shifted from a sense of fulfillment to being characterized by feelings of desperation, confusion, and uncertainty, about their professional lives and prospects for their careers in Canada. This shift in their narratives from the time they were in their home countries to their time in Canada constituted what I coined a diluted sense of self. The following are factors or catalysts present in participants' narratives that I believe contributed to a shift in their sense of themselves as professionals after struggling to establish their careers.

Feeling Left in the Dark: Repeated Failure in their Job Search

Soon after arriving in Canada, participants began a difficult journey to find a job in their field. For those of them who were successful, this journey lasted approximately eight months to a year. Others continue to struggle to break into the Canadian labour market for the first time or to find a job with a contract that is more than just a couple of months long. Participants received little to no responses to their online job applications, had very few unsuccessful interviews, and were told by employers that they were either overqualified or that they lacked Canadian experience. Even participants who, before immigrating, had learned about the downturn in the

economy in Alberta in 2015, expected to be successful in their job search sooner and with much less difficulty than what they shared in retrospect was their experience.

Most of participants applied to tens sometimes hundreds of jobs online over several months but did not hear back about most of their applications. As Ayaan shared, "About 300 resumes. I still have that folder with me… and all those resumes were the ones which I tweaked and changed according to the position, not applying from the same resume and just shooting it out no." Three participants (Mikhail, Ayaan, and Maxim) who secured job interviews after months of applying to jobs online described feeling 'left in the dark' when they were interviewed but did not receive feedback about their interviews. For example, Ayaan said, "There was no definitive feedback from anywhere they said, 'You know you have good experience, you have the designation and everything, but we found a better candidate.' That's it. Nothing else." Maxim delved deeper and spoke about what it felt like to him to be "ignored" by employers:

> I had this HR person call me from a large company and I was like, oh my gosh she called me she called me. We had a 10-15 minute interview and I was, oh my God that's a good sign and then she said, call me in a week or if you don't hear [from me] feel free to call back or just shoot me an email. I called back in a week no response, I left a voicemail, I sent an email, nothing. In three or four months I received an automated email. So, that really hurt because she called me [and] we had a chat so… even though um they didn't choose me which is fine they don't even respond to people who they said are fine to call them back. So [being] ignor[ed] still hurts!

Based on his experiences being interviewed, Maxim felt unimportant and hurt to the extent that the disappointment from these experiences still lingers with him to this day. Overall, participants thought of being interviewed as the establishment of a professional yet also personal connection

with interviewers that warranted the courtesy of receiving a response to their queries and being given feedback about the outcome of their interviews. Given that the success rate of their job applications was so small and their need for employment so dire, they considered very important to learn from employers about how they could make themselves more competitive. The outcome of their efforts left them feeling confused and disappointed when they were met with a requirement of Canadian experience put forth unexpectedly by some employers. As Ayaan stated:

> Recruiters used to tell me, you don't have Canadian experience. Now, the definition of Canadian experience, what is it? One [recruiter] used to tell me, you're in Canada you [have to] intermingle with people, you [have to] learn about the culture and everything. I said, okay, I've studied in an American school [and] I have no problem dealing with North American people, right? So, I don't have a language problem [and] I have a good experience, right? Is that Canadian experience? No…the next person would tell me, no, Canadian experience is work experience. I said, okay, I've been working at a [firm] that is a multinational Big Four firm, right? Accounting is the same all over the world it's nothing different... So, what are you looking for?…or is it an excuse to not hire me…?

Jing reiterated the importance of having Canadian experience in the eyes of employers, but her understanding of Canadian experience was different from that offered by Ayaan, who also was unsure of it, "Well they always say that you have to have some kind of Canadian experience to even be considered, right?... [Canadian experience] means volunteering, working, anything that you're involved in here in Canada that's considered professional." Not only was the meaning of Canadian experience unclear to participants (i.e., "I think", "what is the definition?"), but also those who understood it to mean work experience in Canada found it to be an unreasonable

requirement given that they had only recently landed. As Salma and Ayaan put it, “I started to hear, ‘Do you have Canadian experience?’ What? Sorry? I just landed, how can I?”, “I recently came to Canada that’s why I’m looking for work. I don’t have Canadian experience. But, how should I explain it to them, right?”

Participants further worried about how they would gain Canadian experience if no employer was willing to hire them. In turn, some of them began to target junior positions that they had carried out earlier in their careers to try to appear more competitive in the eyes of employers, as opposed to deficient. In doing so, these participants made clear their willingness to regress in their careers to be able to ‘get a foot in the door’, as it was the case with Mikhail, “I had two choices: to try to understand and most likely get kicked off the ladder, or just climb the ladder. And, I decided to climb the ladder.” Ayaan concurred about regressing in his career, “I was not expecting to be in the same position as I was back home heading a department, but aiming for an intermediate position. I knew that moving to a different country everyone asks, ‘You don’t have experience?” Maxim went as far as to say that the favouring of local education by employers devalued foreign professional experience to the point that it rendered it practically useless, “What you did at home… …is mostly discarded…you have to start [at the level of] a university graduate or even lower because university graduates, if they graduated from University of Calgary, employers know that university is good.”

The strategy of targeting lower positions in their job search did not yield positive results as participants were told by employers that they were “overqualified” for such positions. As Mikhail was told, “‘Okay, there’s a junior position and you are overqualified for that, and there is another next level position but you have no Canadian experience’… So, what can I do if you don’t accept me for either?” Participants who had such experiences in their job search were left

wondering if there even was a place for them at all as professionals, a sentiment made clear by Ayaan:

> Now, if I don't have Canadian experience where should I go? I have to start from somewhere…Now, when I used to apply to entry level positions the excuses were, you're overqualified. When I applied to intermediate level positions, overqualified. Managerial positions, you don't have Canadian experience. So, at every step I heard an excuse.

Participants wondered about the reason for their repeated failure while searching for a job, including Mikhail and Maxim respectively, "I think people need to feel like they can trust me, but how do they do that? How do they know me?", "I am a newcomer and I know that there is a lack of trust I completely understand, but even I tailored my resumes, had phone calls with people. It was all going into a vortex." There were those who speculated about the possible reason(s) behind their lack of success and attributed it to a lack of "trust" that stemmed from them not being from Canada. Santiago argued that this trust cannot be earned it can only be given, "Here it is quite different. Here society doesn't trust you, so you need to make yourself trustworthy before; you need someone, a Canadian working in the Canadian environment to serve as a bridge…otherwise nothing happens." Unlike Santiago and Mikhail who implied that the burden rests on them to make themselves appear trustworthy in the eyes of employers, Maxim argued that this burden rather rests with the Canadian government:

> There is a lot that needs to be done by the federal government to promote Express Entry... so that employers know that this program exists…because we have been vetted by the government for one and a half years; they did criminal checks, they did medical checks, they even did this assessment of our diplomas, they did assessments of our work

> experience... they know that we are good we are highly educated people…but employers don't!

For Maxim, the extensive vetting process of the Canadian government is an indicator of the readiness of skilled immigrants for the Canadian labour market and should instill trust in employers about hiring skilled immigrants. The issue of a perceived lack of trust continued for some participants into their employment. Santiago and Mikhail went on to secure professional employment in their fields, albeit in positions comparatively lower to those they last held in their home countries. Their relations with their colleagues were marred by the same aforementioned lack of trust which resulted in their professional opinion being dismissed or given little consideration. Mikhail stated, "…one of the managers told me, we welcome that you have experience we want to hear from you. I started sharing my experience and I felt that everyone turned around…I just had to do my job and that's it." Santiago contrasted his experience with the success that he experienced when he proposed even more innovative and daring ideas in his home country, "The same stuff happens inside a company; they need to know your work in order to trust you… in [my home city] I proposed… and [there was no opposition]…I was able to deliver."

Having their professional opinion not be taken into account by their colleagues was opposite to what participants had described earlier in our conversations about their relationship with their colleagues in their home countries. In Canada, participants were no longer leaders, nor did they wield influence in their workplaces. Although they alluded to different possible reasons for the perceived lack of trust on the part of employers and their colleagues, none of them could ascertain the source of the perceived lack of trust with certainty.

Falling Off the Ladder: Lower Perceived Social Status

During the latter portion of the interviews participants and I talked about how they saw themselves in relation to others, both in Canada and in their home countries, in terms of financial wealth, educational attainment, and present employment. Discussing their perceived social status across the two societies offered me insight into how their view of themselves in relation to others had changed as a result of their struggles in Canada and the impact this change had on them.

Participants unequivocally endorsed that their social status had dropped compared to what it was in their home countries. However, looking back at their responses to the questions of how they felt about this change and how they managed it within themselves, I was surprised to see that their responses largely consisted justifications for being in a lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder in Canada compared to their home countries. More specifically, participants downplayed the impact that the drop in their perceived social status had on their lives by highlighting the comparative advantages of living Canada or expressing gratitude for being in Canada. The conforming essence of their responses was congruent with their willingness to regress in their careers and the idea that moving to a new country naturally entails giving up the professional standing that they had attained before they immigrated. My aforementioned responses were not in agreement with the feelings of dissatisfaction or disappointment that others shared. For example, Wei drew a comparison between himself and others whom he saw as being at the bottom of the ladder, “At least I am not homeless… I feel fortunate to still have my basic needs met”. He further mentioned that compared to his home country, in Canada it matters less which socioeconomic tier one belongs to in terms of the value one is assigned by others in society. However, when queried about how his struggles had

affected his view of himself in relation to others, he took a pause before opening up about feeling shame:

> …one thing I can say is I am more reluctant to talk about my career to other people… there's not much to say…(pause) I guess I was kind of ashamed of not finding a job even though I tried to say [to you] [that me being rejected by employers] is just random. It makes it harder to introduce myself to people... I don't want people to ask me, what do you do now?

Wei's feeling of shame was such that he tried to avoid speaking about it with me. This feeling was, however, exacerbated by the disappointment he felt thinking about his parents and their increasing concern for his career. In addition, Wei feared being faced with his unemployment in conversation with others to the extent that it affected his wanting to be around other people.

Salma, who arguably was struggling the most at the time of this study due to unemployment and financial strain, also downplayed the impact of her difficulties and highlighted the benefits of immigrating for her son:

> …(sigh) I feel like uh money is not everything in life… the lifestyle here in Canada is way more relaxed... life in [home city] was very stressful. So, I try to look at the positive side of being here in Canada. True I'm jobless now, true I'm almost broke (chuckle). But I still think of my son back in [home country] he would be like all other kids just a gear in a big machine. Here at least his psychological condition is better.

Mikhail also spoke about his perceived place on the socioeconomic ladder in Canada by contrasting it with the lowest point on the ladder:

> I can't say I'm at the very bottom, I'm desperate. No, I'm not. I like it here…my child loves it my wife loves it and I love it as well. I love sunshine, I love the mountains. I can bring parents here for a visit they'll love it too.

Despite his precarious and unsatisfactory employment situation, Mikhail considered some of the benefits of living in Canada for him and his family as an important contributor to his perceived place on the ladder.

The well-being of participants' families was paramount to their perception of their own well-being in relation to others in society. Even though at other times during the interviews participants openly discussed their challenges, when asked to reflect on their social standing in relation others they concluded that things could be worse.

Feeling Othered: Experiences of Injustice

Several of participants shared about instances when they experienced or witnessed unjust treatment. Some instances took place in the context of job searching while others happened while participants were employed.

Jing shared about instances of what she explicitly called racism in which her and her husband were, in her view, rendered invisible because of their race. For example, in one instance, while visiting a brewery they stood in front of the bar waiting to be served, but the bartender walked past them "a few times like [they] were invisible" and they happened to be "the only non-White people" present. In another instance, her and her husband sat at a bar for "twenty minutes" waiting for someone to take their order, yet nobody came. In spite of similar situations happening "multiple times" in which they were treated "wrong", Jing always tried to avoid feeling "offended" even though she felt that there was a difference in how her and her husband were treated when their race made them different to others around them. There was another

incident that Jing shared with me in which the victims were not her and her husband, but rather a group of "immigrant girls" that she had been tasked with supervising as part of her role as a volunteer at an immigrant serving agency. According to Jing, her and this group of girls were walking on the street in the downtown area when a man rode past them on a bicycle and yelled at the group girls, "speak English!" Despite her strong characterization of these incidents as racist and the alleged number of instances from which she drew these examples, Jing went on to normalize these experiences saying, "most people are not like that…no matter where you go someone is racist."

Salma shared about her experiences of unjust treatment in her interactions with people on the street and in the context of her job search:

> Wearing a hijab wasn't very comfortable…when I asked people would get scared when I stopped them in the street… [and would say to me] Ah! or 'thank you… Some of them looked shocked…I spoke good English. I still have an accent or a way of pronouncing things...I also faced people whom I stopped [to ask for directions saying to me], sorry sorry, [which gave] me the impression that I can't speak English or I have uh a very bad accent…it is not the case! So, why do you make me feel not welcomed or that I can't speak your language? It's embarrassing and annoying!

According to Salma, these instances were made worse by the fact that she could not find other women on the street who also wore a hijab to ask them for help, which made it hard for her to navigate the city for the purpose of her job search. In regard to how employers viewed her, Salma wondered if her appearance was hindering her likeability as a candidate:

> …at some point you feel like, okay, I will not find anything in this country (chuckle) I'm not accepted with my looks. Ah! Sometimes I would think, shall I take off the veil? Well,

> I don't like to take off the veil regardless of anybody (chuckle), and sometimes I would feel like, shall I go in the street and tell them I wasn't obliged to nobody forced me to wear it I am freely wearing this!…Because I got laid off sometimes I feel like, shall I remove my picture form LinkedIn because I am veiled! And [employers] might judge me even before uh before interviewing me!

Salma went on to become employed at an immigrant-serving agency where she reportedly had a positive and enriching experience in large part because it was a diverse environment where she got to work with clients and colleagues from "different backgrounds". Despite being laid off after three years of employment at this agency due to funding cuts, Salma felt confident that she would be able to find employment again without having to resort to removing her hijab.

After becoming employed following his internship, Santiago became concerned that his English proficiency would prevent him from being able to carry the responsibilities of his job:

> …I realized that I wasn't that good to be in a job environment here… at the beginning I thought maybe it was bullying, but they were right my co-workers. I sent reports to my boss and one of my co-workers jumped [up] and said, oh why did you do this? You are wasting my bosses time because this report is really bad.

Dismissing his initial perception that perhaps he was being bullied, Santiago instead justified the harsh manner in which his co-workers spoke of him and his work agreeing that his reports were poorly written. Fearing that he might lose his job Santiago sought to speak with his supervisor. His supervisor, however, assured him that his report-writing skills would improve over time and confided in him that the reports of his Canadian-born colleagues were at times written worse than his. Feeling confident and motivated by his supervisor's feedback, Santiago decided to hire a private tutor to help him further develop his English proficiency, which resulted in him being

told “great job!” about his reports. The struggles of Santiago in his job nevertheless did not end there. He would go on to experience not only the dismissal of his professional opinion by his colleagues, but also unfair compensation for years by this same employer.

After the completion of his internship, Santiago was offered a full-time job with an hourly rate lower than that of a “student in training” according to salary data published by APEGA (i.e., Association for Professional Engineers and Geologists of Alberta). According to his boss at the time, it was only at this low rate of pay that he could afford hiring him. Having experienced such scarcity of opportunities during his job search, he readily accepted the offer—"Of course, I’ll take it!” Santiago continued to be “well well underpaid” even after he became professionally accredited by APEGA towards the end of his second year of employment. For Santiago, receiving his professional accreditation meant that he was surely entitled to better compensation, which is why he decided to present the aforementioned salary data to his new supervisor (who had replaced the person that had hired him) and ask for a raise. Six months passed before he received a $1 that left him feeling very dissatisfied, especially given how severely and for how long he had been underpaid. It was then that Santiago decided to take matters into his own hands by emailing his supervisor’s superior directly to inquire about his raise. To his great surprise, his supervisor’s superior responded that he had no knowledge of the request. Santiago was left feeling like he had been lied to by his supervisor who had said to him that “there was nothing he could do” yet did not even communicate the request to his superior. Ultimately, Santiago’s bold move paid off because two months later he received a large raise. In spite of this, he reportedly was still underpaid in relation to the market although to a much lesser extent. All in all, Santiago said getting a raise took him three years and he had to “fight like crazy” for it.

Ayaan spoke about instances in which he felt "othered" as an immigrant by those from whom he sought help during his job search. Soon after landing, Ayaan met with specialized recruiters who work with employers to fill vacancies for professionals with a background in accountancy. Upon meeting with him, these recruiters told Ayaan that he was, "the right immigrant type of candidate that a company should hire…[he had] all the professional experience and um you know communication skills and everything that [employers] need." Around the same time, he was recommended a mentorship program that he applied to and was accepted. This mentorship program was created to connect skilled immigrants with established professionals in their respective fields for the purpose of assisting with their job search. Ayaan's experience of the program was less than memorable:

> …the [mentorship] program was basically very offensive in the way that they were treating immigrants as if they didn't know anything...they used to call us you people…So I thought, what do you mean you people?…The staff told us, if you need any references we're happy to provide those. So, the time came when there was a job that I needed to apply to and I called them…and they said straight to my face, we don't provide references. So,…I really wasted my time, I wasted four months…I gained nothing out of it.

The treatment that he reportedly experienced at the hands of the staff of this mentorship program seemed othering and belittling to Ayaan, who considered the education and work experience possessed by skilled immigrants to be of value and of no less worth than that of professionals in Canada. Ayaan also spoke about having been exposed to other negative perceptions concerning immigrants, particularly in relation to having an accent. Later in our conversation, Ayaan spoke about his friend who was as qualified as him and had a good command of English, but reportedly

struggled to find a job in part because of his accent, “so the accent really matters…they see you in a different way if you have an accent…it’s just presumed that you don’t know good English…my friend had difficulties with his accent.” In his own experience, Ayaan came across people in his job search who judged his command of English based on his foreign-appearance and were then shocked at his level of fluency. These experiences were to him examples of not being “open minded” and highlighted the need for those who associated having an accent or a foreign appearance with a poor command of English to re-examine their assumptions. Moreover, to him, immigrants on should hold onto their accents rather than trying to “change themselves” because it is a part of "who they are”.

Departure from their Professional Sense of Self

Participants shared about having had successful and fulfilling careers in their home countries. Their professional self-stories before immigrating were characterized by continuity, growth, and while sharing them participants exuded self-confidence. Their pre-immigration careers largely shaped their expectations of professional success in Canada. They expected to face challenges in the process of finding employment. However, being awarded permanent residence for their professional attainment in what is a competitive process, communicated to them that there was a need for their skillset in the Canadian labour market and that their professional experience would be of value to employers. As Ayaan said, “… the government allowed me to come here. They recognized my experience…why are companies not supporting that?…The government opened that NOC, why? Because companies said, we need those people…. it’s not the government that invented that.” Their professional self-narratives nevertheless came to a halt when they were not able to realize their potential as professionals.

Those participants who had yet to break into their professions for the first time or had not been able to find employment for months after being laid off, had considered giving up their careers. Wei talked about purchasing a business with the saving he had accrued from being employed in his home country, even though this was neither his plan nor what he envisioned for his professional future. Salma had considered a career change because of the difficulty that she experienced finding a job in the fields of translation and interpretation. Nonetheless, having to provide for her son as a single mother though limited her ability to return to school. For her returning to school would also entail getting into more debt than she already was in as a result of being unemployed for months after having been laid off unexpectedly.

Experiencing little to no success in their job search for months caused participants financial hardship, confusion and uncertainty about their place in Canada, and for some it brought about feelings of shame and emotional distress. As Ayaan put it:

> Almost one year [searching for a job]… I really got frustrated like I didn't know what to do… there's no real clear-cut way of what I should do…should I move out of Calgary?... I can't sit on my savings for a long time… I tried my best… I tried everything every single thing, but it just did not work out.

For Santiago, the impact was profound and long-lasting affecting his mental wellbeing:

> I was sending resumes… and I was running out of money and um no jobs… I had an anxiety crisis, I really dipped. It went for one week, panic attacks one week!... I am still on medication for that…the most horrible experience in my life.

Contrary to their pre-immigration self-stories of accomplished professionals who wielded influence, participants felt like in Canada they had little to offer as professionals and that their educational attainment and professional experience were of no value. Wei and Mikahil

respectively stated, “all I have is education and some experience from elsewhere.”, “you meet people, you speak with them, you try to connect with them, but what can you offer them?... what can I offer them? I can’t offer them anything.” These statements reflected a marked departure from participants’ stories of success in their home countries and from their well-established professional sense of self.

“I Found Myself Again”: Rekindling their Professional Selves

Participants’ well-established professional self-stories, including their confidence in their professional abilities and their passion for their careers, fueled their persistent efforts to search for employment in the face of repeated failure. Mikhail and Santiago epitomized this persistence, “I’m not going back to [home country], this process was five years I’m not gonna go back to [home county] (pause) I am going to do everything whatever it [takes].”, “…I’ll keep working I will not give up I don’t wanna go back...do you wanna keep going? Yes, I do. If I don’t wanna go forward wanna give up, what options do I have?” Reflecting on their stories, I was struck by participants’ tenacity and resilience. However, it was only when these qualities were met with an employment opportunity that participants were able to rekindle their professional identities, the significance of which is captured in the following statement from Salma about her experience interviewing successfully for a job in her field:

> …I was asked about what I know! So, I felt like, welcome back. That’s me again, I found myself!… I felt like, okay let me speak!… [I felt] very prepared, very accomplished, like shining… And I got the job! Even I was like, even if I don’t get the job at least I feel confident that I still can do it, I still can get in touch with my experience. I still can speak!

Speaking to his survival job supervisor, Ayaan also highlighted the significance of being hired into a position that matched some of his pre-immigration professional experiences:

> I told my [supervisor], you know what? I got a job as a senior accountant So, what a senior accountant does is everything, taxes, he does audits, reviews, everything, right? So that's good that's what I used to do. And a senior position? That's excellent, right?

Similar to Salma, Maxim shared about his meaningful experience being interviewed for a job in his field and subsequently being offered the position:

> …they gave me a project [as part of the interview process]…and then uh I presented that project to a client…which was which was good experience for me and then… they came to me, okay, here's your offer, what do you think? So naturally I was thrilled!

The significance of this turning point for participants is also demonstrated in Wei's description of his broader experience of disconnection from others as a result of not yet having found a job:

> Here most people will have more influence on society than me that's for sure… people with jobs can influence society by doing things on the job…I am just better off than homeless people…so there's always part of my mind saying, okay, maybe next year I won't be here.

The above statement from Wei paints a picture of someone who felt alienated from society and not yet settled because of not having found meaningful employment.

After what was for most of participants many months of struggling, the rekindling of their professional selves set the stage for them to be able to re-examine their struggles as formative experiences that brought about for them a renewed sense of growth as professionals. When asked how their view of themselves had changed as a result of their efforts to establish their careers in Canada, participants who had secured employment in their professions described this renewed sense of growth in various ways. Jing shared about feeling more resourceful and

flexible as result of her experiences as a skilled immigrant, "I see myself now as being more flexible than before I guess. Yeah, more resourceful and more flexible." Earlier in our conversation, she had spoken about the importance for skilled immigrants to be flexible, both professionally and in their personal relations in order to be able to weather changes in their lives brought about by their immigration. Thus, the perceived benefits associated with her success becoming employed transcended the professional realm to impact other areas of her life. Salma mentioned feeling confident, empowered, and like Canada is now her home:

> My experience made me feel more empowered, more confident…compared to the person four years ago. Now I feel I have value. Sometimes at the beginning I would feel like, no, people don't like us because we are different, but now I feel like, yes!…this country depends totally on immigration… immigrants are the creators of this country…we have to be grateful even to the First Nations who allowed us on their land. So, now I feel more confident, more comfortable about being an immigrant and more hopeful that I will find a job. No way that [my being unemployed] will last forever.

In her reflection, Salma showed awareness about the importance of Indigenous peoples to the fabric of Canadian society. Being able to turn her attention to and appreciate other groups and their contributions were indicative of notable progress in her settlement and integration.

Similarly, Ayaan spoke about feeling more confident and comfortable being assertive, and of a change in the meek way in which he used to speak to Canadian-born professionals and employers when he first landed:

> I'm more confident now. To be honest when I came to Canada, I tried to communicate with people how would you say (pause) a common thing back home [is to think] that working in North America is difficult [and that] people [here] are really qualified. So, we

like you know [are] down here and talk [to people from North America] like they are up here so they don't get offended…But in…interviews I [began to think], you know what? I'm more qualified than these people are, what am I being so shy about? Why am I…holding myself?

Resisting Hopelessness in the Face of Great Difficulties

Some of participants' prospects for the future of their careers spoke to a deep-seated sense of hope that they would continue to grow as professionals in Canada. For example, Ayaan, who was gainfully employed at the time of our conversation, shared about his plan to move up the ranks with his present employer, "My plan is currently looking at a lateral move from this department to the finance department which has a pathway for my progression." Not surprisingly, Maxim who owned and operated a successful business in his home country, said he envisioned starting a business:

> …probably I will start my own company…my wife cooks really well and she has had success selling her [food] from home…and she's saying,…let's open a restaurant or a bakery or something like that…I will also be pushing myself to be in a decision-making position…I want to make my own decisions in a company or start my own company.

For other participants the future was less clear. Mikhail had difficulty visualizing his professional future because of the instability of his present employment, "I don't know. I don't know cause the only thing I can think about is today, right? I can't think about long term. I just can't." After being laid off from a job that he held for two years and only being able to secure contracts that were a few months long, Mikhail was confined to thoughts of the present and was not able to reflect about the possible future trajectory of his career.

My female participants answered to my question about their professional future notably differently from those of other participants. Salma, who earlier in our conversation had expressed hope about being able to find a job in her field despite having been jobless for months, spoke about the associated challenges for her of returning to school to better her employability:

> Sometimes I think about studying something totally new and changing my career but again, how can I do this? Like, financially, I'm responsible for a kid who's in high school now, so I don't have the luxury of studying and taking money from the government. This will add to my debt and I don't want to get into this cycle…I couldn't find a job so I am considering something that is more in demand…I find it very hard especially [now] that I'm [in my early fourties].

These barriers mentioned by Salma, namely her responsibility to provide for her son, her inability to fund her studies, and her age, limited her ability to plan her career. Salma went on to share that she had considered returning to school to become a healthcare aide because "this is always in demand", but decide it against because she doesn't "feel comfortable being around sick people and can't handle someone who is bleeding." Instead, at the time of our conversation, her hopes rested on being able to become employed in her field or in one related to it:

> I hope I find a job in my career again, administration, or even like social work or in settlement. I think I would be amazing helping people now because I know more resources. I've been applying for settlement counsellor and they don't call me for an interview because I don't have specific experience as a settlement counsellor. But still I have all the transferable skills, and this is what I try to say in my cover letters but I feel it's not working.

Citing her recent experience at the immigrant-serving agency, Salma expressed confidence in her ability to succeed in the job of counsellor to newcomers. However, because her experience was not specifically in the role of counsellor, she felt that employers were not giving her applications serious consideration despite her transferable skills. Consequently, not being able to upgrade her education or find employment in her field along with her lack of experience in other jobs that she was targeting put Salma, in my opinion, at risk of being marginalized indefinitely to her present situation of economic precarity.

Like Salma, Jing was also considering going back to school as the first step towards a career change. Even though she did not have children of her own and made it clear more than once throughout our conversation that she doubted ever wanting children, Jing still talked about the prospect of motherhood and how she thought it would limit her career prospects:

> I think I need a career change. I need to upgrade my education. I need to go back to school, but as for what field—I don't know yet…still you have family to take care of. Maybe we'll have children one day and that means I will probably be a mom at home and I probably wouldn't like that…I don't think we can both work I mean the daycare fee is like one person's salary or so I've heard, so it's better to just raise the children yourself…I don't know what will happen if we are ever going to have children then is that gonna be the end of my professional life? Or, I could wait 15 or 16 years and then start over after they grow up.

Despite her lack of interest in having children, Jing spoke about it with almost an inevitable quality and said she feels pressured due to her age to decide about it:

> [My husband] doesn't want children (pause) right now, but in the future maybe but I'm thirty-three so time is running out, so we'll see…And, of course, my parents are urging us

> and um I uh it's hard they're just constantly pressuring you. You know [nationality] parents they get involved in your personal life they have a say when you get married, when you have children, they're thinking, oh right now is a good time, but it's really not we want to be more stable…I don't know um maybe I don't want [to have children] as well and uh I just feel the urge to do it cause I think it's what women are supposed to do (chuckle). Coming from [nationality] culture and everything I think I might regret if I don't in the future…when I grow old.

Despite being the youngest of participants and having her life in front of her, Jing spoke about her career being bounded by the decision of whether to have children or forego becoming mother. Her family and cultural expectations also fed into Jing's ambivalence concerning motherhood. Elsewhere in our conversation, Jing described these expectations with great clarity, "…back in my home country…you get married, you have children, you raise your children that's pretty much it that's my friends' life pretty much back home they're all moms and dads now and I'm so left out." Not only were there strict expectations placed on her about how her life should unfold, but also not conforming to these expectations made her feel alienated and likely less certain about her future, including her career. In spite of this, Jing opened up about a dream she holds and about what is important to her about her future career path:

> I'm not very ambitious; I wanna do something I enjoy I have passion for and I want a stable income no matter how small how big it is something stable. I want to be financially independent I don't want to rely on my husband... My husband even told me, cause I'm a cat person, if we save up enough I can open a cat hotel. If I can do that it would be very nice. So, yeah something…I enjoy doing and I get paid for it and um it shouldn't be stressful or take too much of my time.

Jing, who was younger than most other participants and had much less professional experience, had a professional identity that was less solidified. She presented her past and current professional experiences as a stepping stone to her plans of possibly going back to school or opening a cat café. What was unique most unique about her story, however, was the negotiation of her aspirations, and thus of her professional identity, with the prospect of motherhood and her relationship with her husband.

When looking to the future, both of my female participants spoke not only about possibilities but also about limitations that were inextricably linked to them being women and that might prevent them from fulfilling their professional ambitions and continuing to write their professional self-stories in the way they would like to, like the rest of participants.

Overall, most of participants held a promising view about the future of their careers that was nurtured by them having succeeded in securing employment. Their higher professional attainment in their home countries laid the foundation for their vision about the future of their careers. In other words, participants had a hunger for more and expressed certainty about their capacity to hold positions of greater responsibility as they had done previously. However, the women in my study faced added challenges that were unique to them. These women talked about feeling pressure from their families' influence on their life decisions, which was not something mentioned by my male participants. In a way, this pressure created for them a sense of ambivalence and uncertainty about their careers and their lives more broadly. In the next section I will discuss participants' concluding thoughts about Canada and their experiences as skilled immigrants.

"A Great Decision! [but…]": Participants' Tension-Filled Concluding Remarks

This last section of my analysis focuses on participants' concluding thoughts and feelings in relation to Canada, their decision to immigrate, and their final reflections about their experiences trying to establish their careers. It was this portion of the data that I examined using elements of CDA to hypothesize about how participants' choices of language positioned those involved, constructed the relation between skilled immigrants and Canadian society, and reinforced or challenged established orders of power, dominance, and inequality.

Having described what was for most of participants a journey from rupture to rekindling of their professional identities, I turned to their concluding remarks about Canada as a whole and their professional experiences. Despite most of their accounts having been stories of challenge to triumph, asking participants about their final reflections led to candid criticisms on their part about some of these contextual elements in their stories.

In reference to Canada, participants' initial remarks highlighted aspects of their lives that changed for the better as a result of immigrating. Wei and Salma described Canada as "safer" and "not as crowded" compared to their respective home countries and Maxim said, "Great decision! I never regret it, no. It was a good decision for my kids for my wife [and] for myself". Despite their continued struggles in their careers, these answers offered by Wei, Salma, and Maxim, reflected a sense of relief about being away from their home countries where the sociopolitical context is not ideal. Santiago said about his first job "squeezing oranges", "I am grateful to Canada...in [home country] you [can] get a really shitty job or you [can] get a good job, but nothing like here where you can eat [and] live okay...with minimum wage." Santiago reflected on the sense of gratefulness he felt towards Canada when, after many months of unemployment, he found a minimum wage job "squeezing oranges" at a supermarket. He

contrasted this employment which would afford him being able "to eat and live okay" with the bleak picture that would await him back in his home country where his chances would be only at a "shitty" job or a "good" one. Presumably, this "good" job would be in his profession whereas the "shitty" one would not, in which case his gratefulness towards Canada was principally rooted in that his job squeezing oranges gave him the means to feed himself and have a roof over his head.

These responses from participants reflect the situation of many skilled immigrants, who, after repeated futile attempts at securing professional employment, are forced into underemployment to be able to subsist. In being offered an opportunity to subsist after months of hopelessness and desperation, and because they left behind complicated circumstances in their home countries, skilled immigrants are forced into a position of gratitude. Turning back to Santiago, his reflection reinforces the established order in which members of the dominant group segregate skilled immigrants in the labour market without repercussions while the Canadian government retains its image of a having a successful immigration system that strengthens Canada's middle class through economic growth and supporting diversity (IRCC, 2020d).

When our conversation shifted to their final reflections about their experiences as skilled immigrants, participants' remarks revealed another more complex aspect of their experiences that diverged from their positive comments about Canada and their decision to immigrate.

Ayaan's experience of the resources for skilled immigrants was as follows, "…to be honest [the resources] are not effective. [My wife and I] we've been to all of them. [Resources should] focus on each and every person. Every person is different, every person has their own needs...". Ayaan also argued for the need for better guidance for skilled immigrants "Starting up in Canada is difficult because people won't guide you, won't pinpoint you to the right process.

Some people may think pinpointing is spoon feeding, no! [Skilled immigrants] need guiding, they're new to the country, they're like your guests." In his reflection, Ayaan conceptualized skilled immigrants as having to start over and facing hardship, which goes against the notion that Canada's immigrant selection process is such that those given permanent residence are able to hit the ground running. His observation about the individual needs of newcomers being neglected speaks to an immigrant-service sector that approaches newcomers as a homogenous group and in doing so fails to be effective. It also speaks to the commodification of skilled immigrants through neoliberal policies and discourses, which reduce them to their ability to contribute to the country's economic growth (Bhuyan et al., 2015). Turning to people more broadly, Ayaan went on to construct skilled immigrants as ill-treated guests who are viewed as incapable and dependent by a society that is not welcoming towards them. This critique clashes with the widespread idea that Canadian society is welcoming of newcomers, through which many non-immigrants distract themselves from coming to terms with the reality faced by many newcomers.

Santiago spoke about his experience accessing employment resources and how it affected his well-being:

> …the system must be designed to not let us reach this point (pointed to the lowest point of his illustration of his mental well-being since his landing)…the guy in the (immigrant serving agency)…the lady in (other immigrant serving agency)… they need to walk through the process. I felt like they were taking me through the process, are you ready? but I wasn't ready!…I was in the system and I went all over the system because I wasn't getting anything…I was like, okay it's not working!...I went to all the agencies...but it didn't work!

Santiago pointed to the crisis of desperation that he experienced after not having found a job for nine months and having no one or nowhere else to turn for help. He placed the responsibility for his crisis on a system that failed to safeguard him. From his perspective, the responsibilities of this system fall on counsellors tasked with walking immigrants through the process of finding employment. In his case, these counsellors failed to walk him through this process and instead sent him off before he was ready. Santiago's reference to the system critiques the notion that the immigrant-service-sector funded is in place to help newcomers establish themselves, including professionally. Furthermore, his descriptions of having gone "all over the system" but it not having worked constructs this as a system that is flawed by design. In his reference to receiving support, Santiago constructed counsellors as having the responsibility of initiating skilled immigrants into the Canadian way of doing things, which feeds into an established order in the labour market in which immigrants are othered and segregated.

Unlike Santiago and Ayaan, Maxim had mixed things to say on the topic of resources for skilled immigrants, "…these uh experts at immigrant serving agencies very often give contradicting advice...I think that [employment program] was one of the biggest contributors for me to be able to find a job…" Here Maxim contrasted the perceived ineffective guidance he received from employment counsellors with the benefits of having participated in an internship program. Although Maxim's reflection about resources for skilled immigrants initially falls in line with that of Santiago and Ayaan, his later statement creates a distinction that elevates certain resources, which are programs that offer skilled immigrants access to internships. Moreover, his labelling of these resources as a contributor to him finding employment aligns with Ayaan's construction of skilled immigrants as agentic beings in their search for employment and

contradicts that of Santiago, which positioned members of this population as completely dependent on a system whose responsibility is to transition them into the labour market.

Mikhail's reflection about his experience as a skilled immigrant focused on the uncertainty that he felt concerning the future of his career and on the elusive reason behind his difficulty to find stable employment:

> …something is not working and I don't understand it and no one will tell you... I know I can climb but someone's blocking me...someone's not allowing me to climb…It's a learning curve it's being open minded…the guys from [employment] agencies call it soft skills…it's not about communication because there's no trouble to come out and speak…It's not about language…I need to build deeper relationships with people but I think, can you maintain all those relationships?... I know I can [succeed] if I just keep working.

Mikhail vacillated between arguing that his efforts to climb the ladder were being intentionally hindered and that there's more for him to learn about "how it works here". Given the lack of clarity surrounding his supposed shortcomings and how he can better himself, his positioning of himself as a student of Canadian professional culture who simply needs to "keep working" and have an "open mind" was futile in the face of such ambiguity. In regard to the notion of soft skills, he contested that his struggles are rooted in his inability to communicate with others arguing instead that the secret lies in developing deeper professional relationships. This statement from Mikhail demonstrates the tacit and subjective nature of Canadian experience as the knowledge that skilled immigrants are supposed to acquire to be welcomed by employers. The idea of having to build deeper relationships puts skilled immigrants in a position of having to go beyond arguing their suitability as professionals to appease the feeling of distrust held by

locals. This established order of how many established professionals and employers relate to skilled immigrants absolves locals from facing their possible xenophobia.

Salma's closing remarks had a hopeful tone that was different to that of struggle in some of her previous responses, "I'm still hopeful. I try to be positive." Her positivity was nurtured by her continued efforts to find professional employment, "I try to follow up regarding the um hiring events I go to meet people...I think I will post on LinkedIn…[asking my professional community] for advice [to] find a job in...administration or uh translation and interpretation." Reflecting about Canada, Salma returned to the issue of discrimination, although this time she was less concerned about it and its impact on her job search:

> …I heard you know the word redneck…So people feel like Western Canada is very removed and uh discrimination is more, especially for women. But this is not the case because in Montreal there is Bill 21… I still have positive feelings about Canada…The Canada I like is Calgary uh even if there's discrimination sometimes most people are nice and friendly and once you communicate with them and um accomplish some rapport they know that you are just a normal human being like them, you have your own dreams, and you came here to be uh a good citizen and to raise your kids to be good citizens and to have better opportunities.

Salma pinned the issue of discrimination in "Western Canada" on those who are referred to derogatorily as "redneck[s]". However, she downplayed the incidence of discrimination and pointed to passing of Bill 21 in Quebec as an actual indicator of true concern with regard to discrimination happening elsewhere in Canada. Salma argued that in Calgary discrimination is not a common occurrence and that all it takes for immigrants to dispel a person's xenophobia is to make a case for their common humanity and noble intentions with that person. These ideas,

along with the notion that most people are “nice” and “friendly”, likely shield Salma from the dissonance that she would otherwise experience. This dissonance has to do with feeling discriminated by employers and viewed with mistrust because of her appearance, which she previously shared. In shielding herself Salma is able to “have positive feelings about Canada” and persist despite her apparent professional and financial struggles.

Ayaan concluded by speaking to the problem of skilled immigrants being undervalued. His final remarks were also critical of the immigration system:

> ...people need to know here especially [immigrant-serving agency] needs to know that immigrants are not under qualified they at least have the same qualifications or are more qualified than the people working in the same positions in Canada. [People should also not be] biased [against skilled immigrants] because they come from a third world country. Although it is a third world country people work really hard. I’ve known people who don’t work hard here; I think people just you know start at nine o’clock and as long as it’s five they leave.

For Ayaan, the conceptualization that skilled immigrants are inherently deficient is based on them being from third world countries and their work ethic being thought of as substandard compared to that of Canadians. Ayaan resisted being positioned in this way by arguing that people in the Middle East have a stronger work ethic compared to that of some of the people with whom he has worked in Canada. Ayaan further made immigrant-serving agencies complicit in the conceptualization of skilled immigrants as deficient, which positions these agencies not as supports but as vehicles through which skilled immigrants are othered and devalued. Ayaan’s criticism extended to the immigration system as well:

> [Skilled immigrants] come with you know two months' worth of rent, what are they going to do? They'll definitely go for um odd jobs...um so basically what happened is they immigrated under the skilled federal class but are not working as a skilled person, they brought them for something else.

For Ayaan, skilled immigrants are destined for underemployment because they lack the money necessary to subsist while they try to find employment in their fields, which leads them to occupy those "odd jobs" that Canadians don't fill.

In his concluding remarks, Santiago offered a sharp criticism of the immigration process drawing on his experience and how it differed drastically from his expectations:

> Um you need to be more thoughtful, more conscious about [the decision to immigrate]…because uh if you just follow the instructions of the process you are misled. So, first of all [you are told], Canada needs you, you are gonna have a job right away. That's not true… I know [struggling] is part of the fun of going to another society that's why you immigrate…but you are not prepared for the rejection… Be prepared to go back in your career three years.

Santiago criticized Canada for not holding its end of the bargain but instead misleading skilled immigrants about the ease with which they will find employment. It is precisely through this incentive that Canada draws the best and brightest from around the world and leverages the FSWC immigration stream for the purpose of strengthening the country's economy. Although some skilled immigrants decide to return to their home countries upon encountering what Santiago described as "rejection", for many returning is not an option and they are powerless to call on Canada to live up to its promise.

In their concluding remarks, participants pointed to various contextual elements that added to their challenges. These included ineffective employment resources, lack of guidance about their professional integration, a misleading immigration process, and discourses that othered them and constructed them as inherently deficient. Although they persisted through their struggles and for the most part resisted these discourses, the effect of these contextual elements was evident; participants were segregated to lower levels in the ladders of their professions, experienced downward social mobility, and were held back in their careers and their integration into Canadian society.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study centered around the question: what stories do skilled immigrants tell about their shifting professional identities in their attempts to establish their careers in Canada? Additionally, I explored the possible role that discourses or broad narratives about skilled immigrants play in participants' understanding of their professional lives in Canada. Using narrative inquiry, I examined the professional identity shifts of skilled immigrants as they attempted to become established in their professions. In this chapter, I will discuss the insights I gained from my findings in light of the literature and their significance for our understanding of professional newcomers' experiences. The chapter ends with my reflections about the implications of participants' stories for counsellors, the immigrant-service sector, and for future research with this population.

Stories of Perseverance, Tensions, and the Influence of Circulating Narratives

The stories of participants were ones of perseverance in the face of great challenges and of experiences that differed widely from their expectations upon landing about what establishing their careers in Canada would entail. This dissonance that participants' experienced echoes the results from a study by Anderson et al. (2010), who examined what it means for an immigrant to start over in a new country. By interviewing a large group of Somali refugees and Chinese immigrants across three cities in Canada, these researchers found that it was common for immigrants and refugees alike to experience a sense of dissonance between their expectations and their lived realities. Despite being grateful and relieved to be in Canada, their participants, like mine, felt disappointed and disillusioned having to face a host of difficulties, including unexpected challenges to find gainful employment.

The difficulties that participants experienced searching for a job in their fields casted doubt on the legitimacy of their established professional selves and threatened to erode their claim to a place in Canadian society. However, participants were industrious in their efforts to find employment, responding adaptively to the challenges they encountered and persisting in the face of failure. Intrinsic to most of their accounts was a sense of hope in themselves, the prospects for their professional lives, and in the promise that Canada holds for newcomers. Most of them succeeded in finding employment in their fields, which allowed them to reconnect to varying degrees with their pre-immigration professional selves. In turn, participants who found professional employment were able to continue writing their professional self-stories with a newly gained sense of confidence and purpose.

Aside from the theme of perseverance evident in participants' accounts, their stories were unequivocally filled with tensions (Clandinin et al., 2009). These tensions spoke to the multilayered nature of their experiences and revealed cracks in what at first sight seemed like smooth thoughts about their experiences in Canada as professionals. The relational nature of narrative inquiry and my efforts to create a space in which participants felt safe to share openly, allowed for these tensions to emerge during their interviews. I strived to present these tensions in my retelling of their stories in an effort to produce what Clandinin et al. (2009) described as counterstories. Counterstories, as defined by Clandinin and colleagues, constitute an attempt to subvert unhelpful circulating narratives. I examined the tensions in participants' stories to explore the influence of unhelpful circulating narratives about skilled immigrants on their attempts at professional integration and their professional sense of self.

Resisting a Narrative of Deficiency

In their stories, several of participants shared about coming up against what seemed like an inherent narrative of deficiency about skilled immigrants, which was based on the unfounded devaluation of their credentials and experience. This devaluation became evident to them when they were unexpectedly asked about their Canadian experience during interviews, or when they were advised to seek opportunities to gain Canadian experience to raise their competitiveness in the Canadian labour market. Fuller and Martin (2012) explained that there are a host of possible reasons behind the devaluation of skilled immigrants' human capital, including poor fluency in the host country language on the part of immigrants, differing work-practices and technologies cross-nationally, and employer unfamiliarity with foreign training systems and labour markets. In participants' view, however, their suitability and readiness for the Canadian labour market is evidenced by the extensive and rigorous vetting process of their professional background and credentials on the part of the Canadian government, the breath and complexity of their former professional roles, and their success among many in what is a competitive immigration selection process.

Participants further contested the notion of incompatibility between their qualifications and professional experience and the requirements of employers in Canada. They did so by drawing parallels between the similarities that they consider exist in the practice of their professions in Canada and their home countries. In some cases, after becoming employed, participants went as far as arguing the superiority of their skills, work habits, and productivity compared to those of their Canadian colleagues. Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015) studied the professional integration experiences of close to 200 internationally educated medical professionals, including physicians, nurses and midwives, and found similar results to mine.

Their participants who were employed reported feeling like their Canadian colleagues overstated the differences between the standards of practice in Canada and those of other countries and questioned their skills and qualifications. These participants contested the assumption of Canadian education and training as the norm and, like participants, safeguarded their professional identity by "minimizing the difference between and in some cases showing the superiority of their skills in comparison to their Canadian colleagues" (p. 80). For participants, this narrative of deficiency also came up in the context of employment counselling, in which they were instructed about the importance of networking and of exuding confidence in order to establish fruitful relations with local professionals. One of participants described how the influence of this narrative of deficiency on his experience of counselling led him to feel othered and demeaned as opposed to empowered. Ironically, the devaluation of participants' professional attainments went against the very expectation that they should embody confidence in order to appear well adjusted to the professional culture in Canada, and thus employable.

Despite feeling confident in their ability to perform in their professions at the level of professional standards in Canada, some of participants pointed to a lack of trust at the core of the devaluation of their skills and experience on the part of employers. Guo (2013) discussed this lack of trust and pointed that the non-recognition of foreign credentials and the deskilling of immigrants resulting from difference being equated with deficiency and the knowledge of immigrants, particularly those from Third World countries, being thought of as inferior. According to Guo, even though Canada promotes itself as a democratic society committed to cultural pluralism, our tolerance of difference extends only as far as non-influential cultural aspects like food, dance, and festivities. To him, more substantive differences that go against the hegemony and resist assimilation are viewed by many Canadians as "deficient, deviant,

pathological, or otherwise divisive" (Guo, 2009, p. 47). As a result, differences concerning the professional background of skilled immigrants, whether real or not, are thought to be incompatible with the social and cultural reality of Canada, and therefore are deemed undesirable (Guo, 2013). Ultimately, it was participants' belief that this lack of trust reflected doubt about the compatibility of their skills and the equivalence of their qualifications. This doubt set them apart from other job seekers and nullified many of their efforts to find employment commensurate with their professional background.

Encountering this narrative of deficiency had a powerful invalidating effect on my participants' professional sense of self, which they felt compelled to argue against during their conversations with me. By resisting this narrative, participants nurtured their belief in their ability to succeed and by extension their efforts to continue to seek professional employment in the face of persisting failure. Ultimately, these efforts were participants' attempts to claim a place for themselves in Canadian society that was as congruent as possible with their expectations. Blustein (2008) explained the importance of our careers for our place in society. To Bluestein, "working is the social role in which people generally interact with the broader political, economic, and social contexts that frame their lives, working often becomes…a source of rewards, resilience, and relationships" (p. 230). In line with Blustein's argument, participants who had had the least success establishing themselves professionally felt alienated from society and experienced doubt about wanting to remain in Canada. As one of them put it, employment is the means through which one is able to exert "influence" on society. Their lack of sense of belonging as a result of their poor employment outcomes contrasts with the goals of Canadian multiculturalism policy, which emphasizes shared identity and integration (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). Furthermore, as visible minorities, their poor labour market outcomes speak to the

persistent issues of unemployment and underemployment in Canada of visible minority skilled immigrants (Chuong & Safdat, 2016).

Negotiating the Requirement of Canadian Experience

Reflecting on participants' accounts, it seems that the requirement of Canadian experience masked the underlying narrative of deficiency about their qualifications and skills. Despite participants' resistance, the barrier of Canadian experience continued to subdue their job search efforts. Adding to this problem was the vague and elusive meaning of this requirement; participants felt confused about the meaning of Canadian experience and uncertain about how to acquire it. This finding resonates with the results of Sakamoto et al.'s (2013) examination of English print media. These authors concluded that, despite Canadian experience being crucial to immigrants' successful integration in the labour market, it constitutes knowledge about professional culture that is subjective and context-specific in nature. The nature of Canadian experience makes it so that newcomers, like participants, are unlikely to be able to obtain this knowledge without being able to practice it, in a supportive environment (Sakamoto et al, 2013). However, participants reported finding little to no opportunities for internships, work placements, or to shadow professionals employed in their fields. Adding to the problem of the vague and subjective nature of Canadian experience is the fact that in 2012, Canadian experience was added to the FSWP applicant point system whereas the number of points allotted to foreign education and experience was decreased (Sakamoto et al., 2013). Measures such as these have been touted as ways to fix Canada's immigration problems by allowing the government and employers to differentiate those immigrants who are more likely to succeed. However, this institutionalization of Canadian experience in immigration policy arguably allows employers to deploy this requirement as a legitimate way to exclude those who threaten to disrupt the

homogeneity of their workforce (Bhuyan et al., 2015). Therefore, in reality, Canadian experience arguably disguises elements present in immigration selection policy that disadvantage racialized immigrants and contribute to the structural barriers that immigrant professionals face in Canada (Bhuyan et al., 2015).

In the face of the requirement of Canadian experience, participants were left with no choice but to redirect their job search efforts towards employment opportunities that were lower in the ladder of their professions or apply to jobs outside of their fields simply to try to enter the job market. Speaking about what they described as the cost of immigration, Hilde and Mills (2017) discussed how to come to terms with a reality that differs widely from their expectations, some immigrants embrace an identity of deficiency and relinquish their search for employment at the level of their pre-immigration jobs. Doing so shielded them from the shock of their credentials and work experience not being recognized. Otherwise, according to these authors, continuing with their unsuccessful job search attempts is likely to be detrimental to immigrants' wellbeing and may lead them to experience issues like depression and even thoughts of suicide.

Although participants resisted being conceived of as inherently deficient because of the foreign nature of their professional experience and education, the barrier of Canadian experience forced them to forego their efforts to seek employment at the level of their pre-immigration jobs. Underemployment led participants to rate their socioeconomic status in Canada comparatively lower to that in their home countries and in some cases to feel uncertain about the future of their careers. Downward mobility in the socioeconomic ladder has been associated with poor mental health and sense of wellbeing (Anderson et al., 2010). In the case of participants, both continuing a fruitless job search and desisting from it to pursue underemployment had a deleterious impact on their wellbeing.

Participants managed within themselves their comparatively lower socioeconomic status and underemployment by citing the benefits of living in Canada for their families, as well as their plans to continue trying "harder" to climb the ladder of their professions. The latter of these two justifications exemplifies how circulating narratives about skilled immigrants, like that of Canadian experience, may infiltrate their subjective sense of self and influence their understanding about the degree of responsibility they bear for their professional success. This infiltration speaks to the localized relation between neoliberalism and subjectivity (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010). In the case of skilled immigrants in Canada, the influence of these narratives contributes to the creation of ideal neo-liberal subjects who view their struggles as personal shortcomings and see themselves as having to be resilient in order to succeed (Ku et al., 2018). At a societal level, the notion of Canadian experience shifts the public's attention towards viewing immigrants' challenges as individual deficits, which deracializes their marginalization while also positioning them as inferior in relation to a norm of Canadian excellence (Bhuyan et al., 2015; Ku et al., 2018). Furthermore, this notion of an ideal self-sufficient immigrant falsely nurtures Canada's national identity of a multicultural society that is welcoming of difference, and it detracts from the need for continued public discussion about social and institutional issues that contribute to the difficulties experienced by skilled immigrants (Chuong & Safdat, 2016; Dhamoon & Abu-Laban, 2009).

The Loss and Rekindling of Professional Identity

The downward mobility that my participant experienced had a profound impact on their identity development, to the point that some wondered if leaving everything behind to immigrate had been a mistake. Erikson (1963) conceptualized the function of identity as unifying the self across time. From a narrative perspective, bringing unity to the self involves making sense of

temporal discontinuities or seemingly disconnected happenings in one's life by creating a life story (McAdams, 2018). Participants struggled to integrate their dissonant experiences as professionals in Canada with their established self-stories, which caused their sense of self to become ruptured. As a result, they experienced anger, frustration, confusion, anxiety, and one of them admitted having had thoughts of self-harm for which he had to seek medical help. It was only when they found employment in their fields, even if not commensurate with their experience, that participants were able to incorporate their job search experiences as meaningful learnings into their broader professional narratives. This integration constituted, for several of them, the emergence of transnational professional identities that restored coherence to their previously disrupted sense of self (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015).

The rekindling of participants' professional self-stories extended into the future; those of them who found employment were able to envision hopeful prospects for their careers and the steps to achieve their goals, whereas those who continued to struggle were mired by uncertainty about their future. The notion of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) shows the importance of participants having a clear, positive vision for their professional futures, including for being able to overcome their current difficulties. According to this theory, possible selves constitute personalized, envisioned futures that we deeply fear or wish to attain for ourselves. Our belief in the potentiality of these possible futures makes them influential as incentives, which in turn moderate our present behaviour and sense of ourselves (M.G. Erikson, 2007). Therefore, a lack of clarity about their professional futures due to longstanding struggles to establish their careers likely affected some of participants' belief in themselves and their ability to continue authoring stories of success into the future. Consequently, for those who continue to struggle, their sense of self may grow more diluted as the rupture between their previously established self-stories in

their home countries and their present realities grows more stark. The shifts that occurred in participants' sense of self showed their professional identities to be an ongoing story that is subject to social, political, and cultural influences. Nevertheless, the forging of participants' transnational professional identities required the recognition of the broader host society, including established professionals, regulatory bodies and employers (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015).

Implications

The themes that emerged from participants' stories yielded valuable implications for counsellors, the immigrant-service sector, and researchers whose work focuses on newcomers, including skilled immigrants. These implications should be considered within the broader context of globalization that facilitated the opportunity for participants to immigrate. Prilleltensky (2012) defined globalization as the dispersion and absorption of people, products, and processes around the world. The influence of globalization on participants' lives is well illustrated in Prilleltensky's following quote:

> Dreaming of a life without oppression can instigate decisions to migrate, change jobs, and otherwise take control of your life…People around the world put on the scale their dignity, the future of their children, economic opportunities and huge personal sacrifices to decide whether to migrate, to go on strike, or to work within systems of injustice…globalization forces individuals to confront opportunities and risks that challenge their emotional stability and sense of coherence (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 617).

Although they consider themselves fortunate to have been able to immigrate, participants struggled with little power to influence the systems and narratives that dictated their professional lives in Canada. Prilleltensky argued that it is power that in large part determines how

individuals are affected by worldwide processes like globalization (Prilleltensky, 2012). Critics of globalization argue that for those with little power this process has detrimental impacts, including increased poverty, less access to health care, and lack of political freedom (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001). Globalization largely benefits Euro-American governments, corporations, and transnational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which exert great control over trade through policies, loans, and penalties (Stiglitz, 2007). In response to these differential impacts that globalization has over those with power and those without it, Prilleltensky (2012) argued for a redefinition of globalization. This redefinition would involve a shift in its purpose away from the profiting of the rich and powerful to equality, justice, and well-being. Realizing this shift would require collective social movement to which psychologists may contribute by focusing their research efforts on how lay people understand globalization and its impact on their lives. This knowledge is important if we wish to mobilize our governments against the pernicious effects of globalization on those without power, like immigrants (Prilleltensky, 2012). Nevertheless, because the impacts of globalization can be felt at the personal, interpersonal, organizational, and communal levels, if we wish to help to redefine globalization and its impacts on those who are vulnerable, we as psychologists must transcend a solely subjective view of wellbeing. Instead, to be able to fully understand the impacts of globalization on individuals we should adopt a multidimensional view of wellbeing comprised of interpersonal, communal, occupational, physical, psychological, and economic dimensions (Prilleltensky, 2012).

Implications for Counsellors

My reflecting on Prilleltensky's ecological view of wellbeing in relation to participants' accounts revealed the need to reconceptualise employment practices with skilled immigrants

towards making them more socially just and attentive to a multidimensional view of wellbeing. In Canada, participants were outsiders in the hierarchy of their professions and were disempowered by the challenges and barriers the faced as well as their social and political contexts, including, for some of them, in context of employment counselling. It has been argued that counsellors employed by immigrant-serving agencies, many of whom are immigrants themselves, may, despite well-intentioned efforts, spouse assimilationist, oppressive standards in their efforts to support their clients' professional integration (Sakamoto, 2007). Shan and Guo (2013) described these efforts as contributing to the turning of foreign trained professionals into "desirable workers" by "Canadianising immigrants codes of conduct and reproducing dominant cultural norms" (Shan & Guo, 2013, p. 34-35). Therefore, these counsellors may unknowingly promote the very same discrimination and perpetuate the same structural issues that they are trying to help their clients overcome. In the case of participants, some of them felt othered by counsellors and mistakenly perceived as self-reliant when starting to look for a job. Therefore, counsellors who serve skilled immigrants would greatly benefit from reflecting about their own biases and stereotypes and how they may influence the working alliance and the effectiveness of their interventions. The infusion of culture into career counselling as proposed by Arthur and Collins (2011), also requires that counsellors develop awareness of how social, economic, and political contexts impact their clients career concerns to be able to provide counselling that is socially just. The results of this study, however, point to employment counsellors having to walk a fine line to be able to grow their skilled immigrants' social awareness while also empowering them.

Participants' positive feedback about participating in this study, including how it helped them to re-examine their view of their professional experiences in a more positive light, supports

the notion of a narrative approach to providing employment counselling to this population. Kennedy and Chen (2012) proposed Cochran's (1997) narrative career counselling model as a suitable approach for counsellors working with skilled immigrants. This approach prioritizes clients understanding of their career experience and builds on their understanding to create a vision for the desired future of their careers. This vision is elicited from clients narrating their past and present career experiences, while the counsellor inquires into their background and socio-cultural context and uses such information to help clients to construct a career life narrative. The barriers that skilled immigrants have to contend with may diminish their sense of self-efficacy and their ability to generate a future-oriented career narrative (Kennedy & Chen, 2012). A narrative approach to career counselling allows for the exploration of interpersonal, environmental, and societal factors impacting skilled immigrants' ability to achieve their career-related goals. This exploration would therefore bring to the forefront issues of social justice in a manner that is relevant to the individual telling their story (Caine et al., 2018). Counsellors may in turn highlight how the outcomes of their clients' efforts are not simply a reflection of their abilities, but also the result of complex contextual influences that may lead skilled immigrants to experience racism or other forms of stereotyping in their careers. Openly discussing these issues would communicate to skilled immigrants that their counsellor is knowledgeable about and sensitive to aspects of their reality that are hindering their efforts, thus strengthening the working alliance. My study, in particular, illuminated the need for incorporating into the career counselling process discussion about the possible impact of skilled immigrants' struggles on their sense of self. This discussion may point to a rupture in their professional identity that has diminished their sense of agency and thus their perceived capacity to overcome their difficulties. If that is the case, following this discussion, counsellors may discuss with their clients their

strengths and past successful professional experiences to help improve their self-efficacy and in turn their ability to revitalize their efforts to continue trying to become established in their professions (Kennedy & Chen, 2012).

Implications for the Immigrant-Service Sector

Participants' experiences of accessing specialized employment supports for skilled immigrants point to a need to reconsider how employment programs for this population are funded and how the immigrant-service sector is structured to operate. These select employment programs offer mentorship from an established professional or internships in skilled immigrants' field of experience, which are valuable supports for their professional integration. Nevertheless, several of participants shared having faced delays of months trying to access these programs or having had negative experiences interacting with staff delivering them. The source of these issues may trace back to Bauder and Jayaraman's (2014) findings indicating that the immigrant-service sector in Canada has suffered from inadequate and unreliable funding over the past two decades, which in turn has resulted in gaps in services, higher workloads, less on-the-job training, and deteriorating working conditions for those employed in this sector. In addition, a shift away from stable, long-term funding for these agencies towards short-term, project-based arrangements restricted their capacity to hire permanent full-time staff (Türegün, 2013a).

These critiques of the funding structure of these agencies resonate with my former employment experience in this sector. Reflecting on my experience, I also think that the accessibility and quality of specialized employment supports for skilled immigrants is greatly influenced by how the immigrant-service sector has increasingly come to be structured: a monopolistically competitive market model. This model describes an industry containing many firms that offer similar products or services (Dutta, 2006). Although the high number of firms

promotes efficiency and innovation, it may also lead to overlapping products or services between firms that offer little added utility or value (Greenlaw et al., 2017). The number of immigrant-serving agencies that offer similar basic settlement supports arguably limits the amount of funding available for specialized employment programs, which leads to limited capacity and long waitlists. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider funding for these programs. Furthermore, the low number of employment programs for skilled immigrants compared to other settlements supports for newcomers is reflective of troublesome neoliberal immigration policies that position members of this population as self-sufficient and largely responsible for their own professional integration (Root et al., 2014). In addition, the salience of gender in participants' experience speaks to the need for more widespread employment resources that are attentive to particular needs of skilled immigrant women. Presently, from my experience, employment resources tailored to immigrant women, particularly those who are mothers, are scarce and ill-suited to assist with professional integration of those of them who are skilled.

Implications for Research

The themes that emerged from participants' accounts point to a continuing need for research into the lives of skilled immigrants and the influence of circulating narratives on their sense of identity and belongingness in Canadian society. The global phenomenon of migration continues fuelled by economic, social, political, and technological transformations, including globalization (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Between 2017 and 2018, net immigration accounted for 80% of Canada's population growth, and by the early 2030s, it is expected that immigrants will account for almost all of Canada's population growth (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020b6). Furthermore, the federal government continues to develop new programs that dictate the opportunities available to foreign

professionals to immigrate, the most recent of which is the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) unveiled in 2017.

Contrary to the priority that immigration has on the governments' agenda, varying narratives are circulating in Canadian society about the repercussions of immigration espoused by those in favour of it and those against it. Those in favour cite the economic, demographic, and cultural contributions of immigrants, whereas those against it view immigrants as a burden to health and social services and consider immigration to be a threat to social cohesion and national security (Wills, 2010). However, ultimately, it is in the lives of individuals that geopolitical, economic, cultural, and psychological processes intersect (Aneesh, 2012; Shimpi & Zirkel, 2012). The stories of participants showed that macro processes as well as circulating narratives about skilled immigrants had profound effects on their lives and how they came to view themselves and their place in society. Mobilizing this knowledge is critical for the development of policies that promote newcomers' sense integration and deter their alienation, including in the labour market (Wills, 2010).

Strengths and Limitations

The touchstones of narrative inquiry guided my reflection about strengths and limitations of this study as they did for making a case about its rigour. One of the strengths of this study was the use of a narrative approach; the stories of participants give us insight into the mechanics of shifts in their professional identity, including how they worked through a rupture in their professional self-story and how the rekindling, or not, of their sense of self affected their vision of the future of their careers. The bulk of the research on skilled immigrants has focused on the barriers that they face and the impact of these barriers on their labour market outcomes (e.g., Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Lai et al., 2017). However, studies that have explored the effect of this

population's professional experiences on their sense of self, are comparatively much fewer (e.g., Hilde & Mills, 2017). By reflecting critically about participants' stories and by drawing on the critical lens of CDA to examine their concluding remarks, I was able to understand the detrimental influence of circulating narratives about skilled immigrants on participants' understanding about their careers in Canada.

Another strength of this study is the relevance of its findings for employment counsellors working with this population. This strength is also undergirded by its narrative approach, as it showed how important it is for skilled immigrants to tell their story and how doing so contributed to them being able to locate positive, growth-promoting narratives within their struggles with hardships. This study provided us insight into how skilled immigrants make sense of downward mobility in the socioeconomic ladder and its effect on their self-view. As the notion of possible selves suggests, this process appears to affect their perceived future of their careers and in turn their sense of self-efficacy and motivation. Addressing these issues in the counselling context would help skilled immigrants navigate the job search process more effectively and with a stronger sense of agency, which would allow for decisions that are truly reflective of their aspirations for their careers.

A unique aspect that characterized this study was the use of the MacArthur SSS Scale during the interviews. This tool brought to bear what was for participants a drop in their perceived socioeconomic status between their home countries and Canada. The use of this ladder allowed addressing the topic of loss of professional identity while maintaining the narrative format of the interviews. Prilleltensky (2012) argues the importance of understanding the consequences of macro processes on individual's realities. This argument highlights another valuable aspect of this study: how participants' professional integration was shaped by broad

narratives may serve as munition to challenge these narratives and the systems that oppress this population.

The most notable limitation of this study concerns the limited number of interactions that I had with participants. Narrative inquirers seek to have much contact with their participants, including living alongside them to immerse themselves in their lives and together create knowledge. The scope of this master's thesis limited the design of this study in relation to its narrative roots. My contact with participants was limited to the interviews and our exchanges over email about the content of their restories, during which some of them provided, on their own accord, additional feedback or shared their reflections about the significance of having taken part in this study. Still, this study mostly inquired into their past job search experiences which I did not witness nor shared with them. Despite this limitation, this inquiry showed the heterogeneity of participants' experiences associated with, for example, the intersection of age, gender, and religion. Therefore, with the development of new immigration streams that continue to grow the diversity of Canada's immigrant population, future studies may explore the experiences of skilled immigrants arriving through other immigrations programs to more rural areas of the country, or whose sociodemographic characteristics vary from those involved in this study. The results of such nuanced approaches to researching this population are critical for leaders to be able to advocate for employment resources that are more responsive to the complex and the varying needs of members of this population.

Concluding Thoughts

Engaging in this research enriched me immensely. I became exposed to the tradition of narrative research and the power of stories to understand the lives of those who are the focus of our work, and to incite meaningful reflection in both the audience and the storyteller. The

process of carrying out this inquiry faced me with some of my biases and taught me about producing work that is reflective of rigour. Despite the existing large body of literature focused on skilled immigrants, this inquiry has shown me that there is a continuing need to shed light on the lives of newcomers to be able to advocate for a more equitable Canada that is reflective of the values, like diversity and inclusion, that it strives to uphold. Engaging in this research also revealed for me the importance of finding ways to mobilize the knowledge we gain from our work for the purpose of challenging policy and broad narratives or discourses that obscure the challenges faced by disadvantage members of our society, including skilled immigrants. Lastly, as a counsellor, I take with me valuable insights about how employment counselling practices with this population may be strengthened by drawing on the principles of social justice and narrative counselling.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada

Subject Line: Skilled Immigrants in Canada

Hi there,

My name is David Marulanda and I am a second year student in the Master's of Science in Counselling Psychology program at the University of Calgary. I am presently recruiting participants for my thesis project titled: *Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada.*

The focus of my project is on the experiences of skilled immigrants who came to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker program since 2015, and have experienced difficulty in the process of establishing their careers in Canada. I am interested in learning about their immigration experience, the challenges they have faced while looking for a job in Canada, and how these experiences have impacted them. The goal of this project is to help us better understand the experience of skilled immigrants in Canada as they look for a job in their field, and how we can better tailor counselling supports and other resources in the community to better address their needs.

Your participation in this study would involve a 60 - 90 minute **confidential** interview where we will discuss your experiences in relation to your immigration and the process of looking for a job in your field in Canada. As a token of appreciation, you will receive a **$30 gift card** for your participation.

For more information about this study, or to participate, please contact David Marulanda:

David Marulanda, Student Researcher
Werklund School of Education, Department of Educational Psychology

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Dr. Kaori Wada, Supervisor
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study
(REB19-1137)

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Appendix B: Online Advertisement Recruitment Letter

Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada

Did you come to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker program since 2015?

Have you struggled to find employment in your field in Canada?

We would like to invite you to share your experience as part of a research study examining the experiences of skilled immigrants in Canada.

The goal of this project is to help us understand how counselling supports and other resources in the community can be better tailored to address skilled immigrants' needs.

Participation is **confidential** and involves a 60 - 90 minute conversation.

In order to participate you must have immigrated to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker program since 2015, and have experienced difficulty securing employment in your field of expertise in Canada.

You will receive a **$30 gift card** as a token of appreciation for your participation.

For more information about this study, or to participate, please contact David Marulanda:

David Marulanda, Student Researcher
Werklund School of Education, Department of Educational Psychology

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Dr. Kaori Wada, Supervisor
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study (REB19-1137)

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

ARE YOU A SKILLED IMMIGRANT?

Did you immigrate to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker program since 2015?

Have you struggled to find employment in your field?

We would like to invite you to share your experience as part of a research study examining the experiences of skilled immigrants in Canada.

Participation involves a 60-90 minute interview.

As a token of appreciation, you will receive a **$30 gift card**.

For more information, or to participate, please contact David Marulanda:

David Marulanda, Student Researcher

Dr. Kaori Wada, Supervisor

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study (REB19-1137)

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Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Title of Project:
Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada

Name of Student Researcher, Faculty, Department, Contact Information
David Marulanda
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology

Name of Supervisor, Faculty, Department, Contact Information
Dr. Kaori Wada
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study (REB19-1137)

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Study
The focus of this study is to increase our understanding of the experiences of skilled immigrants in Canada in relation to their search for professional employment, and how this process impacts them and their overall settlement experience. Skilled immigrants often have difficulty finding a job in their field, which hinders their overall settlement and integration into Canadian society. The goal of this project is to help us understand how counselling supports and other resources in the community can be better tailored to address skilled immigrants' needs.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?
Should you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form, fill out a demographics questionnaire, and participate in a confidential 60-90 minute one-on-one interview about your experiences as a skilled immigrant in Canada. The topics of the interview will include your immigration experience, the challenges that you have faced while looking for a job in your field in Canada, and how these experiences may have impacted your settlement and integration experience in Canadian society. You may decline to answer any questions at any point during the interview without consequence or penalty. You will receive a summary of your interview and will be asked to comment on how well your experience is captured. At this point you will have an opportunity to change information contained in the summary to help ensure that

your story is depicted well.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw without penalty up until two weeks after you receive the summary of your interview. Your willingness to participate in this study (or not) will not impact your status in Canada, your eligibility for services, or your employment status.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?
Should you agree to participate, via a demographics questionnaire, you will be asked to provide information about your age, gender, marital status, education, income, and professional experience. You may decline to answer all or some of these questions. This information will be collated with the answers of other participants to show general trends, and it will not be attached to your answers from your interview.

Your interview will be digitally audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription and data analysis, and only the student researcher (David Marulanda), his supervisor (Dr. Kaori Wada), and a third party transcriptionist will have access to the recording. This third party individual will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement, and will not have access to your consent form, your demographic information form, or your contact information. A participant number and a pseudonym will be assigned to your demographics questionnaire and your transcribed interview. Personal identifying information will be removed from the transcript of your interview (e.g., names of people or places), and identifying demographic information collected in the demographics questionnaire will be presented in the form of ranges or aggregates and at a high level (e.g., male engineer from the Middle East as opposed to civil engineer from Iran) to safeguard your confidentiality. After the recording of your interview is transcribed, a pseudonym and participant number are assigned to it, and personal identifying information is removed, other research team members will have access to the transcript for the purpose of assisting the student researcher with the analysis.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
There are minimal risks to participating in this study. There is a possibility that you might experience minimal feelings of discomfort as a result of recalling and sharing your experiences. Should you find that you are experiencing distress as a result of your participation, information about counselling resources have been provided to you with your copy of this consent form. This list also contains the contact information of not-for-profit immigrant-serving-agencies in Calgary that might be able to assist with your settlement process.

You will receive a $30 gift card as a token of appreciation for your participation in this study.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation, without penalty. You will receive a copy of a summary of your interview and will have the opportunity to comment on how well your experience is captured. If you do not respond within two weeks after being sent the summary, it will assumed that you are in full agreement with the contents of the summary. Further, you will be able to rescind your consent and have

your data removed from the study up until two weeks after receiving a summary of your interview.

You will be assigned a pseudonym and a participant number in order to connect your responses on the demographics questionnaire to your interview responses. However, all the documents that contain your personal information (i.e., demographics questionnaire, interview transcript) will be de-identified. You will only be asked to provide your actual name(s) and last name(s) at the end of this form for the purpose of consenting to participating in the study. Your interview will be transcribed by an individual who will have access to the audio recording of your interview. This individual will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement, and will not have access to your consent form, your demographic information form, or your contact information.

Your audio-recorded interview file will stored by the student researcher in a password protected USB until transcription is complete, at which point the audio-recorded interview file will be permanently deleted. Copies of your signed consent form and your demographic information form will be stored in a secure and locked filing cabinet accessible only to the student researcher (David Marulanda) and his supervisor (Dr. Kaori Wada). These forms, along with the transcribed copy of your interview, will be retained for five years after the last publication of the study and after no further dissemination is foreseeable. At this point the forms and data will be destroyed permanently. The information you provide as part of your participation in this study may be used by the student researcher in conference presentations or published in research journals. Data collected from your interview may also be used by the student researcher to complete his thesis and as part of his degree requirements. The student researcher will keep a master list containing your name, pseudonym, and participants number, in order to be able to discern your identity, remove your data from the study, and destroy all your documents should you choose to withdraw from the study prior to two weeks after you have received the summary of your interview. This master list will be stored as well in a secure and locked filing cabinet accessible only to the student researcher (David Marulanda) and his supervisor (Dr. Kaori Wada).

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in the research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the student researcher and his supervisor from their legal and ethical responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project without penalty prior to two weeks after receiving a summary of your interview. You should feel free to ask for clarification throughout your participation.

Participant Number: _____

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Researcher's Name (please print):
_____

Student Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:
_____

Questions / Concerns
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

David Marulanda

OR

Dr. Kaori Wada

If you have any concerns about the way you have been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services, University of Calgary.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.
The student researcher has kept a copy of the consent form.

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Appendix E: Participant Demographic Information Form

Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada

Name of Student Researcher, Faculty, Department, Contact Information
David Marulanda
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology
Name of Supervisor, Faculty, Department, Contact Information
Dr. Kaori Wada
Werklund School of Education, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology

1. How old are you? _____

2. Please select the one that you most identify with:
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Transgender & gender nonconforming
   d. Prefer not to answer

3. What is your country of origin? _____

4. Please select one that you most identify with:
   a. Heterosexual
   b. Gay
   c. Lesbian
   d. Bisexual
   e. Asexual
   f. Prefer not to answer

5. What is your marital status?
   a .Single
   b. Married
   c. In a relationship
   d. Other: _____

6. Did you come to Canada with your family?
   a. Yes
   b. No

If yes, please indicate who you came with (e.g., spouse, children): _____

7. What is the highest level of education that you attained in your home country?
    a. Undergraduate degree
    b. Master's degree
    c. PhD
    d. Other: _____

8. Have you completed in any education in Canada?
    a. Yes
    b. No

If yes, please specify _____

9. What was your occupation in your home country? _____

10. How many years of experience did you have before coming to Canada? _____

11. What is your current employment situation?
    a. Unemployed
    b. Employed - Full-time
    c. Employed - Part-time

If you are presently employed, what is your job title? _____

12. What was your income in the past twelve months before taxes (Canadian dollars)?
    a. 0 - 30,000
    b. 30,000 - 49,999
    c. 50,000 - 79,999
    d. 80,000 - 109,999
    e. 110,000 - 169,000
    f. 170,000 +
    g. Prefer not to answer

13. Have you accessed employment services in Calgary?
    a. Yes
    b. No

If yes, which employment service(s) have you accessed?

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Appendix F: Interview Guide

Skilled Immigrants' Professional Identity and Settlement Experience in the Process of Establishing their Careers in Canada

Introductory comment

Thank you for your willingness to share your experiences with me. Our conversation today will focus on your experiences as a skilled immigrant in Canada. My questions are meant to help us construct a story about your life as a professional from the time you were back home until now, as well as into the future. Let's start with your professional life back home.

Career in Home Country

1. What kind of **work** did you do **back home**?
    Probes:
    - What were your responsibilities?
    - What degree of independence did you have in your job?
    - What did a typical day look like for you at work?

Immigration to Canada

2. Tell me about **your immigration** to Canada.
    Probes:
    - What led you to your decision to immigrate?
    - What did you think your life in Canada would be like before you immigrated?
    - What did you wish to accomplish in Canada as a professional?
    - What concerns did you have about your career in Canada?

Career in Canada

3. Tell me about your **experience looking for a job in your field**.
    Probes:
    - What has been your experience:
        Having your credentials validated
        Applying for jobs
        Interviewing
        Networking
    - What role have other people played in your job search?
    - What has looking for a job in your field been like compared to your expectations?

Identity

4. I would like to get a sense of **how you see yourself in relation to others in the broader society**, and how this may have changed as a result of your experiences as a skilled immigrant in Canada.

[Place two sheets of paper beside each other, in front of the participant]
Note: Each sheet contains a drawing of a ladder and the ladders on both sheets look the same.

Source: MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status

Instructions for the participant: Think of the ladder on the left as representing where people stand in your home country, and the ladder on the right as representing where people stand in Canada. At the top of the ladders are the people who are the best off in both societies– those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off – those who have the least money, least education, the least respected jobs, or no job. The higher up you are on the ladders, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

[Point to the ladder on the participant's left] Please place a lage "X" where you think you stood in relation to others in your home country.

[Point to the ladder on the participant's right] Please place a large "X" where you think you stand in relation to others in Canada.

Probes:

If the participant draws "Xs" on different rungs in the two ladders, ask:

- Tell me about your "Xs" being on different places in the two ladders.
- How do you feel about this change?
- How do you manage this change within yourself?

If the participant draws "Xs" on the same rungs in the two ladders, ask:

- Tell me about your "Xs" being in the same place in the two ladders.
- What is it like to see yourself in the same place in Canada that you were in your home country?

5. [Summarize the participant's narrative about her/his efforts to establish her/his career in Canada], has your **view of yourself changed during this process**? [If so] How?

Probes:

- Has your view of yourself as a professional changed? [If so] How?
- Has your view of yourself in relations with others changed? (e.g., spouse, children) [If so] How?

Career in the Future

6. Tell me about your **future career in Canada**?
    Probes:
        What do you hope to achieve?
        What concerns do you have about your career?

Closing Question

7. We have talked about your story and your experiences as a skilled immigrant in Canada. Now, when you think about your experiences as a whole, what thoughts or feelings come to mind?
    Probes:
        What thoughts or feelings come to mind about Canada?
        What thoughts or feelings come to mind about your decision to immigrate?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share to help me better understand your experience as a skilled immigrant in Canada?

Debrief

9. How was the interview for you?

Concluding comment

That concludes our conversation. Thank you for sharing your story with me. I feel that I learned a lot from you that will help me in my work. Please feel free to reach out to me by email if you have any questions or after thoughts about your participation.

Home Country

Instructions: Please place a large "X" where you think you stood in relation to others in your home country.

Canada

Instructions: Please place a large "X" where you think you stood in relation to others in Canada.