OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY: NARRATIVES OF ASIAN INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS’ EXPERIENCES

by

Mandy Hung

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Abstract

Although many immigrants in Canada are Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs), possessing substantial skills, credentials, and experience, a significant portion of these immigrants cannot practice in the field of their qualifications. The purpose of this research was to examine the narratives of how Asian ITPs experience their occupational identity through the transition in their career and immigration. Existing research on ITPs has examined issues such as barriers to professional employment, and the psychological and social effects of unemployment and underemployment, and has yet to look at the concept of occupational identity (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Basran & Zong, 1998; Lev-Wiesel & Kaufman, 2004; Valenta, 2008). On the other hand, studies that have focused on identity changes through work role transitions have yet to focus specifically on ITPs. Therefore, I interviewed eight Asian ITPs who identified as being unemployed or underemployed to explore their stories around the experience of their occupational identity. Using an adapted version of the life story interview, the participants and I co-constructed the narratives of their “career life” in a semi-structured interview format. This resulted in chronological summaries of each participant’s career life story, demonstrating the struggles and changes in the Asian ITPs’ narration of the self throughout their career. There were common themes pertaining to the transitional experience across the eight Asian ITPs’ narratives, including immigration to improve quality of life, from the peak of a career to the beginning again, level of agency and hope, and professional identity maintenance. The results are discussed in terms of its relevance and expansion from the literature, its limitations, along with its implications for counselling and future research directions.
Preface

The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board approved this research on June 6, 2011 (H11-00928).
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Stories of a taxi driver with a Masters in Engineering, a bank manager turned custodian, and a caregiver who was a doctor may be puzzling, but these lives are not as hard to imagine when it is revealed that the common thread is that they are all highly educated and experienced immigrants, or internationally trained professionals (ITPs). According to an article published by Statistics Canada in 2006, approximately half of the immigrant population (49% of women, 58% of men) between the ages 25 and 54 were skilled and professional immigrants (i.e., immigrants with university degrees, substantial training, credentials, and/or experience), whereas only 19% of Canadian-born men and 23% of women held university degrees (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008). Although the points system of the Immigration System increases the chances of skilled and professional workers to immigrate to Canada, this does not guarantee their success in securing employment and continuing their accomplishments in their own profession (Grant, 2008).

Galarneau and Morissette (2008) examined data from the 1991 and 2006 census data, which included data on established immigrants ($n=151,808$; i.e., arrived in Canada between 11 and 15 years ago) and recent immigrants ($n=230,200$; i.e., arrived in Canada between one and five years ago). There is an overrepresentation of recent (16-48%) and established (13-31%) immigrants with university degrees in law, accounting, engineering, and medicine working in jobs with low education requirements outnumbers; on the other hand, less than 10% Canadian-born university graduates from these disciplines work in occupations with low education requirements. These statistics demonstrate the extent to which internationally trained professionals are likely to become unemployed or underemployed in Canada, that is, working in lower-skilled positions that require less education or training, or working in a position that does
not fully utilize the skill set possessed (Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant & Nadin, 2007; McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Salaff, Greve, & Ping, 2002). Furthermore, research findings seem to indicate that underemployment is likely to occur regardless of whether they are a recent or an established immigrant – taking duration of stay in Canada out as a possible contributing factor to underemployment of ITPs.

Statistics and research findings only affirm my experience at an employment resource centre; throughout that work experience, there was always a presence of professional immigrants accessing our services as they try to re-establish their career in Canada. Each had their own story in the past and their own future to write. Some worked hard despite numerous obstacles towards returning to their profession, others struggled to present themselves as suitable candidates for entry-level positions in their field – stuck between being “overqualified” and lacking “Canadian work experience” or settling for survival jobs at fast food restaurants, cleaning services, grocery stores, etc. Many had a family to care for and feed. Behind our conversations about the hidden job market and job search techniques, I was often curious about how the ITPs were experiencing this transition.

Ever since my family and I immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong, I have witnessed, more often than not, other immigrant parents who chose to keep their business or job in their country of origin while their spouse and children lived and grew up here. Although my father travelled between Canada and Asia for the first few years, we were fortunate in that he was able to establish his own business here. That was my family’s story, but for those parents who did not (have to) make the choice of being away from their family, they either saved up enough to retire early, or they had to re-establish themselves in the Canadian workforce. Whenever a professional we knew ended up working in a low-status occupation, there was always a level of
sympathy and pity, and sometimes, also a level of avoidance. Situations that never used to be a problem were now filled with uncertainty. When we saw our banker working as a butcher at the grocery store, questions rose up. Do we ask him for the meat or do we avoid him and ask someone else? Do we address him formally like we always have, or do we call him by his first name? How do we interact now without egos getting hurt? These questions undoubtedly made the situation awkward for both parties. If this situation conjured up that many questions and uncomfortable feelings for us, I wondered how he must have felt in all those moments when he encountered someone from his past.

Conducting this research, I was aware that there are assumptions that I carry because of my collectivistic culture and upbringing. For example, I associate being a professional with having high earning power and potential, status, power, credibility, and “face” (a Chinese concept similar to prestige, honour, and respectability) – face for the self and for the family. Therefore, achieving professional status is something that is admired, praised, and boasted – a source of pride and identity. Along with the professional identity is the confidence in being able to take care of one’s family. Thus, I was interested in the internal experience of their self – the occupational identity – as ITPs went through this transition. How did they experience and answer the question “What do you do?” in a social setting? How did they see themselves amidst this shift in environment, status, and employability?

Research and statistics looking at ITPs consistently found a disproportionate number who were unemployed or underemployed (Basran & Zong, 1998; Galarneau & Morisette, 2008; Salaff et al., 2002). Both individual barriers (e.g., English proficiency) and structural barriers (e.g., professional standards; Grant, 2008) affected the difficulty ITPs encountered in trying to re-establish their professional career in Canada, and increased the chances for unemployment.
and underemployment (Lee & Westwood, 1996; McCoy & Mausch, 2007). Moreover, unemployment and underemployment have been shown to have negative effects on ITPs, such as an increase in anxiety and stress (Lev-Wiesel & Kaufmann, 2004) and the experience of negative feelings like hurt, frustration, and resentment (Grant & Nadin, 2007), and poor psychological health (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Furthermore, when ITPs’ occupational identity and qualifications were not recognized by others such as employers, it was found to be related to ITPs’ avoidance and isolation from other co-workers (Valenta, 2008), threatened self-concept (Lee & Westwood, 1996), and perceived discrimination (Grant & Nadin, 2007).

The transition between a high to low status work role is likely to be a significant change, and socialization researchers would argue that changes in one’s career are accompanied by changes in identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Nicholson (1984) developed a theory of work role transitions to examine the factors that affect personal and work role change processes; this theory was adapted to the unique circumstances of migrants’ career adjustment (Tharmaseelan, 2008). Both versions posited that change occurs when there is a discrepancy between one’s sense of identity and the work role, and that change can occur in the individual or in the work role to achieve a sense of consistency. Work role transitions accompanied by changes in identity have been studied in terms of medical students from the beginning to the end of their residency (Pratt, Rockman, & Kaufmann, 2006), junior consultants and investment bankers transitioning into a project management role (Ibarra, 1999), disengagement from past work roles and self-employment success (Niessen, Binnewies, & Rank, 2010), and retirement (Teuscher, 2010). However, most of these studies on the experience of work role transitions and occupational identity focused on upward or lateral career movements, which is less likely the case for immigrants, especially ITPs. There has been a gap in the literature regarding ITPs’ lived
experience of their occupational identity in an immigration-related career change. Therefore, my research question was to explore how Asian unemployed and underemployed ITPs experienced and understood their occupational identity through the immigration transition process.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Occupational Identity

Occupation and Identity

While each person’s self-concept is composed of many different aspects (i.e., a person may identify herself as a mother, a liberal, an accountant, and an athlete), certain facets may be more dominant or important than others. Information derived from how we see ourselves and how others see us helps us form and construct our identities in a social negotiation process; the unique combination and variations of identities unite to form our self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Occupation is a particular dimension that often has a strong influence on self-definition (Amundson, 1994; Rudman & Dennhardt, 2008; Valenta, 2008). The workplace is a social environment where identities can be formed and reaffirmed (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). For example, being hired for a position that you feel you are qualified for and are congruent with can be a source of affirmation – other people’s perception of you matches your perception of yourself.

Work can also be a place where people form new conceptions of the self as they grow and develop, are given new responsibilities, and take on new roles (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). In addition, as adults, a person’s occupation is informative for both the individual and for others. When adults are in the process of getting to know each other, the topic of work often comes up. Stating your occupation can be a way of establishing your identity, and at the same time, asking about another person’s occupation can help you gather and infer a wealth of information about him/her. Occupation may speak to multiple aspects of the self – achievements, expectations, goals, values, roles, preferences, perspectives, etc. – therefore, rather
than looking at the *relationship* between occupation and identity separately, these concepts are merged to form ‘occupational identity’ (Rudmann & Dennhardt, 2008).

**Occupational Identity Defined**

Occupational identity, defined as a combination of “who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one’s history of participation… [and] serves both as a means of self-definition and as a blueprint for upcoming actions” (Kielhofner, 2002, p. 120), can be one aspect that would be particularly pertinent for a professional’s self-concept. Unruh, Versnel, and Kerr (2002) described occupational identity to be:

> a fabric of occupational choices that conveys something about who a person is at particular points in his or her life. Occupational identity does not convey the whole of an individual but it is a core concept of the person as an occupational being. (p. 12)

Both sets of definitions converge on the idea of occupational identity as an amalgamation of aspects negotiated between the individual and the environment; hence, changes to the individual or changes in the environment entails changes to the occupational identity. And for ITPs, not only are they experiencing change in terms of geography, relationships, and culture, they may also experiencing change in terms of resources (e.g., language, support networks, confidence, etc.), and in terms of career (e.g., competency, expectations, job prospects, job duties, job title, industry, status, financial stability, etc.).

**Culture and Career**

The experience and impact of career transitions will likely be contingent on how a person perceives his/her own career and the concept of career in general. The concept and experience of career can have fundamentally different meanings depending on a person’s values. The idea that
people should “do what they love” and “follow your bliss” for work is a largely Western concept (Henderson & Cha, 2005). It has been long recognized that the majority of career development theories and models have been constructed within the Western, individualistic context and may not be generalized to other cultures, most notably, collectivistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994; Pekerti, 2008). Therefore, addressing cultural differences in the meaning of career was necessary to examine and discuss the career transition of Asian ITPs.

Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures and Career

Collectivistic and individualistic cultures have often been associated with non-Western and Western cultures, respectively, with key differences in people’s values, goals, and self-definition (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Markus and Kitayama (1991) reviewed literature on self-construals in order to examine and reconcile seemingly inconsistent empirical findings around cognition, emotion, and motivation. The researchers presented literature to demonstrate differences between an independent and interdependent view of the self. An independent construal of the self was described to be a norm for Western, individualistic cultures, where the “view of the self derives from a belief in the wholeness and uniqueness of each person’s configuration of internal attributes” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226), and the goal is to become an autonomous person to promote one’s own goals. Contrarily, an interdependent construal of the self was described to be a norm of non-Western, collectivistic cultures, where the view of the self is “most meaningful and complete when it is cast in the appropriate social relationship… [and] people are motivated to find a way to fit in with relevant others, to fulfill and create obligation” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227), and the goal is to become an interdependent person in various relationships to promote others’ goals. Along with
independent and interdependent self-construals, individualistic and collectivistic cultural norms create distinctive implications on the notion and experience of career. In individualistic cultures, power distances tend to be small, emphasizing the importance of equality where individuals all have the right to speak their minds. Power distances tend to be larger in collectivistic cultures, creating hierarchical structures where people are expected to defer to their superiors. A subordinate who disagrees with a superior would disrupt harmony, and would essentially be acting inappropriately according to the subordinate’s role. Therefore, immigrants from collectivistic cultures could encounter difficulties interacting with individualistic others at work (Mak et al., 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Furthermore, individualistic cultures have been related to the concept of a “boundaryless career”. A boundaryless career has several meanings, but each meaning converges on the independence from the traditional, organizational careers. Individuals are depicted to be autonomous, with freedom and control to choose their career path, and are unlikely to stay in one organization for the duration of their career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Pekerti, 2008). This perspective is contrasted with the “bounded career”, more commonly seen in collectivistic cultures, where “getting along meant doing what the firm wanted; and getting ahead meant being grateful for the opportunities the firm brought your way” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 4), which seems to be relatively consistent with the cultural norms of collectivistic societies. Bounded careers have also been recognized in marginalized groups such as racial/ethnic minorities. Such individuals tend to be bounded by a number of factors, such as physical, cultural, institutional, and subjective boundaries (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005).
Cultural Implications on Achievement and Career

With an increased understanding of cultural differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, researchers examined the implications of such differences on aspects such as academic achievement (Dundes, Cho, & Kwak, 2009; Sue & Okazaki, 2009), career choice (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005), career commitment (Noordin, Williams, & Zimmer, 2002), and career happiness (Henderson & Chan, 2005).

Career paths often follow educational pursuits. A phenomenon that has emerged in North America is the apparent academic success of Asian Americans compared to other ethnic groups (Sue & Okazaki, 2009). After a review of the literature, Sue and Okazaki concluded that cultural values do not seem to be sufficient in explaining the difference in academic achievements. Instead, the researchers attributed the difference to the relative functionalism of academic success for Asian Americans. More specifically, Sue and Okazaki theorized that Asian Americans’ pursuit towards educational successes of is indicative of the lack of perceived or experienced upward mobility in careers unrelated to education. Similarly, Dundes and colleagues (2009) studied factors behind educational and career choices by conducting quantitative online surveys to 116 White and East Asian students in the United States. They found that more Asian (41%) than White (9%) participants prioritized prestige, while more White participants (28%) prioritized happiness in selecting a college. The researchers related such findings with the social discrimination and barriers that first-generation immigrants experienced in their career, that Asian Americans then associate educational achievement as a means for upward social mobility. In addition, academic achievement was also described to be a source of pride or shame for the family. Therefore, Dundes et al. (2009) asserted that the search for career fit is more aligned with individualistic rather than collectivistic cultures.
Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on race/ethnicity differences in career choice. A total of 16 relevant quantitative articles comparing two or more racial groups on their decision making around career aspirations, perception of barriers and opportunities, and exploration-related tasks, for a total of 19,611 participants. In terms of career expectations and perceptions of opportunities and barriers, an inclusion of six studies found a significant overall mean to indicate that racial/ethnic minority participants perceived fewer opportunities and greater barriers to their career than White participants. On the other hand, no significant differences were found between race/ethnicities in the participants’ career aspirations or decision-making attitudes across four studies. Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) suggested the need for career counsellors to attend to the barriers that racial minorities perceive and experience in their careers.

**Internationally Trained Professionals Unemployment and Underemployment**

In general, unemployment and underemployment have been found to be related to negative effects such as stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and a loss of identity (Guidon & Smith, 2002). There have been studies examining the issue of unemployment and underemployment of immigrants to make sense of the disconnection between labour shortages, wealth of foreign-trained immigrants, and the employment barriers such immigrants are facing (Basran & Zong, 1998; Salaff et al., 2002). Various researchers have also investigated the factors that lead ITPs to become unemployed and underemployed, and the psychological and emotional effects (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Valenta, 2008).
**Structural and Individual Barriers**

Individual and structural barriers that prevent many ITPs from practicing in their own profession often lead to unemployment and underemployment. ITPs often have to struggle to establish themselves in the workforce as the qualifications, skills, and knowledge at the point of immigration may be insufficient to be deemed qualified amongst a pool of job applicants. Basran and Zong (1998) conducted a quantitative survey in Vancouver, B.C. on 404 visible minority ITPs, examining aspects such as their credentials, current and past work experience, and difficulties or barriers to accessing professional work in Canada. Of the participants, 79% indicated they experienced downward mobility (i.e., transitioning from a high to low skilled occupation), and 50% were employed in a low-status, non-professional occupations. This also meant that 70% of the participants earned less than $30,000 a year after taxes or none at all. Moreover, devaluation of their credentials, and discrimination were themes that emerged from ITPs’ perception of systemic barriers to their career.

Salaff et al.’s (2002) qualitative interviews with 32 professionally or technically skilled immigrant couples from China found individual and structural barriers to their ability to secure employment in Toronto. The cases the researchers presented demonstrated that individual barriers interacted with situational and structural barriers. Individual factors such as English proficiency, age, and educational degree may or may not hinder an immigrant’s eligibility, depending on elements like labour market demands, employer’s perception of age and learning, and employer’s familiarity with the educational institution. Structural factors such as expectations set up by employers, regulated versus non-regulated professions, and connections and access to networking opportunities were some of the barriers that ITPs encounter in their job search. Therefore, transferability of credentials, family obligations, Canadian experience
requirement, financial circumstances, along with labour market demands can steer ITPs into underemployment (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Grant & Nadin, 2007).

Moreover, though skilled immigrants may consider these low-skilled jobs to be a temporary, survival job, the same problems that led to this choice may keep them there as well. Unfortunately, the longer one stays in a survival job, the harder it is to get out. It comes to a point where an ITP has gained “Canadian work experience”, but their past technical skills and knowledge may be questioned as to the relevancy in today’s changing world of technology. Some professional immigrants understand the difficulty in re-entering into their profession after immigration, and thus choose to re-establish their career though entry-level administrative work unattached to barriers such as credentials. However, “many immigrants encounter an invisible barrier: a kind of ‘glass wall’ that keeps them on the outside” (McCoy & Masuch, 2007, p. 190). Research has also indicated that many skilled immigrants who have been unable to secure employment perceive discrimination from employers as one of the reasons for their employment status (Basran & Zong, 1998). Therefore, it is apparent that unemployment and underemployment occurs despite adapted expectations and goals for job targets.

**Effects of Unemployment and Underemployment**

Unemployment and underemployment for skilled and highly-educated immigrants can be a frustrating, disconcerting, and stressful experience, juggling the tasks of adapting to a different community, culture, and environment while learning about Canadian employers’ hiring practices and norms. The pressure, expectation, and hopes of obtaining employment at a similar professional level can be substantial. Being unemployed or underemployed can lead to negative effects on one’s psychological and emotional well-being, self-concept, and ability to adapt for
immigrants (Amundson, 1994; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Ghidina, 1992; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Lev-Wiesel & Kaufman, 2004; Valenta, 2008).

Within the process of job search, through the barriers encountered and time passed, is an increased likelihood that ITPs may experience negative effects on their emotional and psychological well-being. In 2004, Lev-Wiesel and Kaufman conducted a quantitative exploratory study of 132 highly educated, unemployed immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel. They administered five questionnaires: the State Anxiety Questionnaire, Potency Scale, Perceived Social Support Scale, ENRICH Scale for Marital Quality – Hebrew version, and demographic variables. A significant positive correlation was found between the duration of unemployment and state anxiety. ITPs encountered additional stress and pressure from the family to find a job and provide for the family. In addition, the results showed that although support from family and friends helped unemployed immigrants in terms of their anxiety levels, when unemployment extended beyond six months, that same support from friends and family was related to a greater sense of anxiety and stress. The researchers posited that along with the support is a sense of obligation and responsibility to care of the friends and family; the continuation of unemployment led immigrants to feel guilt and greater stress. These results seemed to indicate that the responsibility and pressure to provide for one’s family, along with short-term or long-term unemployment can be stress and anxiety provoking for ITPs.

Moreover, when facing difficulties in receiving recognition for their credentials and work experience from employers, skilled immigrants have been shown to experience a number of emotions. In a quantitative study, Grant and Nadin (2007) used questionnaires to examine the experiences of 180 skilled immigrants who were experiencing credentialing problems. The identified emotions included feeling disappointed, sad, bad, stressed, hurt, frustrated,
discouraged, angry, bitter, and resentful (Grant & Nadin, 2007). Aycan and Berry (1996) conducted a quantitative study on employment experiences and immigrants’ psychological well-being and adaptation to Canada with 110 Turkish immigrants in Montreal. Employment-related experiences were represented by measures of status loss, status mobility, duration of unemployment, and employment status. They found intercorrelations between poor psychological health (i.e., acculturative stress, self-concept, and alienation) and psychological, socio-cultural, and economic adaptation. Immigrants who experienced greater status loss were more likely to be unsatisfied with what they were able to accomplish economically and with their life in Canada. Therefore, research on unemployment and underemployment indicated that the experience may be unsettling for immigrants, creating negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, stress, alienation, dissatisfaction, and feelings of inadequacy (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Grant & Nadin, 2007).

Identity and Cultural Integration and Inclusion

Because collectivistic cultures such as Asian cultures typically produce hierarchically structured societies, ITPs’ professional occupation often significantly increased their status and power; thus, their occupational identity will likely be a prominent part of how they define themselves (Mak et al, 1994). However, what the ITP has to offer versus what the employers accept is often incongruent for job seeking ITPs. Professional associations and/or employers may devalue and may not recognize the knowledge, years of experience, skills, education, and training that ITPs have acquired in their country of origin (Basran & Zong, 1998; Salaff et al., 2002). The dissonance and lack of recognition of an occupational identity a person has associated with him/herself would likely be disconcerting (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Lev-Wiesel & Kaufman, 2004; Valenta, 2008). Therefore, when others do not recognize that occupational
identity, it is possible that aspects such as confidence and self-esteem suffer. Lee and Westwood’s (1996) theoretical article examined the various career-related psychological impacts professional immigrants experience in order to present a self-validation model to understand stress factors as well as adaptation strategies. When employers do not recognize a skilled immigrant’s foreign credentials and experiences, the inability to practice within one’s own profession may mean a loss of a dominant identity. Thus, Lee and Westwood (1996) posited that professional immigrant workers experiencing acculturation issues may also experience a threatened self-concept.

In Valenta’s (2008) study, qualitative interviews were conducted with 43 immigrants in Norway to examine the identity affirmation process in workplaces as a form of social integration of these first generation immigrants. Valenta (2008) found that the lack of recognition and the need to work in a lower-skilled job drove some ITPs to avoid socializing with co-workers, isolating themselves from being included or integrating with the culture that they are in. In addition, the immigrants who went through a substantial loss in terms of occupation and class displacement and of status felt the most frustrated with their circumstances (Valenta, 2008). Similarly, in Aycan and Berry’s (1996) study, immigrants experiencing greater loss in status indicated that they felt less satisfaction with their lives in Canada. The disconnect between who they were and, how they are perceived now may be alienating, causing some immigrants to disengage from others; thus, making the adaptation and acculturation process harder (Aycan & Berry 1996).

Moreover, Valenta (2008) found that low status jobs often meant that the immigrant workers in Norway lacked consistent, social contact and interactions with others; therefore, they were often void of the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and to integrate with the
culture and society. The participants also revealed that the lack of social contact with other Norwegian colleagues was hard to interpret at times, as they were unsure if it was due to the nature of the work they are in, or if it was due to their ethnicity. Valenta (2008) argued that doubts like these heightened the professional immigrant’s sensitivity to the possibility of being devalued by others. As the duration of unemployment increases, immigrants may become more likely to experience acculturative stress, negative self-concept, alienation from society, and adaptation difficulties. This is consistent with Grant and Nadin’s (2008) finding that skilled immigrants’ journey into immigration were often met with multiple barriers inhibiting them from acquiring success in their profession; such obstacles made their adjustment process more difficult. Furthermore, Grant and Nadin (2007) found that skilled immigrants’ difficulty in finding employment were attributed to discrimination from Canadian employers, thus decreasing the development of a strong Canadian national identity.

**Work Role Transitions**

In today’s world of work, an individual’s career is dynamic, changing with promotions, company restructures, labour market and economic shifts, technological advances, and personal growth and developments. A frequently cited statistic is that a person changes jobs on average, five to seven times in a lifetime. Although often attributed to collecting this data, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the United States Department of Labour denied it and clarified that the lack of a unified definition for “career change” makes such a task impossible (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010a). Nevertheless, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979, a longitudinal study by BLS, found that the 9,964 baby boomers surveyed held on average eleven jobs between the ages of 18 and 44 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010b). The prevalence of work role transitions is evident. Such transitions refers to “any change in employment status and any major
change in job content (Nicholson, 1984, p. 173), and could include changing careers, being promoted, being laid off, entering a profession, retiring, working for a different company, becoming self-employed, etc. Thus, every worker will experience work role transitions from the beginning to the end of their career.

In the context of work role transitions for an ITP, it is possible that previous identities may no longer be sustained, and that new ones will be created. Work role transitions have been an area of study within the fields of career development, occupational therapy, occupational and organizational psychology, and counselling psychology. More specifically, work role transitions have been studied in terms of disengagement with a past work role (Niessen et al., 2010), provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999), and constructing a professional identity (Pratt et al., 2006).

Theories and models of work role transitions include Nicholson’s (1984) theory of work role transitions, Tharmaseelan’s (2008) adaptation of Nicholson’s theory to fit migrants’ adjustment to career, and Ibarra and Barbulescu’s (2010) process model for narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. Each piece of research contributed to understanding work role transitions in general, and the process in which ITPs may experience and undergo their work role transition across careers, cultures, and countries.

**Theories of Work Role Transition**

Nicholson (1984) developed a theory of work role transitions to fill the gap in understanding “the experience and psychological consequences of work role changes” (p. 173) at the time. The theory addresses how change and stability are interrelated, and how the interaction between individuals and social systems affects both. There are four categories of predictor variables: role requirements, motivational orientations, prior occupational socialization, and induction-socialization processes. Role requirements pertain to the options and novelty in the
repertoire of requirements between roles. Motivational orientations refer to the individual’s psychological disposition and motives, and desire for feedback and/or control. Prior occupational socialization looks at if there is an upward or downward shift in level of discretion from the previous work role, and the novelty of the new role’s demands. Finally, the induction-socialization processes involve the way the current organization inducts or socializes the individual into adjusting to the new role. Nicholson hypothesized that personal development is more likely when the induction-socialization processes are sequential, serial, and involve divestiture, whereas role development is more likely when the processes are random, disjunctive, and involve investiture (Tharmaseelan, 2008). The combinations of predictor variables determine the mode of adjustment workers can experience in their work role transition: replication, absorption, determination, and exploration – each mode is characterized by high or low degrees of personal and role development. This theory provided a perspective to predict and understand the possibilities of changes that could occur when an individual’s occupational identity, skills, and knowledge does not match the requirements of a new work role.

Tharmaseelan (2008) felt that Nicholson’s (1984) theory of work role transitions needed to include cultural socialization to fit immigrants’ work role transitions. In addition, Tharmaseelan (2008) defined career as an individual’s property, where career success was each individual’s responsibility. Therefore, Nicholson’s (1984) four modes of adjustment were redefined as “the state of individuals’ adjustment to the new work environment with respect to their previous experiences and expertise” (Tharmaseelan, 2008, p. 13). Work role novelty and discretion modes of adjustment to career were replaced with the extent of effort made towards the new work environment, and the usefulness of prior knowledge, skills and habits in the new work environment, respectively. Hence, replication was characterized by low efforts made and
usefulness of prior skills, absorption by low efforts made and high usefulness of prior skills, determination by high efforts made and low usefulness of prior skills, and exploration by high efforts made and usefulness of prior skills.

Tharmaseelan’s (2008) adapted model was tested with 221 Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand using quantitative questionnaires that looked at mode of adjustment to career, career success, and career satisfaction. The results indicated that there was no relationship between acculturation strategies and career outcomes. On the other hand, significant positive correlations were found for both modes of adjustment to career with career success and satisfaction. Therefore, given that external factors such as labour market demands are favourable, the efforts immigrants made as well as the usefulness of their skills and knowledge had a positive effect on their employment outcomes. Tharmaseelan (2008) thus predicted that immigrants who were experiencing occupational success and satisfaction would likely remain and contribute to their community, whereas others experiencing less success and satisfaction may decide to return to their home country, or stay feeling disappointed and being underemployed.

While Nicholson’s (1984) theory neglected the cross-cultural adjustment element that ITPs experience, Tharmaseelan’s (2008) adaptation was able to address the unique career transition immigration creates. However, because Tharmaseelan’s participants were from a general pool of immigrants, it is not clear if the effects and experiences would be directly related to ITPs’ experiences. In addition, the quantitative nature restricted the depth of understanding in the immigrants’ experiences, and the scope of the study did not address immigrants’ occupational identity.
Occupational Identity Deconstruction

Coming from organizational psychology, Niessen and her colleagues (2010) studied the relationship between disengagement from the prior work role and adaptation into the current work role. The researchers came from the perspective that having fit between the person and environment would result in increased satisfaction, performance, and commitment on the job. Thus, they hypothesized that: 1) psychological attachment to a past work role would be negatively correlated with learning, fit, and task performance in the new work role; and 2) that disengagement with the past work role would attenuate the negative relationship between psychological attachment to a past work role and learning, fit, and task performance in the new work role. This was a longitudinal study, 131 participants responded to three questionnaires administered at one-month intervals. All respondents were transitioning into self-employment for the first time, with the business being in operation for maximum two years. The results supported the hypotheses that psychological attachment to a past work role was negatively related to learning and fit with the new work role, while disengagement moderated that negative relationship.

Occupational Identity Negotiation and Construction

As Niessen et al. (2010) found, having more psychological attachment to a past than current work role identity was an incongruence that was unlikely to co-exist with growth and success in that current occupation. The incongruence may be from the skills an ITP possesses versus the skills used in a job, and how others perceive the low-skilled, low-status occupation versus how the ITP would like to be perceived as a worker. For example, Ghidina’s (1992) in-depth interviews of 27 custodians in universities, high schools, and elementary schools of the United States provided a lens into the struggles of managing how they perceived their occupation
as well as how others perceive them to achieve recognition and maintain a positive sense of self for working in low-status occupations. Ghidina (1992) found that certain aspects of their job were embraced, such as the pleasant relationships established with other students and staff, while independence and autonomy was exercised by regaining control over behaviours disrespectful to their profession. This demonstrated how workers in a low-status occupation can work to negotiate their identity through the projection of the self and how that is perceived by others – as there may be discrepancies that could be damaging to the self. In comparison, the situation for ITPs seems to be more complex than the custodians in Ghidina’s (1992) study, since ITPs’ professional background likely creates more dissonance from low-status or low-skilled occupations. Therefore, an ITP may be working to manage not only the conflict between his/her own versus other people’s perception of the ITP, but also the conflict between the ITP’s perception of the self versus the job.

According to Ibarra (1999), people tend to test and try on “provisional selves” (p. 764) before taking on a new identity. The researcher conducted qualitative interviews to study the career transitions of 34 junior professionals into technical and managerial positions in investment banking and management consulting firms. From an inductive, grounded theory development process, three basic tasks in the process of transition into senior roles emerged from the interviews: observation, experimentation, and evaluation. The trend observed was that participants first began by identifying and observing role models who were successful in that particular work role, and who possessed identities that they felt matched their own “skills, preferences, inclinations, or values” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 774). Then, they experimented with provisional selves through different strategies, imitation strategies is where all or some characteristics of their role model are emulated, and true-to-self strategies, where certain
characteristics congruent to the self are incorporated. Lastly, experimentation with these provisional selves were evaluated through internal and external feedback. At this last stage, the participants reported using the internal and external feedback to make decisions in terms of adjustments to reduce discrepancies for their own aspirations for who they want to be, and for others’ perceptions. This research demonstrated that “identities crafted in the early stages of adaptation are provisional constructions that must be revised with experience” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 783).

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) further expanded Ibarra’s (1999) concept of provisional identities in a proposed process model where narratives are used to negotiate and construct occupational identities in macro work role transitions. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) argued that macro work role transitions inherently involved ruptures and discontinuity. As with most other work role transition research and theories, the researchers saw incongruence and identity violations as opportunities for identity (re)construction (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984; Niessen et al., 2010; Pratt et al., 2006; Tharmaseelan, 2008). The researchers combined work role transitions as well as narrative research to arrive at a model where “people draw from personal narrative repertoires to accomplish their identity goals” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 136). Thus, the model posits that people test out and continue to revise identity narratives in these macro work role transitions until they arrive at a narrative that fits for both their own and others’ perceptions of who they are.

Pratt and colleagues (2006) further contributed to the understanding of identity construction process with their study on medical students’ process of constructing their professional identity as they go through their residency. In this longitudinal, qualitative study, the researchers conducted interviews with 29 medical residents in primary care, surgery, and
radiology. Four interviews spread over the time the medical residents began their first year at 0 months, 6-8 months in, 12 months in, and the end of their residency. They found that “identity construction is triggered by work identity violations” (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 235), that is, when there was incongruence between what the individual did versus who they were. These could range from minor violations (e.g., needing to take care of patients’ social needs as well as medical needs) to major violations that may cause identity devaluation (e.g., doing mainly paperwork and menial tasks, which led surgery residents to question their identity as surgeons). To resolve these discrepancies, the medical residents engaged in enriching, patching, or splinting identity customization processes. Identity enriching involved deepening their understanding of their professional identity, identity patching was the integration of two types of identity to create a more complete identity, and identity splinting used prior identities (e.g., student) to support the current, less developed and robust identity (e.g., radiology resident or physician). In addition to identity customization processes, validation reinforced identities in the form of external feedback, and role models. Similar to Ibarra’s (1999) basic task of observing role models, the medical residents surveyed here chose their role models based on “those physicians whose characteristics matched the perceptions of their professional identity” (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 251). Pratt et al. (2006) concluded that work-identity integrity violations can be distressing, but rather than inventing a completely new identity, strategies such as enriching, patching, and splinting can be used to help select elements individuals prefer to lessen the dissonance.

Both Pratt et al. (2006) and Ibarra’s (1999) studies contributed to the understanding of how occupational identities may shift and may be constructed in the face of work role transitions. To become a professional often requires a substantial investment in time and effort through education, training, and work experience; thus, an individual’s occupation often has a strong
contribution to our sense of identity. Pratt et al.’s (2006) study demonstrated the long and gruelling process medical residents go through in the construction of their professional identity. Therefore, the transition from working in a high-status, professional position, to working in a low-status and low-skilled position will likely be a significant change, especially for those who are invested and attached to their professional occupation (Guidon & Smith, 2002). Moreover, as Ruddman and Dennhardt (2008) argued, there is a need to consider cultural influences on the construction of occupational identities. Although occupations may be a universal phenomenon, occupational identities may be experienced, expressed, understood, and addressed differently across different cultures.

An interesting finding from Ibarra’s (1999) study on provisional identities is that positive external feedback led to “gradual changes in identity because people replicate the behaviours that win them approval… [whereas] negative external feedback… did not consistently motivate a change” (p. 781). The inconsistency was mediated by the quality of affective relationship between feedback giver and receiver. That is, when the relationship is positive, negative external feedback motivated changes in people’s identity, whereas negative relationships did not have the motivating effect. Given Valenta’s (2008) finding that ITPs lacked consistent social contact with colleagues, it is uncertain as to how ITPs may receive negative external feedback, and if it motivates changes to their occupational identity. Applying Niessen et al.’s (2010) finding to my research interest, it is possible that ITPs’ who are psychologically attached to their professional occupational identity would experience more difficulty adapting to new work roles in Canada compared to ITPs who are able to psychologically disengage from their professional identity.
Research Problem

The literature reviewed here indicated that there are immigrant professionals who struggle to establish themselves professionally because of multiple barriers such as language, lack of Canadian work experience, and credentials (Ghidina, 1992). Therefore, many ITPs end up working in jobs that are lower-skilled and lower-status than what their skills and experience warrant (Basran & Zong, 1998; Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Grant, 2008; Salaff, et al., 2002). Not only are the immigrants facing the devaluation of their credentials and experience and struggling to adapt to a different working environment, they are likely to be experiencing class displacement as well. The combination of a financial restrictions and being subjected to lower-skilled and lower-status occupations when one is qualified and capable of professional occupations may lead to feelings of bitterness. Hence, the devaluation of an immigrant’s professional identity may lead to lowered self-esteem, feeling alienated, and feeling isolated (Aycan & Berry, 1996).

While the literature on ITPs attended to issues around barriers to employment, the emotional impact of unemployment or underemployment, and often in a quantitative manner, the literature has not explored the topic of occupational identity. At the same time, while research on work role transitions have focused on the deconstruction (Niessen et al., 2010), negotiation (Ghidina, 1992; Ibarra, 1999), and construction of identities (Pratt et al., 2006), none of the research has combined the elements of striving for qualitative understanding of ITPs, occupational identity, and work role transition. Therefore, my research question was to explore how Asian unemployed and underemployed ITPs experienced and understood their occupational identity through the immigration transition process.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Previous research on the underemployment and unemployment of ITPs were often conducted through quantitative research methods, and researchers were able to identify and establish the difficulties that ITPs faced upon immigration in regards to employment (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant, 2008; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Lev-Wiesel & Kaufman, 2004; Niessen et al., 2010; Tharmaseelan, 2008). However, I hoped to go beyond establishing the problem and into understanding the issue from the participants’ perspective. Qualitative, exploratory methods enable people from a marginalized population to voice their experiences. Therefore, for my research, I chose a qualitative method to enable the Asian ITPs to express their perceptions and experiences around their occupational identity in their own words and voice.

Within the various qualitative research methods, I used a narrative approach to gather and understand ITPs’ stories of their identity embedded within the realm of career. This method of inquiring into people’s lived experiences has been applied across a range of domains in the social sciences, such as education, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, and anthropology (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narrative research enables “meaning-making” (Riessman, 2008, p. 10) – bringing to the surface the significance of the experiences as the narrator understands and interprets it. Narrative analysis’ emphasis is on the narrator, allowing the participants’ stories to speak for themselves, which contrasts with methods that focus on the researcher, fitting participants’ responses to a pre-conceived framework dictated by the hypothesis, past research, or theories.

Identities can be “open-ended” (Martin, 1995, The Identity Narrative section, para 2), and is constructed and established in the context of the Other; people choose the identity narratives they tell and do not tell. Therefore, the use of narrative inquiry into the stories around ITPs’
experience of their occupational identity was an opportunity to understand them as they chose to understand it, co-construct it, and be understood by it. Moreover, as Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) proposed, the work role transition conditions that increase prevalence for narrative identity work seem to be similar to the conditions that ITPs experience, that is, work role transitions that are socially undesirable, atypical, drastic, involve high stakes, and evoke concern from others. This gave reason to believe that ITPs may be more motivated to create narratives to explain for themselves and others their career transition with immigration. Furthermore, a “good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13); thus, it was my intention that using a narrative analysis would stimulate insight from the ITPs’ experiences – for both readers and ITPs themselves.

**Participant Recruitment Process**

The purposive sampling method was utilized for this study; potential participants for this study were recruited through community employment centres around the Greater Vancouver region, and social networking sites. The suitability criteria for this research included ITPs who: held technical and professional degrees and positions in countries outside of Canada, were currently unemployed or underemployed, identified as Asian in ethnicity, and were living in the Lower Mainland. In addition, because of the narrative nature of the study and the interviews, the participant’s English level was a restriction in suitability. The preference for participants with English levels of intermediate and above ensured that their experiences would be clearly communicated and understood. The recruitment goal was according to a search of recent narrative research studies, which showed that a typical sample size was between 5 and 12 participants.
In order to recruit Asian ITPs, I broadcasted the research volunteer opportunity advertisement at employment centres and immigrant service providers, as well as via e-mail and social networking sites. The characteristics of participants required in this research were listed on the advertisement, along with information specifying that I am a Counselling Psychology graduate student at the University of British Columbia, conducting this research under my supervisor, Dr. Norman Amundson, and that the purpose of my study was to explore Asian ITPs’ experience of their occupational identity. My contact information was listed, and those interested were directed to leave their contact information (i.e., name, phone number and/or e-mail address) by phone or e-mail to inquire for further information about the study.

Potential participants who indicated their interest in participating in the study were contacted initially by telephone. The initial contact served as a screening for participants’ suitability, as well as to provide further information regarding the study. They were informed that the study pertained to the experience of occupational identity of Asian ITPs. The participants were also informed that the study consisted of two separate interviews that will last approximately one to two hours, the interview will be recorded (audio only) – and that the recordings will be kept strictly confidential, where only the researcher and supervisor have access. I also mentioned that there is minimal foreseeable risk from participating in the research. The benefits of their participation were highlighted as an opportunity for their voice to be heard, to describe the experiences they have gone through or are experiencing currently, and that they will be receiving remuneration of $20 per interview. In addition, the use of narrative research may help participants gain understanding of and insight into their experiences through the process of re-telling or re-writing their stories (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). Participants were informed that their participation is
strictly voluntary – and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. After the potential participants understood the background information about the research as well as what their participation entails, I asked for verification of their participation. For those potential participants who agreed to participate in the study, a convenient meeting time to conduct the interviews was coordinated. The interviews were held either at UBC or at the participant’s home.

To facilitate the quality, focus, and efficiency of the interview, I encouraged participants to take some time before our meeting to reflect on their career journey. In particular, participants were asked to think about when they considered their career to have started. And since that time, what were some significant events that have influenced their career path; as well as how they conceptualized themselves as a worker differently in each stage of their career. This verbal introduction over the phone was reinforced by an e-mail. The e-mail was a confirmation of our scheduled meeting date, time, and place, as well as a reminder of the three points for consideration mentioned above (see Appendix A). Eleven people expressed interest in participating in my research, due to lack of availabilities and concerns over the use of audio recording, eight participants were recruited and interviewed.

**Participant Demographics**

The eight participants included four males and four females. The participants originated from four out of the five Asian regions: East, South-East, South-Central, and West. They represented professionals from a range of occupations, including Engineering, Education, Business, and Accounting. In terms of education, all participants had at least a Bachelor’s degree, most had a Masters degree. Two out of the eight participants’ work revolved mainly around research after their graduate studies while the remaining participants had a range of 3-20
years of professional work experience prior to immigration. Two participants were single at the
time of immigration while six participants immigrated to Canada with family. Currently, two
participants have begun or have already established themselves in another profession, three
participants identified as being underemployed or working in a transition job, while three
participants are unemployed or actively looking for work. The participants ranged in the number
of years since immigrating and moving to Canada, from one to twenty-two years.

Diversity and Ethical Considerations

Because I recruited from employment centres, it was important to ensure that the
participants understood that what they disclosed to me would not be shared with their case
managers. At the same time, their agreement to participate or not participate would not affect the
service they received from the employment centre staff, nor will it increase or decrease their
chances of obtaining employment. Their voluntary participation were explained clearly both
during an initial telephone screening, on the informed consent form, and in the verbal review of
the informed consent during the first interview.

Another ethical concern in my research was the possibility of provoking strong emotions
from the participants through the interview process. It was imperative that participants were not
harmed in the process of the research study, and for the participants to have gained more benefits
through their participation than costs. In addition, because critical information can surface
within an exploratory technique, providing participants with the time and opportunity to speak
out and reveal their thoughts and feelings may enable participants to connect to the necessary
people and resources that may be able to help them in their moment of darkness (Borgen &
Maglio, 2007). Therefore, participants were debriefed fully regarding their experience of
participating in the study, they were also given a list of resources should they feel the need to
further explore things that may have come up from this experience (e.g., counselling services, employment services, etc.).

**Narrative Method and Analysis**

Narrative analysis has been recognized as having the potential for a wide range of analyses, from thematic, to structural, to visual (Riessman, 2008). Lieblich et al. (1998) have also categorized narrative analysis to fall under four categories: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content, and categorical-form. For the purposes of this research, I chose to analyze the interview materials through the holistic-content lens. The interview and analysis process was an interpretation and adaptation from Arvay’s (1999) collaborative narrative method, which includes six stages: 1) setting the stage, 2) the performance: co-constructing the research interview, 3) the transcription process, 4) interpretive readings of the transcript, 5) interpretive interview, and 6) sharing the story.

**Setting the Stage**

From the first contact with participants, I tried to develop rapport with the potential participants by ensuring that they understood clearly the purpose of the study, what was asked of their participation, and my interest in the topic (Arvay, 1999). During the first interview, informed consent (see Appendix B) was obtained from each participant at the beginning. The participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research, their role in the research, or myself before I began the interview. As Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, and Amundson (2009) recommended for research within the counselling psychology field, I tried to establish rapport with participants using verbal and non-verbal minimal encouragers, and probes and questions in order to help participants give a full and descriptive explanation of their experiences. Utilizing counselling skills such as reflection, basic empathy, active listening, and
Respectful curiosity were helpful in building rapport and in gathering rich and informative data (Borgen, Amundson & McVicar, 2002).

**The Performance: Co-constructing the Research Interview**

The interview process consisted of a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. There were two parts to the interview. The first part consisted of three questions that enhanced my understanding of the participants’ cultural context and personal opinions on careers. The questions invited the participants’ to describe their feelings on the importance of career in their life, the personal significance and meaning of being a professional, as well as their culture’s perception of professionals. The second part consisted of an exploration and invitation for narratives of participants’ experiences of their occupational identity through a life stage outline (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Lieblich et al. (1998) introduced using a stage outline to gather unique, succinct and rich narratives, which invites participants to think of their life as a story; I adapted this to fit my research question by inviting participants to think of the life of their career as a story. I prompted participants to think about their career life as a story broken down into different chapters – and explained that their story could contain as many chapters as they see fit. The first chapter of the story began at the age they considered their career - as they defined it - started; their career life story progressed until the present time. Then, on a piece of paper with two-columns (see Appendix C), I asked participants to denote the age their career began for the beginning of the story, and the age that ends the first chapter. They were prompted to continue marking down the ages that began and ended each subsequent chapter until the present time. Once that process was completed, we moved on to the next column, where I asked participants to give a title or heading for each chapter.
This outline formed the basis of our conversation and for narratives to emerge. As with the stage outline exemplified by Lieblich et al. (1998), I created general questions that guided the interview process and elicited narratives as we explored further into each chapter. The questions included: “Can you tell me about a specific memory around your career at that time?”, “How would you describe yourself in terms of your career?”, “How did you decide to begin and end this chapter at these ages?”, “Tell me about this chapter”, and “How do you see culture as a factor in how you saw yourself?” The semi-structured interview format allowed room to ask clarifying and probing questions; thus, our conversations were open for depth and breadth in the narratives beyond what the initial questions formed elicited. Furthermore, in order to ensure that we were able to capture as much information as possible, I gave participants a chance to elaborate on any of the information they provided by asking if there were anything else during this period that they felt was important to mention.

**The Transcription Process**

For each participant, I assigned a designated number for their documents and removed any identifying information to maintain the participants’ anonymity. I also invited participants to create a pseudonym for their story, and for those who did not have a preference, I randomly selected an Anglo-Saxon name to be used in place of their names. After each interview, I transcribed the participant’s audio recordings. This transcription process allowed me to enhance my familiarity with and understanding of the participant and participant’s stories more than what I gathered from the interview itself. Although the voices were being transferred into text, hearing the recordings several times allowed the intonations and emotions within the voices to be remembered as a part of the text, this was especially useful for the subsequent steps. Marks were made along the transcription if specific words were not clear, or if I felt there was a need for
clarification from the participant. Once the transcription process was completed, the next step in reading through the transcripts began.

**Interpretive Readings of the Transcript**

Arvay (1999) recommended four interpretive readings of the transcript – reading for content, self, research question, and power and culture. For my readings, I diverged from the recommendation and instead, produced three different readings of the transcripts, I read for the content, the self in terms of career, and culture. For each of the chapters the participants denoted, I read for the content of the transcript – focusing on what was the storyline, the content of the chapter. Here, I tried to focus on capturing the chronology of what happened during within the chapter. Then, because my research question focused on the experience of the participant’s occupational identity, I decided to combine it with reading for the self. This reading focused on excerpts where the participant made clear demonstrations of their sense of identity in relation to their career. Lastly, I read the transcript for themes and elements of culture, and specifically how culture played a role in their perception of themselves, and how they saw themselves within their culture. I created a document organizing the excerpts of the transcripts from the three separate readings: content, self and identity, and culture.

**Interpretive Interview**

Returning to a more collaborative process, the excerpts with the three separate readings were presented to each participant for review in a follow-up meeting. As the participant reviewed their story excerpts, I invited them to make corrections or omissions or elaborations along the way. At the same time, I was able to ask the clarifying questions I marked down throughout the transcript. At the end of each chapter, I asked the participants if they felt that what was included was sufficient, or if crucial incidences to their experiences in the chapter were
missing. In addition, participants were reminded again of the issue confidentiality. I confirmed with the participants regarding the detail of the information presented to ensure that they were comfortable with what was included. At the end of the follow-up interview, I reflected to the participants that they have just finished reading their career life story from beginning to the present time, and I asked if they noticed any overlaying theme or pattern in their story. Although not every participant noticed a theme, their answers contributed to my understanding of their perception of their story. These excerpts were then further distilled into a chronological summary according to the narrated chapters. Once again, the chapters were sent to each participant for review. In the participant’s review of the summary, I specifically asked participants to comment on the summaries’ fit for how they saw themselves, and how they want to be represented. The participants’ responses were positive and affirmed the accuracy of the narrative summaries to their perceptions and to our interview conversations.

Sharing the Story

In accordance with the holistic-content analysis, each participant’s career life story was represented individually. Each narrative represented here began first with a brief summary of the participant’s professional highlights as well as their current employment status. The participants’ responses to the meaning of being a professional from their cultural and personal perspective were included to provide a context to their narratives. Then, a summary of the participants’ career life story according to the career stage chapters followed in order to bring the interview transcripts into a concise and comprehensive whole. Written from a first-person perspective, the summaries incorporated many phrases and words that each participant used. With these summaries, I positioned myself as a co-author of each participant’s stories as I am presenting my understanding and interpretation of each co-constructed narrative. An additional
projective question regarding their hopes and expectations for the future were asked of six out of
the eight participants. Their responses were represented as a “future chapter” after their current
chapter, along with a brief description of what they hope that chapter would consist.

**Rigour**

Rather than looking at rigour through a quantitative stance of ability to replicate results
and generalizability, the co-constructive nature of narrative research calls for a different lens into
reliability and validity. As Riessman (1993) explains, “[t]he historical truth of an individual’s
account is not the primary issue. Narrativization assumes point of view” (p. 64), and thus,
narratives are situated and subjective truths – situated in time, in perspective, and in the co-
construction (Riessman, 2008). Nevertheless, Riessman (2008), Lieblich et al. (1998), and
Creswell (2009) suggest various validation strategies. I have chosen to focus on consensual
validity, pragmatic value, and resonance.

**Consensual Validity.** Consensual validity, or member checking (Riessman, 2008;
Creswell, 2009; Lieblich et al., 1998), is the process where the themes and conclusions derived
from interview transcripts are discussed with the participants. After creating transcriptions for
the initial interview, I scheduled a second meeting with the participants to ensure that the
transcripts were accurate. This provided an opportunity for the participants to elaborate on their
narration, to clarify aspects of their story that was not clear, as well as to confirm the
representation of the text as congruent to how they wanted to be portrayed. The edited transcripts
were then condensed and summarized. These summaries were once again, reviewed by the
participants. This ensured that the resulting representations of the participants’ stories resonated
and validated their experiences and that agreement was achieved between the researcher and
participants.
**Resonance and Pragmatic Value.** Furthermore, I asked a career practitioner to review the across-participant themes to check for its pragmatic value, and resonance in themes as an expert reviewer. He confirmed that the across-participants themes resonated with his experience working with ITPs, especially the themes of adaptation, priorities, and re-establishment. At the same time, the themes provided him with a lens into the realities of many ITPs. In terms of the pragmatic value, he saw value in the across-participant themes to help clients “identify, describe, reflect upon, and make meaning of his or her own experience.” In addition, he felt the themes enabled him to contextualize Asian ITPs’ experiences in their needs, values, and preferences.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Participants’ Narratives

Narrative One: Wendy

Wendy is from China, where she has an MBA degree, and at the peak of her career, she was the regional manager of an IT company for five years. Since immigrating to Canada, Wendy started learning, getting licences, and working in bookkeeping. Currently, she works in insurance, though she has an interest in working in the finance industry in the future. Wendy feels that being a professional means knowing the field and the job well; with her experience starting from the bottom and moving up, she feels that she has a thorough understanding every aspect of her industry. Wendy feels that people in her culture sees a professional as someone with a lot of success and experience in their field, and that his/her achievements are recognized and exceptional. Below is a summary of Wendy’s Career Life Story.

Chapter 1: “Good Start”, Ages 21-22. I think I am very lucky to have a good start to my career; my first job after university was for a big IT company doing Technical Support training clients how to use the software. My clients were different from me, typically much older; I was very young, but they will call me “Teacher”. I trained many clients, and sometimes after a week’s time, I cannot remember their names anymore, but they remember me and send me gifts, and I felt very happy to receive them.

I was young so I didn’t think a lot and didn’t have any big future plans. I just focused on working and doing my best. I tried to learn as many things as I could. I studied English even though it was not needed at work. I learned Photoshop on my own, and video editing software from a co-worker. It was exciting to learn and have so many successes. I really think I’m lucky to be able to enjoy my work. Most importantly, I always had a good relationship with my co-
workers and with my boss, which made me feel more comfortable, so I worked harder. And I’m smart… I think, but they also agreed and they seemed to like me, so that’s a good feeling!

However, with me being young and moving to a bigger city for the first time, sometimes I would feel homesick. Fortunately, I have a classmate who worked in the same company with me, so that helped. Plus, this city is a bit different from other cities in China. The culture was more open, people were younger, and they tended to have higher education levels than other cities. Almost everyone is from another place, so I didn’t feel like I didn’t belong here, I’m a stranger, or this is not my place, because everyone else was like me.

**Chapter 2: “Finding Out My Advantage in My Career”, Ages 22-26.** After working there for one and a half years, I wanted to learn more so I started thinking about working elsewhere, but my boss wanted me to stay. He saw that I had very good communication skills and an easy-going personality, so he suggested that I switch into sales. This was something that I had never considered before – I never thought that I wanted to or that I could do sales, sales and marketing was not something that I had studied. But I thought I would give it a try. My boss was always looking out for me. He divided a region of the city for my start in sales. Because I am a girl, working in a city close by made it more convenient and comfortable. He trusted me enough to allow me to work independently without having a manager, so that really encouraged me.

Within the first year, I got an award with quite a lot of money, so that encouraged me even more. I grew up very quickly during this period. I found out where my strengths were and how to make money. I felt that this would be good for my future, if I wanted to study and improve my quality of life. Compared with other people my age or my co-workers, I made a lot more money than they did. I was only 23 or 24 and already I could buy my own apartment and
car. All of my friends would say, “Oh Wendy! You’re doing so well for yourself!” I became friends with many successful people, and they were in a way, a resource for me. For example, even though I am the younger sister, I was able to help my older sister get three out of five jobs. Things like that made me feel like I could do what I wanted. I could make my own choices, and I knew that I would have people who can help me too. It seems like I was successful – I was young and independent, I had an apartment, a nice car, a good job, I lived a good life. I know my family were proud of all the changes that I made since leaving my hometown.

**Chapter 3: “Improve Myself”, Ages 26-27.** After a period of making money, I wanted to improve myself. I felt that when I get older, my 3-year college degree would not be enough. I began to think about the future, and I knew I wanted and needed more education. Especially since I am a girl, I thought it would be important for me to develop myself. I didn’t want to be doing sales my whole life, and if I wanted to be a manager, I would need higher education. I cannot manage someone who has a Masters or PhD; they won’t think that I can.

My friends influenced my ambition to improve myself. My friends were all thinking about how to improve, make more money, get higher education, etc. They liked to think about spending money on education as an investment. It was a strong, aggressive and ambitious atmosphere; people were constantly trying to elevate themselves. The biggest difference in China compared to here is that, there are actually chances for people to move up. The difference in the income is quite big, perhaps 10 to 100 times more. But here, it seems like it’s impossible.

I had my mind set on eventually studying abroad, so I chose to go to study English for six months at a University in China. I sold my apartment, moved to study, and bought a second-hand bicycle. This was a very special period, I don’t think that many people would have done what I did – it’s not easy to quit the job to go study and not worry about anything. Studying after
working felt very different. I didn’t have any stress, I just studied. I remember it snowed that winter. I think that for most people, if they have to ride the bicycle to work or school in the snow, it would be difficult. It might have been a little bit dangerous, but I just really enjoyed the snow and riding the bicycle because it was fun for me! I think it was because I didn’t have to, I chose to ride it, so I enjoyed the new experience. Just like studying! I didn’t have to study, I chose it, so it was a different and more enjoyable experience than when I was younger. This was also when I decided to apply for immigration to Canada. I asked about studying abroad, and a consultant told me it would be much cheaper if I was a Canadian resident. I really didn’t fully understand the situation then, I just believed them. My goal was just to study abroad.

Chapter 4: “Export My Capabilities”, Ages 27-32. The more information I got about studying abroad, I realized that what I wanted would require much more time and money than I thought. I didn’t want to study English at any small college. I just wanted an average, public university. I found out that this would require at least four years of my time, and the amount of money would be over my budget. So I decided to go to a University with Australian professors. My English improved and I decided to enrol into an MBA program.

Afterwards, a company learned that I was looking for work; they were expanding to my city and they offered me a manager position for their new office. I was very interested in this challenge because I will be managing everything, from the office location, to hiring. I was still young so I felt I had to pretend to be more mature when I was interviewing, training, and managing people. My work involved working with key clients and management. I was at the top at this office and I did everything with freedom and could spend what I needed to each month, whereas other employees had to apply to spend money. However, I also had more pressure to perform, reporting the sales results every half a year. I grew up a lot and became
much more confident. It was a higher stage for me; those five years were the best period of my career.

I could see a change in me from the beginning to the end of this period. At the beginning, I am very ambitious and competitive, but near the end, I began to feel lazier. My focus and attitude changed. I also started getting tired of sales. In China, you have to do a lot more than just sales. In order to do business, you have to become friends first. You need to take your clients out for dinner and drinks, remember their birthdays, and build a personal relationship with them. Fortunately, I did not have to drink, but most other sales do, so I think that although they make a lot of money, they are giving up their health. I don’t want that; I want a healthier lifestyle.

Maybe it is because of my age during that time, I was over 30, so I started to think about my next stage of life. I did not see myself focusing on this job for a long time; I wanted to do something new. Although my Canadian immigration was approved, I decided to return to my job in China because I knew how hard it was to find a job here. I had nothing here, no friends or family. So I went back. But after a while, I thought that if I gave up my chance to come to Canada, I will regret it. Going abroad has always been my dream, it is not a big dream, but it is my dream. If I had a family in China, I might give up the chance. But I was still single, with no pressure from my family to stay. I didn’t want to give up, so I quit my job, gave up everything, and came here. I’m not young and looking for adventure anymore; now, I worry, I don’t like adventures, I want stability. I think that at this age, I think differently, I consider what is more important. My culture and my family also affected me. Especially when you are a woman, you need to have family and kids. My friends would ask me about my relationship, when I will get married, and tell me to get married and have kids earlier. I started to feel the pressure and that
the job I had was not the best. I also thought, if you are a girl, you have a good job and home, and everything is good, it’s more difficult to find someone. But if you are a guy and you are a rich, it’s easier to find someone. It is the opposite. What I want is someone to take care of me, someone who can have the ability to give me security. But if I am already doing well for myself, then it’s difficult to find a single guy who is better off than I am. That pressure changed my thinking. I thought, maybe money is not everything right now.

**Chapter 5: “New Start”, Ages 32-Present.** The first three months being here was quite difficult for me. I cried a lot. Everything changed. I used to have things, but now everything is gone. I had no friends, everything felt quite terrible. Then, I got to know a friend who owns a company and she needed someone to help her with her accounting. She suggested that I study bookkeeping to help her. I heard that it’s not easy to find a job, so I agreed. Even though I really hated studying it, I finally finished studying level I and II, and with an honour mark, which is quite a high mark so I was really proud of myself.

Later on, I met another girl around my age and we became really close friends. She knows the owner of an Insurance company and she knew that they wanted to hire someone, so she suggested that I go in for an interview. I think I am really lucky. I had the language and communication skills they were looking for. So I really feel lucky that they also think that I can do the job, gave me the chance and hired me. I studied hard the first three months to get the insurance license. Although my salary is not very good right now, I think it’s okay for a new person like me. I would rather study hard for several years than to have to work as a waitress or labour work. So in this situation, I just see it as another chance for me to learn something new. Even though I do not think I will do this job for a long time, but at least I am learning, I am making enough money to cover my costs, and I’m improving my English.
In my career, I think partly I’m lucky, and the other part is myself – working hard and studying to improve myself. For the past ten years, I have been working in sales, but it was not really my choice, just something that I started and kept doing. Working here in a small company with just five people is quite a different experience. Before, I have always been used to working in big companies with more than 1000 employees. But I have no choice right now, my language needs to improve, so I just have to adjust my requirements to match the true situation. I am taking the level II course for insurance right now. It’s not required but I think it will help with the quality of my work. I think I am confident, but it will just take time for my English to improve.

Things are getting better, I am getting used to the environment and I am enjoying my life here. I think I have the chance to do something I like. I have my dream and requirements. I don’t want to just make money for a living, so I am lucky that I made enough money in China to make my life easier here. But I need to study more because you need a license for everything here. I think I like Finance. So even though working in insurance is not my choice, I plan to keep doing it until another chance comes because I can see that it is related to finance, so it might help me. Finance will be quite different from my experience, but I think I can still use my strengths, like communication. I hope that I can find work in a big financial company, use my advantage and my experience. Not only is it a job, working in finance will be great for myself as well, knowing how to manage my money. Knowing what I want now is nice; it is more mature, so I am not just a girl anymore. I am optimistic, aggressive, and quite strong-minded, so when I know what I want, I will do it. I wanted to study so I finished my MBA. I wanted to go abroad and now I am here. I’m thinking about Finance now, and I think I will get it, sooner or later. It
is not just about wanting it, I am prepared to do something about it. I think that being independent can be good – relying on yourself is the best way.

**Narrative Two: Kamal**

Kamal has had a long career in Power Systems Engineering in Iraq, working his way up into a high position in the government. Since coming to Canada, Kamal has struggled to secure even entry-level work in his field. To Kamal, being a professional means experiencing a “sense of hard work and achievement in your education”, but at the same time, professionals can occur in any career, from painting to engineering. In his culture, people see professionals as someone with the skill and expertise to work without mistakes, they are given more respect, and are likely to be managers and department heads. Below is Kamal’s Career Life Story summary.

**Chapter 1: “Beginning of the Career”, Ages 26-30.** When I studied in University, I chose to study computers because I thought that the future would be in computers. However, in my country, the government appoints students to jobs; we do not get to choose for ourselves. I was appointed to work in a Hydro Power Station, and even though there was a computer department, I was given the position of an Operating Shift Engineer. This station was 400 km away from my home, but I had no objections to this because if I did, I would be sent to jail!

I was raised to be responsible and accurate, so all I could do was to just cope with it and work hard to succeed in the job. And I think that I did because at some point I became the head of my department even though there were many older engineers with more experience. Even though I was doing it well, there is always an internal fight within myself – I am uncomfortable with it, but I must do it. Sometimes, I would feel like there were decisions made and opportunities passed on to others due to discrimination of my religion. I felt like even if I worked 24 hours, I would not get any benefits from it. On the positive side, working here really
helped build my character and career. I had many training courses, and since it was a new power station, I had the rare opportunity to see the structures before it is filled with water.

**Chapter 2: “Beginning of Professional”, Ages 30-34.** At this time, I accepted the Transmission Directorate position as this job led me to be closer to my family, and provided relief from the suffering I went through in my previous job. This position had great responsibilities, maintaining a large number of substations. On top of that, it was a deserted area; no one is there, so not many engineers would be willing to take this position. I had to drive 50 km to the nearest village just to buy bread. So it turns out that there were even more suffering and difficulty here than in my previous positions. The staff I had was mostly uneducated workers living in that area. They respected me and I didn’t want anybody to be hurt, so I would do the work first to show that there is no danger. This is a very risky job, and I had to be very accurate. I would do the jobs myself and only ask them for help when I needed some physical work.

During the Gulf War, I was waiting for my substation to shut down so I could leave. I was waiting there alone, sitting in the substation hoping to be bombed, to die. Honestly, I hated myself at that time; I couldn’t cope with my situation anymore. Everything in my life was negative; I didn’t feel like I had any successes. It wasn’t until one of the main power stations was completely destroyed 3 days later, causing a black out at my substation that I could leave. After the war, my job required me to build substations in risky conditions to provide electricity to the people. I even moved an unexploded bomb with my hands just so that the workers could continue their work. Others who saw just ran away, but I took that risk. Is that courage or hopelessness? I think I was probably suffering from hopelessness. I didn’t care, I just wanted to
finish this job and leave. I guess these experiences helped build my confidence – to be able to deal with difficulties, and not be frightened with new projects.

Chapter 3: “Stability”, Ages 34-44. In 1992, I had a bit of luck – there was another engineer wanting to work at my substation, and another position requiring my experience elsewhere. My application was accepted and I was finally in a stable work situation. I could finally consider marriage. My family chose my wife for me, I got married, had a stable, routine job. I was relaxed, not nervous anymore. The only downside was that my salary was low, so I would also take side jobs, helping people install lighting and wiring to earn a bit more money for my family. I stayed here for 10 years of dealing with screens and watching the technical information, which power stations must operate, which ones to stop, the voltage, etc. So it was a big change in my background. It was more of an administrative job whereas I preferred more hands-on, technical jobs. I derived a lot of happiness from solving technical problems, but I didn’t have that here. So after a while, it became boring for me.

Chapter 4: “The Maximum Achievement”, Ages 44-47. When an opportunity came for me to change my work, I took it and came to work with the Minister and Deputy General (DG). Once again, the nature of my work changed from monitoring screens to office work. It was a special and unique position, not very many people can reach this high level; I had a lot of opportunities here. When my supervisor was away, I would take on his responsibilities, meeting with other ministers, visiting power plants and control centres in the United States, I even got to travel in business class, which made my wife really happy. I think that this is the maximum achievement that I can reach. I had a good salary, authority, I dealt with high-levelled people, I managed around six departments, and my employees respected me. I could have stayed in that
position for a long time. Unfortunately, some tragic event followed that did not allow me to stay in this position. I did not feel safe.

**Chapter 5: “The Difficult Decision”, Ages 47-50.** I had received threats from someone to do whatever they wanted. I saw this as very unsafe because I have kids, I have family, and I don’t want to be hurt, so we made the difficult decision to leave the country. We became refugees in another country for 3 years while we waited for our immigration application to Canada. I had no option and choice. Because we had to flee the country before, we did not have much savings to live by – and we had to rely on relatives to help us out financially. There is not much to say about my career then since we were not allowed to work. I had to put my career aside, and in the beginning, it was difficult to sit at home all day. After 20 years, my nature is just about working, not sitting around doing nothing. It was like a suspended situation, just waiting and hoping. We were lucky that our application was approved because until now, there are still many families there, waiting without hope.

**Chapter 6: “Looking for a Job”, Ages 50-Present.** This chapter could also be called “Looking and Lost”. I didn’t expect to be unemployed for this long. I thought that within the first six months, I could work in any low-level job like an operator or skilled worker in my field. But I was surprised to find that there are very different and strict rules here. I participated in a skilled immigrant program, thinking that they would be able to guide me and tell me what to do. But unfortunately, I found myself to be experiencing the same thing I experienced in my country. I saw people of the same culture helping each other, reaping the benefits. But for me, I was in the program for one year without any benefits. It wasn’t until I talked to an employer that I found out taking additional courses could help my employability.
If I don’t work as an engineer, I don’t consider it a loss, I just want to work in any technical job. I would be happy to have an engineering supervisor telling me to do the job. But even then, I will not get a job. When I was applying for jobs, I got many phone interviews. However, once they found out that I had not been working for three years, they move on to someone else. But you see, those three years was when I was a refugee and was not allowed to work! I have been doing the same thing, applying for jobs from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day for the last two years with no results. I changed myself, I will take any job, but even then, I cannot get a job. I went through a security guard course and I got a license. My age is not on my side either, I am over 50 so I think it’s very difficult to get a job in this field. I have only found two temporary jobs during the Olympics because they wanted 5000 persons. So my chances were 1:5000. How can I expect to get a job when the competition is 1:1?

I am not even able work as an Operator. I had a technical interview on site for an Operator position. I was very happy to work; I just wanted to put my feet in the door. After two months of waiting, they apologized, saying that they were unable to do the security background check because of where I was from; there is no way to investigate my background. I was really frustrated and upset at this. It is not my fault that they could not do a background check. It didn’t make any sense to me. The funniest thing is that I passed the ten-fingerprint check to work in security for the G8 Summit in Ontario, I visited power plants and control centres in the US, and that was after September 11! If only they would give me the chance, I could put on my résumé that I worked there for this period, and it would change a lot for me! I can get another job! But nobody is willing to give me this first chance.

It is impossible. I am confused. I am lost now. If someone could give me specific instructions on what to do, I will understand it! I am very open to everything! But it seems like
no matter what I do, I will not get any results that I want in the end. So far, I have been hopeful
to work in any capacity within Engineering, but now, I think I am on my last line. I think within
one or two months, I must leave everything to find work in other fields. I have tried everything,
but there are reasons that are out of my control preventing me from working in Engineering.

**Future Chapter: “The Happiness”.** Let us imagine that I can find a job in my field –
then I will call this chapter, “The Happiness”.

**Narrative Three: Grace**

Grace is a Certified Public Accountant with approximately 20 years of experience
working in from the Philippines. Her experience included working in a multi-national company
as a financial manager. Currently, Grace is working in two part-time jobs, as a bookkeeper, and
a sales associate. To Grace, “being a professional gives you a wider perspective of what it’s like
to be in the marketplace, better opportunities to have a better future, a little notch higher than the
rest, in terms of knowledge, [and] it makes you respectful as well.” As for her culture’s
impression of professionals, she feels that being a professional is also your “reputation, how
people think about you as a person. It’s not just intelligence, it’s also the way you conduct
yourself once you become a professional.” The following is Grace’s Career Life Story summary.

**Chapter 1: “Young and Undecided”, Ages 20-23.** After graduating in accounting from
University, I started to work, but my focus was more on having fun. All I wanted to do was
secretarial or administrative work because I thought it was very glamorous to be a secretary
working for a CEO or something. I worked as an accounting clerk, and a few other positions. It
was exciting to wake up and dress up for work every morning, then hanging out with my friends
after work. Life was carefree at that time, I was young, I didn’t have any obligations because I
was living with my parents, and thankfully they did not require me to help send my younger
siblings to school in terms of financials. Whatever I earned was for myself, it was fun to have a
bit of independence.

**Chapter 2: “Realization”, Ages 24-27.** Personally, this is when I got married. Professionally, this is the first time I worked with a big company. I became a little bit more serious because I was hired as a field accountant. That was immediately after I passed the accountancy board exam. I had more responsibilities and realized that I really wanted to do accounting. My boss was very vocal in her appreciation of what we do; I got a lot of inspiration and encouragement from her and realized that I could be an asset to the company. I was a field accountant and liked to play with numbers, so I came out with a report with simple analysis. I thought that it was informative and might be a good idea to present it to management. It stirred up a lot of curiosity from the management and the general manager asked, “Why can’t other accountants think about it?” It was just me. Afterwards, they asked other field accountants to present the same information in the next meeting. I was happy and proud of myself. I could see my potential and thought that if I became more committed and serious with work, I could be like one of my bosses in the future, so I started to emulate them.

**Chapter 3: “Became More Committed and Responsible, Ages 27-31.** This is when I started to work for a multi-national company, and when my career started to climb, getting all these different opportunities. I was promoted to be Junior Accountant first, after 2 years, I became Accounting Supervisor, and after 3 years, I became a Financial Analysis Manager already. I had two kids within this period so there is no way but to be more responsible and know how to prioritize and maximize my time – giving quality of time I have with my growing family while building a career. When I was the Accounting Supervisor, I had one of my best bosses. Others may see him as petty, but it was from his pettiness that I learned the most. I was
committed and saw it as an opportunity to grow. He inspired me and supported me, I think that was a very significant part of my career. He took the risk to recommend me to the general manager, and they created a position the Financial Analysis Manager position for me. I would not have been able to do that job if not because of his guidance.

Before I was just emulating, but this is when I realized I could really be a manager. Because I was young and supervising people in their 50s or 60s, who might think, “Why should I be under her?”, or that I can’t do it because they have been in the company longer than me, it was very difficult. Handling people was the most challenging part about being a supervisor because you are also dealing with their emotions. But I didn’t give in, I just did the best I could to gain their confidence and support. I have a participatory management style because think everyone has their own ideas, intelligence, and potential; I just listen to them and build on their ideas to create something out of it.

Chapter 4: “Working Towards the Peak”, Ages 32-40. I became the Financial Planning Manager in the multi-national company in Philippines, and I was in charge of budgets, strategic plans, long-range plans. This position led to opportunities to travel outside of the country to attend meetings and defend our budget with the regional management. It was a bit scary at first, they can be tough in their questions regarding our budget, but once I had the confidence talking to this level of people, and convincing them that the budget is realistic, it became more enjoyable. It gave me confidence to work with people above my rank, and get used to working with foreigners who had a much more open-minded culture. This was also a great opportunity for me not only to represent my region but also to listen to how business was done in other regions in the Asia Pacific, so it opened my mind. There was a great sense of
fulfilment for me to be chosen out of all the other managers to go out of the country to attend the meeting. I was having the time of my life!

With finance, I knew that they were trusting me with so much confidential and sensitive information, like the executive payroll. I remember one of my bosses telling me the first time I had that responsibility of supervising the preparation of payroll that even if I was pregnant, I cannot discuss it with even the baby in me. So I learned the value of the trust I was given. I already knew what is going to happen for the next year but I could not discuss this with anyone because it was just a plan, nothing was for certain. I got excited when I knew how much we could afford for salary increase, but I just had to learn to compose myself and not brag about my knowledge to others.

Something significant in this period was the Controller that I was reporting to at one point. His expertise was in Audit while I was in financial planning, he was very humble and said that because his expertise was not in my area, and that he would be learning a lot from me and vice versa. I really appreciated that because the things I learned from him continued to be something I enjoyed doing the most. He supported and encouraged me a lot. One time, I was the head of a task force and we were sent to Melbourne for three weeks to work on a project. He suggested that I travel to Australia with my husband, and I found out later that he had talked to the Finance Director in Australia about me, and that they wanted me to be a part of the Australian team. It was really touching to know that he was thinking about my future for me, he recognized my potential and wanted me to be able to do more.

This gave me the possibility of relocating to Australia with my family. They wanted us to make a decision, so while I worked, my husband observed the lifestyle there. He noticed that you cannot leave children alone at home if they are below 12 years old, that you will have to
bring them into daycare; with all four of our kids below 12, he didn’t like that idea. So that
didn’t materialize. Although I have a strong personality, I was still submissive to my husband’s
decision, it might be my Filipino culture, but the husband has the final say for major decisions.
But I was really excited, I really liked Australia, I wanted to go. Anyway, it was not meant to be.

Chapter 5: “Change of Priorities”, Ages 40-45. There was a trend in pharmaceutical
companies when mergers and acquisitions took place and many positions became redundant and
people took advantage of the severance package, because they offered a good package – like
three month’s pay for every year or service. I also went through that stage. My position was
declared redundant because they took in an expert, finance director and they asked if I wanted to
try other positions. Although I was thinking of changing careers to be in logistics, materials
management at that time because I thought it was an interesting career, but I just said no. I
wanted to slow down because my kids are growing and I thought I needed to have more time
with them. I thought that it would be more difficult when they’re already teenagers, when you
have to know their friends and you have to know where they are. I thought I just needed more
time to be with my children. So that was when I started working with local companies.

I was telling myself I wanted to slow down, but at the back of my mind, I still missed
working for a multi-national company. Of course I didn’t miss the stress, I missed the
environment. There were so many changes. I had to change my mindset to work in a family-
owned business where the owner has the sole authority to make decisions. But in multi-
nationals, you have to go through layers of people to make decisions. Everyone including the
General Manager is just an employee. Although I was happy to share what I learned from multi-
national companies to local owners, I found that I could not do anything, the owner would still
insist on what he thinks is best. I felt like my wings were clipped – there were no more chances
to fly. It was difficult and sad for me, but also humbling – it took a lot of humility to accept that I have to go down and work in that kind of environment. I also tried working as a consultant, representing your client in front of government agencies and local municipalities. Most clients would try every possible way not to pay taxes. I’m not used to that; I’m used to reporting everything. I wanted to preserve my sense of integrity and honesty so I did not stay as a consultant for long, it wasn’t my style.

Another thing is, all the benefits that I used to enjoy – all gone. My lifestyle had to change too with the change in my income. We had to adjust and take all the non-essentials out of our life, like eating out and vacationing. But I made sure that my children could continue studying in private schools. People looked down at children who attend public schools in Philippines because they equated that as being poor; and often their classes are so crowded in public school, with more than 60 students in a class. I didn’t want to sacrifice my children’s quality of education and future so I was adamant about this point.

**Chapter 6: “Starting All Over Again”, Ages 45-Present.** Starting all over again in Canada, it was very difficult and humbling – even more so than in last chapter, changing my lifestyle, adapting to a new environment, weather, and culture. If I came to Canada in my 40’s, I might have gone to school to get my CGA designation, but at this point, I can only see myself taking short courses to fill the gaps. Accounting is a universal language. How is the debit/credit different here from the Philippines? The fact is, I worked with multi-national companies, I was working in an environment governed by US accepted accounting principles. It is frustrating. I do not want to waste time and money on courses learning things I already know. I wish they would just hire me so I could show them what I can do!
I was hopeful when I came to Canada, thinking I would be able to find a job as an accountant. It was frustrating to apply for jobs and not even get an interview! It is difficult for newcomers when they expect you to have Canadian experience but then not give you the opportunity. So I ended up doing volunteer work, just filing and answering the phone. I was fortunate that I met a Filipino business owner who was looking for a bookkeeper. But I feel underutilized, it’s a simple job for a small business. My boss knows that I am worth more than what he is paying me, but it is just that the company cannot afford to pay me more. Since that is only part-time, I also found a part-time sales associate position to keep us going financially, until I can find a better opportunity. I would still like to work in accounting. I worked for big, American companies, so I’m just sad that up to this day I still haven’t had the opportunity. I just feel that the Canadian market is missing the opportunity to give me the chance to work and contribute.

Coming to Canada was not really for me anyway, it was for the children. I have accepted the fact that, at a certain point of your life, you are here just to play a supporting role to your children. Because it is now their turn, it is their turn to build their future, so, your being a parent never stops. It is going to be there… always. My children like it here. I appreciate that there is dignity of labour here. As long as it is an honest job and you are paid well, people don’t mind what job you do. I continue to remain hopeful that better opportunities will come. I am inspired by what my friend said – that the first two to three years is going to be a struggle, but it will get better, and it will be worth it.

**Future Chapter: “A Dream Come True”**. My dream is for my children to have a good future. Looking forward, I know that it will all come to fruition, hard work and all.
Narrative Four: Linda

Linda began her career in Education in China with her Bachelor degree; she then earned her Masters of Education in Germany where her work evolved from project design, project management, to consultant. Currently, Linda is a case manager at an employment centre. She sees being a professional not as a project with an endpoint, but a conscious process of growth, learning, and continuous development. Linda feels the Chinese culture see professionals as an “authority figure that knows, [with a higher] social status [that] demonstrates that they have better earning, better respect from others”. Similarly, in Germany, professionals and their educational level elicit a lot of respect, where your academic title is introduced along with your name. The following is a summary of Linda’s Career Life Story.

Chapter 1: “Professional Development”, Ages 20-24. I was quite young when I started working in the Department of Learning and Teaching. I had knowledge from university, but still so much to learn. I was involved with development and design of curriculum and learning materials. I would also observe classes in order to support teachers to become better teachers with constructive and students to learn better with more suitable lessons. I was very focused in my job because I was inspired by the access I had to the many different levels of people, from classes, schools, principals, department directors, to district school boards.

I only felt busy then, it is not until now that I recognize what a marvellous learning process it was and the impact I had. I observed that some teachers taught English without formal training, so I held teaching workshops on curriculum and teaching methods for them, and constructed three example classes so teachers could observe how other teachers taught efficiently and encouraged students to learn. Looking back, I see myself being an eager learner, and innovative in the teaching methods I created. For example, I used TV and radio programs to
teach, test students, introduce learning activities with fun to help student gain English
comprehension skills. I organized a citywide competition for this and took the top 20 students
camping as a reward. I had many opportunities to create, mature, and be independent in those
four years. In some ways, I was like a pioneer and did many new things, though I was not aware
of it; I just felt I had the power, opportunity, and interest to develop system in the city’s
education. These were times after the Cultural Revolution, so we wanted to catch up the 20
years that we lost. Definitely, I felt like I had a mission, the cultural background made me feel
more ambitious, to contribute to setting up the educational system because I believe education is
important for the country and people’s futures.

Chapter 2: “Professionalism”, Ages 25-28. Despite working at my department for four
years, I was still the youngest there with a large age gap because my co-workers were mostly 40-
60 years old. The only one with a degree, I was very involved and proactive in learning and
taking action; I think other people noticed the work that I did, and it was suggested that I become
the vice-director of the department. I felt that some of my relationships with co-workers lost a
bit of balance or harmony. I usually got along with others very well, but I started to feel some
tension… I think some of the elder colleagues felt threatened. To manage people who were
older than I was and whom I have respected for so long was a huge cultural challenge. My only
relief was thinking, “At least I’m not the director.”

I definitely matured and built the foundation of my career during this stage. There was
also a time when I had fear when I recognized that my presence and actions were a threat to
others, and the fear of surpassing my elders at the department. In the end, I didn’t want others to
feel threatened by me, so I chose to leave instead of fight, because I saw no purpose in fighting.
I came out of it feeling like I had a better understanding of my own identity as a young professional, and I gained confidence based on my achievements and the feedback I received.

Chapter 3: “Multi-Specialties / Individualization”, Ages 29-35. I had developed an interest in adult education, and I moved to Germany to do my Masters studies in Education. I was lucky because prior to moving, I was already involved in some vocational training projects with Germany. When I moved, I continued to work with this company on vocational training, and was the project coordinator, and then the project manager of certain regions like Mongol and South Asia. During my studies, I also went to Beijing to do mid-level management and training. Throughout those six years, I had many opportunities to grow. I was really successful in Germany, academically and professionally. Personally, I grew because I felt like I could be myself, my energy, desires, confidence were all renewed. The way my boss managed had a big impact on me, he never played an authority role, he always listened to us first, and he gave me a lot of encouragement through the opportunities I had. I was able to develop different skills and work in different areas. In planning multiple projects, I became involved with the social, cultural, and political factors that our projects impact. I felt more mature and confident of my comprehensive skills; but every now and then, I would remind myself how little I really know.

Chapter 4: “Professional Expert”, Ages 36-39. I probably reached the peak of my career in the previous chapter, and I think I continued to be at this kind of level here. I continued to put my comprehensive skills to use, only my role changed to be more of a consultant instead of just a developer. As a consultant, I provided overall support with the experience and expertise I have in project development and implementation. There was definitely still more learning and growth during this peak. I felt lucky to be able to use such a variety of skills and to be involved in so many different aspects of the product from planning to implementation.
During this time, one of the biggest lessons I had was from a company owner that I had to work with. The demands he made and the way he communicated with other people was a bit of a shock to me. He really used his authority when interacting with people. After witnessing his behaviours, I lost respect for him. I also realized that every culture has its good and bad, and within each culture, there will be people that I will and will not respect. This experience gave me a mirror to see how I should behave. Your knowledge, position, or title does not give you the right to be rude and disrespectful. Similarly, I feel it is unnecessary for people to act differently, more respectfully around me than they do around their co-workers just because I am their manager. I respect people for their contributions, not their title.

Chapter 5: “Transition”, Ages 40-41. I decided to immigrate to Canada in order to support my daughter. I gave up my great job, my relationships with friends and colleagues. The decision was tough because it was not something that I volunteered to do, but something I felt I had to do; as her mother, I had to take care of her. The transition was difficult. I tried to look for work, sending resumes for half a year. One particular issue was that I did not speak decent English. I didn’t know what I could do – even a coffee shop wouldn’t hire me if I could not communicate with the customers. I knew I needed to practice speaking English, so I volunteered at my neighbour’s store serving customers to have that opportunity to practice.

I tried to find a new orientation in my life in Canada; it wasn’t only finding a job, and it was also finding a new identity. I am such a career-driven person. I was at the peak of my career! I had so much to offer, and now, I cannot find a job. It was difficult to accept it; it was like, “I couldn’t get a job? Me?” I was stuck at the thought that “I am somebody who deserves better. I was such an ambitious, confident, and capable worker, what am I doing here?” I felt like the gear of my life was not in my hands. Add the stress from other aspects of my life on top,
I felt challenged, frustrated, depressed, and helpless. I felt I lost my identity. With time, I felt more and more uncomfortable, anxious, and stressed. Then people suggested that for me to try doing informational interviews. The first few that I did, it felt like I was begging, asking people for help. It hurt my pride – I thought, “I am so successful for so many years, why should I ask people for help? I should just go and do it! … But, go where? Get what?” There were so many unknowns and uncertainties. I needed to know what I want, what I need to get there, and where it is!

I began to realize that what I needed was information, information that other people had. Maybe it was the professional side of me; I had to be realistic and come to see what I needed to do to move forward. I was adamant on practicing my English at every opportunity possible. Informational interviews became my way towards my goal – getting to know people, practicing my English, knowing where to navigate, getting opportunities – I think that was a successful way of helping me find work. What I also came to understand was that although people will stress the importance of understanding the Western culture, my experience tells me that language comes first. Language is the tool of thoughts and expression – without language, it would be extremely difficult to learn the culture.

This period was such a big transition for me, as a person, in career, and in life. I learned to embrace every opportunity I have to grow and learn. I began to appreciate the small and simple things in my life, and that made me happy. From all the struggles, I had to accept and surrender – surrender to the situations I cannot change, and say to myself, “How can I live with it?” Accepting rather than fighting meant that I was more able to focus on what I needed to do.

Chapter 6: “New Career”, Ages 42-Present. After nine or ten informational interviews, I received a job offer! A manager I interviewed forwarded my resume to another
manager who contacted me for an interview. They gave me a chance and started me off with a few clients to make sure that I could handle this type of work. Since then, I have been working as a case manager of an employment centre for three years. This position is a blend of the vocational training and adult education that I was involved in, but there were many differences from my previous profession. I learned and developed a lot throughout these past three years. Recently, I was offered a supervisory role at the employment centre, and I was very happy to accept it. I appreciated the recognition they gave me for my work. This company has given me such a great opportunity, I am grateful to be able to give back to them. I see myself continuing to learn in the work I do. It is as if I have entered into another path, developing this professional career towards gaining professional expertise. Although I always try my best and am confident in my skills in career counselling, I know that I am not the best and still have much to learn, but that is all part of being a professional – it is a process. I am a professional, so I need to continuously learn more things so I can better support others and do my job well.

**Future Chapter: “Professional Development and Professionalization”**. I feel like I am on my way to gain more expertise, to be more comprehensive in this career. My goal for the next stage of my career is to try to grow into and integrate adult education and counselling.

**Narrative Five: Shankar**

Shankar is a Geological Engineer with a Bachelor of Science from India and Master of Science degrees from Canada and United States. Throughout, he has been gathering research experience in academia. Currently, Shankar is unemployed, but is in the process of writing a book. The following is a summary of Shankar’s Career Life Story.

**Chapter 1: “Foundation of My Learning Attitude”, Ages 5-12.** I was brought up in a unique educational system that focused on integral education, teaching us to become a complete
human being, rather than on tests and competition between students. We were already doing yoga and meditation at 5 years old. We were free to study what we chose, and the teachers were there to teach and guide us in our learning. Usually, kids don’t like to go to school because of all the discipline, but I loved to spend my entire days at school and library because there were no rules or punishment. I was free, but if I did something wrong, then I had to be able to face my actions. They fostered self-reflection. I was a bit of a prankster when I was young, but they would never punish me. They would just tell me what I have done and to think about it in a meditation room. After thinking about it, I realized that I am guilty without the need for confession or punishment. I could introspect and take responsibility of my actions. That period had a big impact on me – it shaped my attitude in life. The teachers guided the values and the sense of choice I have in life and in my career later on.

Chapter 2: “Blending into the Mainstream”, Ages 12-17. By grade 8, I had to go into a general school with a more traditional, formal education structure. Education and achievement was the focus, but I think the foundation I had from my previous school gave me a different attitude. Although I was able to blend into the mainstream by being successful in school, I still kept my individuality and thought process. I was the best student and even came out first among 200,000 students in a state exam. It was a great achievement, but my foundation and parents taught me that this is no reason to brag.

My parents supported me and took care of everything, because in India, your job as a student is to study and get good grades. There was no exposure to vocational training or exposure to what you want to be. All I knew was that I wanted to be a teacher because of all the great teachers I have had growing up. And when other students asked me for help, I enjoyed helping them. As I got to the higher grades, I had to choose between sciences or arts; I could not
do both. I entered the science stream, and by the end of my grade 12, I was prepared to go into my next stage, my B Sc.

**Chapter 3: “Technical and Open Studies, Ages 18-23.”** Usually, after being successful in high school and pre-university, you go into engineering. Although I qualified, and becoming an engineer meant a better salary – which people perceive as success – I chose not to because I knew that engineering was very intensive, and I thought I would be a teacher. Many people did not understand why I chose Science over Engineering. I just followed my own path, to continue to a Masters and Ph D to become a professor, and my parents supported me. Many of my friends went into Software Engineering, because the money they earned gave them a lifestyle they liked, but I was never into materialistic and monetary rewards, so it did not have an appeal for me.

In some ways, the educational system was constraining for me. I was interested in psychology, sociology, economics, but because I was in Science, I could not take those courses. So I pursued them through reading and learning on my own as a hobby, and I would be able to discuss it with my friends who studied those disciplines. They expected you to be good at what you study, and I definitely got a good exposure to all the branches of geology to know what I wanted to pursue, but they don’t expect you to know other things. However, the restrictions also gave me more focus in my studies, so I became more specialized in my field, it gave me the background I needed for research later on. In a way, the previous chapters shaped my personal character and my values, and this chapter shaped my area of expertise that I would pursue.

**Chapter 4: “Adapting to a Different Culture”, Ages 23-30.** I came to Canada for my Masters and found that being a student here was like a real job. It was exciting to adapt to a new culture, work habits, and academics. It was a new experience and taught me my inner power because with the research I was doing, almost everything I learned and looked at, I could use and
apply it. For example, I was able to take a mathematical sequence and apply it to my research in geology. I have always liked to diversify and think in very different ways, and not that because I was in Science that I cannot learn other disciplines. I had great academic growth and developed my professional expertise.

I started my Ph D in the United States, but due to lack of funding, I did a Masters instead. I studied hydrogeology and published papers from environment to mechanical engineering. This experience further gave me confidence that I could do a lot, that I could contribute something unique in research that was applied and interdisciplinary and be recognized for it. Handling a couple projects and guiding two students in $50,000 projects, I was given complete freedom in the projects I did. Here, I knew that I could do a lot of things not in the mainstream of what I was supposed to do and still earn a living.

Chapter 5: “Exploring Career Options”, Ages 30-Present. Things changed once I stepped out of academia; the world outside is not what I knew. They don’t care about what you have learned, they just want the job done. And I was ready for that, but I was sometimes too high up for them. At an interview, they would ask me what I have done. They could understand my research, but they couldn’t connect it with the real job because there are not many opportunities to diversify the work that you do. There are already standard procedures that you just go and follow. That was something that was hard for me. In my perspective, people who are hiring have different requirements – being innovative is not something they are looking for in the industry. I cannot bring myself down to doing just a run-of-the-mill, routine job because I am used to certain standards that are not normal outside of academia. I had to turn down a job once due to personal reasons, but I could tell that the hiring manager thought that it was because I had higher expectations. But I would prefer to fully understand the processes at the lower
level, how field samples are collected before going to a higher position. I value jobs done well, with accuracy. So I am curious about how things are done so I would rather do it myself and perhaps establish a better procedure. They don’t recognize the importance in going in with an analytical mind to re-examine what is being done and what could be done instead.

My main problem now is that I cannot get a job that I really like. I am not in the position to compromise my interests, or my professional goals. I am fully qualified to do well in my profession, but my goal is to learn how to adapt to the industry culture. So professionally, I would say that by keeping my character and learning aptitude in tact, I will be able to break this barrier. I will adapt to the industry culture, and at the same time, keep both my personal and professional life in harmony. With my wife working and our frugality, I am able to work on my book and research papers without bothering about getting a survival job.

**Narrative Six: Frank**

At the height of his career, Frank worked as an Education Officer for the Government in Hong Kong. Frank went through a period of adjustment and transitioning through a series of different jobs after immigrating to Canada before entering into the real estate industry. Frank has been a realtor for 16 years now, and is looking into the possibility of retirement. Frank describes being a professional as having a specialized training and quality of skills that fulfills certain social standards; he feels that his definition is quite similar to what other people in his culture thinks. Frank’s Career Life Story summary is presented below.

**Chapter 1: “Pre-Immigration Period”, Ages 23-38.** After a long period of studying in University and being professionally trained, I began to serve as an Assistant Education Officer, which was a teaching post in a government secondary school. This was a government position with a good income and great benefits like any other university graduates employed by the
government. Job stability and predictability for promotions ahead were the main attractions of being employed by the government. It was very difficult and intense to compete for enrolment into the two recognised universities in Hong Kong at that time, but it was comparatively easier to get a better job after graduation from the university with a degree at that time too. Once employed, all you had to do to get promotion were simple: 1) accept and perform the duties assigned to you with consistent hard work, and 2) not make mistakes. After gaining more working experience and seniority in a period of 6-7 years, the prospects of being promoted is relatively good. When I first started my job, I knew that I had to learn a lot – in the routine management of curriculum within the subject department, allocation of teachers, organization and cooperation in various school activities and functions, as well as learning the procedures and skills in administrative work in running school.

This was a memorable and rewarding period in my working career. I got married, had two kids and was promoted into a higher grade after the first six years. I would say that this is my 10-year Golden Period in my working life. I had the greatest job satisfaction than at any other time, before or after. Nothing was more enjoyable and rewarding to me as a teacher when I saw my students being able to pursue further education and to gain good working opportunities after their graduation. It was equally rewarding to see problematic students to be able to get back on track through substantial guidance and counselling. Teaching is not as simple as it appears to be and the duties are often as challenging and demanding as any other profession. I enjoyed and loved my job of working in the school because it was a great entertainment to be able to offer help in the growth of our young generation – though it involved long hours of preparation and nerve breaking days and nights.
Chapter 2: “Transition Period After Immigration”, Ages 38-43. After immigrating to Canada, life seemed to be tough and I knew I had to start building my career again. I had prepared long before coming into Canada to get all my education and training certificates, letters from the government to prove my employment history and performance. I was approved to be recognized in my teaching qualification by the College of Teachers on a temporary basis. The approval only lasted a year and I was required to seek local teaching employment to get permanent recognition of qualification. For the first year, I tried dropping off my resumes and applications for teaching posts in various Lower Mainland school districts. At the same time, I worked as a part-time storekeeper in a 24-hour convenience chain store. I mailed my application and resumes repeatedly, but a few months passed without receiving any replies or calls. During my first year in Canada, I had quite a number of sleepless nights. Sometimes, I dreamt of being unemployed and worried about how I was going to walk along the future path in my life. Often in the middle of the night, I would suddenly become wide-awake and in sweat, worrying about what I should do here to start my life again. By the time a year or so passed by, I knew I was not getting any chance at all to pursue my former career here.

Things started to change after a year’s time. With the help of newly acquainted friends, I got a fresh start in another job – an assembler for computer systems. I worked in this job for 5-years before being laid-off when the company went into bankruptcy. Shortly afterwards, again with the help of friends, I was able to change to work in warehouse for a company selling equipments and clothing for outdoor activities. It was a union job with good benefits and the salary payment was quite good too. All I could say is that I was very fortunate, to have friends within my cultural group helping me re-establish myself in Canada. Actually, all jobs I got were directly or indirectly through ties and connection with friends who were working at those places.
I feel strongly that job hunting remains very much the same in the current time – you have to get connection and ties – otherwise, you won’t be able to get a job! I was lucky because subsequent changes in jobs were able to improve my salary income and prospects.

This was quite an uneasy and difficult period for me. I am happy to have overcome it. One of my friends often questioned if I regretted giving up a good job and a more comfortable way of life because of immigration. He asked if I had hard feelings taking those hard-working and labour-demanding jobs, and not working in full capacity of my training. I told him that I am just as ordinary as others are. I don’t mind at all for not getting into the same profession as I was previously – as happy as I was before – at least I enjoy my current way of life. After all, I like the small and minimal social class differentials here. I happened to see in my first few jobs, the wage difference between a supervisor of a production line and an ordinary labourer is just merely a couple of hundred dollars per month. There is less social segregation among people as according to their wealth, and people of different working class have equal degree of respect from others. I also feel that as long as you are prepared to work hard, it is not that difficult to make a living.

Chapter 3: “Permanent Career Period”, Ages 43-Present. During my job as a Warehouse Worker, I found that the job demanded a huge amount of effort and labour, and it might not fit me any more as I grow older. With the encouragement and push from one of my friends, I decided to pick up the realty sales business, and started taking the realty course a few years after immigration. It was not my first choice of job because commission-based jobs appear to be very risky for me.

I was lucky in working as realty sales because I got lots of business from various people I met in Vancouver, and friends and colleagues from Hong Kong who were immigrating here, and
from referrals of my clients. Again, most of my business came from clients from my culture too. Right now, I am finding that this job particularly suits my lifestyle and me. It allows flexibility in working intensity as according to my time available and needs. I can work very long hours if I wanted or I can take a couple of days off if I needed.

**Future Chapter: “Retirement”.** I would like to work in current job until I retire in a few years’ time, as I am almost 60 now. If I am able to stay healthy and there are opportunities ahead, I would like to continue working – otherwise, I will choose to retire.

**Narrative Seven: James**

James is a Mechanical Engineer from South East Asia. After pursuing post-graduate studies and research work overseas, he applied for immigration to Canada. James has been living in Vancouver for approximately one year, and has been working with employment services to obtain an engineering position. In response to what being a professional means to him, James feels that being a professional is an “attitude… doing the job well, responsibly” and being able to “work collaboratively with other professionals”. He sees that in Canada, professional bodies designate and grant the professional status, but he feels that they are already professionals before the formal acceptance by the society. When reflecting on the meaning of professionals in his culture, James feels that a person’s title in education and career, and professional status have a more symbolic meaning, for example, “what you publish, does not matter actually [as long as] you have published something, it is very highly respected.” James’s Career Life Story is summarized below.

**Chapter 1: “Pre-University Period”, Ages 7-19.** Pre-university was an easy period for me, I had a lot of joy. I was still dependent on my parents, who made a lot of decisions for me, and did not have to think a lot about the future. There was regularity within each day; it was
simple. Although at the time, I did not think so because I was really busy all the time going from school to after-school activities and lessons. Now looking back… if I could go back, I can probably enjoy it more than I did then.

School and achievement was the focus of this period. It was a constant search of better schools from primary to secondary to high school. I moved away from home to live with my aunt when I was 14 to attend high school. I lost contact with friends and had to make new ones – and learn new languages too because each region had a slightly different dialect. But perhaps it is because I didn’t know the language that I could concentrate more on learning. I was an above average student because I could enter university and their selection is tight. I guess all that hard work and after-school classes paid-off. My culture puts a lot of value in education, so when you do well, people see you very positively. Unfortunately, this also meant that sometimes they only saw my education and not me as a whole person.

Chapter 2: “University Period”, Ages 19-25. I had a tough time adjusting to my university life. I moved again to another city for a very good university and started living on my own. There was a lot of freedom and choices; I had to do a lot on my own, like making my own schedule. I entered into Engineering, but there were so many options within it that after I chose my major, I didn’t feel very good about it, and went through a sort of crisis. I wish my school had provided more discussions around career counselling to help us make decisions. Making decisions on my own was not usual for me at that time, but I think it was a necessary experience to become an independent individual.

Throughout my university days, I learned to become more independent, and rely less on people like professors or my parents. Many professors were part-time, so they did not provide that much support. So my friends and I collaborated from each other through difficult situations
instead. I also learned to do the readings to problem solve on my own rather than waiting for the professor to explain it. Sometimes I think of myself almost like a machine back then, just following rules and textbooks without thinking about alternatives. All I knew was I needed to work hard to succeed because my culture forced me to succeed in my studies. Failure is not accepted. I wish I could have relaxed more.

Chapter 3: “Post-Graduate Period”, Ages 26-32. Because the job that I could get after university is not the job that I wanted, so I thought post-graduate studies could offer better prospective in my working career. I did my post-graduate degree in another country. Post-graduate school had even more freedom but also more stress because research is always about something new and uncertain. By then, I had gotten used to being on my own and moving around. I did still have some culture shock because that culture was not very social, but then I got used to it.

My situation there was very frustrating for me because I had to renew my visa every year and indicate the program or research I am doing. This meant that I could do not wait to research something of my own interest, and that was not optimum. I felt lucky that I could do some research. But I also felt unlucky; being a foreigner was an obstacle. I could not do something that was classified as new technology because they preferred to let their own citizens do it. So I could not choose 100% what I wanted to do. I am the type of person that always tries my best, but after a while, I realized that even if I worked really hard, my prospects were limited. The economy was bad, and even their own citizens suffered. As an international student, it was even worse for me.

Chapter 4: “Work Period”, Ages 32-Present. I began to work at a research company, but later decided to move to Canada because I saw other people moving on to Canada after doing
research, so I thought I should try it too. When I applied, I didn’t know when the answer from
the Canadian consulate would come. So there was a period of uncertainty. I was still lucky, my
application was quickly approved after a year or so. I moved to Canada and I lived with my
friend for six months and by myself for four months. I am quite happy that there is a lot of
assistance for job search in Canada. However, I think that my timing might be off with the
recession. Even if I have the perfect résumé, if there are no employers then I still won’t be able
to find a job. I really do think I have a lot of good potential, but I feel like the decision is out of
my hands. I understand that with the type of work that I do, creating results takes time; and with
the recession, most employers are looking for immediate results, so that is an obstacle.

Although I am happier in Canada than in my post-graduate studies, I have gone through a
lot of reflection. I reflected on what I have done and what I could have done differently, like
learning a different field. It is a challenge and struggle to be looking for work for such a long
period. I can see that if I had a family, work might not be as important, but at this stage in my
life, work is very important to me. Actually, it is almost everything I want to do in Canada. We
spend most of our time at work, so it also means social connections. For me, I don’t have work,
so I also don’t have social contact. I am limiting contact with friends and family at home too.
Because my level of education is so highly respected back home, I am afraid to tell people that I
am unemployed. They wouldn’t believe it! I was so successful before, and they are all working
now. They live in a place with an economic boom; and I live in a place with a recession. So I
am afraid to have contact with them because I know they will ask me is where I work. So
sometimes, I feel lonely here. People I have contact with now are mostly career counsellors and
other job seekers. All the job seekers are good people, but mentally they are down and
discouraged, and that atmosphere can influence me too.
A pattern I see in Vancouver is that certain ethnic groups can dominate certain industries. In my industry, many of employees and executives are not from minority ethnicities, so I suspect that stereotypes may contribute to my difficulty in finding employment. Canada has industry but it is spread out. Although I am willing to move elsewhere, I am not able to commit to moving before securing a job, and employers cannot justify paying to interview people. So that is a challenge as well. Because there is always a lot of change in my profession, losing contact with my profession only makes the situation worse. So, I am here, very sad, and also helpless, because I see many skilled immigrants working in survival jobs for a long time and I could end up like them. The survival job I had took up more time than I wanted, so I quit and decided to concentrate on looking for a professional job. But I am afraid… I cannot do this forever. I don’t see the end of the tunnel that I am in – it’s long, dark, and very crowded. The decision is not in my hands, so there is some anxiety.

Future Chapter: “Self-Employment”. While I really don’t know when it will be, I don’t think it is in the near future, probably much later. Because in my career, most of the time, still people tell me what to do, still I don’t have control over situations that greatly affect me. And with self-employment, I could have more control over my life and my decisions. In the time being, I just want a good, solid career – that is my motivation. Hopefully, later in my life, I can work for my own rather than depending on employers.

Narrative Eight: Ritika

Ritika is an Electrical Engineer from India with a Masters degree from the United States. When Ritika first immigrated to Canada, she looked for employment in Engineering. However, she took a chance to apply outside of engineering and landed a job at a bank. She has since been working at the bank for approximately a year. Ritika feels that being a professional means that
she has a professional degree, is knowledgeable about her field, and can contribute to the society. In her culture, professionals receive a lot of respect for their educational and knowledge level.

Below is a summary of Ritika’s Career Life Story.

**Chapter 1: “Foundation”, Ages 4-12.** As the youngest in my family, I used to be quite shy and didn’t talk much until I was four or five. Our family moved every two years due to my dad’s job, this meant that I was constantly switching schools and making new friends. I think this really made me an adaptable person. By twelve years old, I was an active and talkative girl with lots of friends. From a young age, I learned from my paternal grandparents that “if you are a girl, you have to sit and talk quietly; you have to behave like a girl”. As I grew up, my maternal grandfather told me not to be “just a girl” who does nothing, studies, then gets married. He wanted me to have a career and do something different, professional or not, as long as it is good and ambitious. He influenced me and put the career objective and ambition in me.

My mother used to tell me stories every night, and that got me interested in learning about many things. My parents didn’t suppress me, they supported me and my love to read and learn. My father has even had to argue with my grandfather who thought my father should not be bringing books home for me. Thankfully, as I got older, my grandparents and relatives began to understand that I was excelling in my studies. They began to like me and support me as well. I think that my love of learning and my career ambitions created the foundation for my career.

**Chapter 2: “Strengthen the Base”, Ages 12-18.** When I first started at high school, I was disappointed and felt trapped there. What I saw were rules and teachers telling us to behave a certain way. I was rebellious, so I did not usually like it when people told me what I was supposed to do. If you told me to do one thing, for sure I wouldn’t. My mother was concerned and talked to my principal, and then my principal had a chat with me. I told her how I was
feeling and she explained that they may be teaching me one way, but if I had other ideas, they wanted to know because I might have a better way. She gave me a sense of choice. I remember thinking that perhaps I should just try and maybe I will learn something out of it.

That school became an extraordinary experience for me. The teachers asked and found out I liked science. They nurtured and encouraged me to pursue my interests, and even brought extra books to help my learning and understanding. The teachers built our confidence, made us realize our value and taught us to love ourselves. We learned how to carry ourselves in and outside of school. Coming out of that school, I was calmer, more composed, and mature. I became more focused; I knew what I was doing and was determined to pursue a career.

Chapter 3: “Making the Right Choice”, Ages 18-22. Before going to college, I had the foundation from my family, and the base from high school, once I started learning about engineering, then it is like starting to build the structure of the house. Attending Engineering college is when I consider the start of my professional career. Along with starting school, it was also the first time I was away from my home, which was hard initially, but I think the experiences of moving throughout my childhood helped me to adapt quickly. I made good friends and we would all study together. The professors made the subjects really interesting to learn, and that is when I feel like I made the right choice – in college, subject, and friends. I really loved my life there. Sometimes it was like I was two different persons from one time to another; at school, I was professional, confident, calm, and loved to study, but at home, I was a completely different girl, doing all the things that I never would have done at home.

In the past, I am used to learning on my own; the only other people that I learned from were teachers. I was really struggling with this one course, and one of my friends offered to help me. We met up and he would help me understand the subject, and this helped me with my
homework and eventually helped me do well for the exam. This experience taught me that rather than always asking the professor everything, I could ask my friends too. I also learned to respect others and recognize that other people have a lot that they know and can offer as well.

**Chapter 4: “Enhancement”, Ages 23-26.** After I graduated, I had a smooth transition into a job at a small company. I learned a lot from that experience from the work I did and from my supervisor, who supported and guided me through a lot on the job. Every time I realized that I did not know something, I would approach him to ask questions. I was very apologetic and felt embarrassed, but he was very nice to me, praised me for what I knew and taught me what I didn’t. I worked there for two years until I was married and went to United States for my Masters degree. Things were completely different in the US – the culture, education, professors… even I became different as a result. I realized how little I knew about engineering, and how much more there was to learn. My professors were all really nice; they supported my learning and reassured me of what I knew. I became more open because although I was confident before, I was still shy to talk to strangers. From this experience, I felt more comfortable to approach people and chat with them. I learned how to dress and act more professionally.

**Chapter 5: “Learning Options”, Ages 26-Present.** My husband liked the culture and lifestyle in Canada, so we decided to immigrate here after my studies. Initially, I was only applying for jobs in my field. I thought I would never get a job. It was really depressing at the time. One day, I just decided to apply to a bank, and luckily, I got the job. At that moment, I felt the importance of this job. I know it is not an electrical or professional job, but I got the job! My co-workers and my manager have been really helpful and supportive of me, they understand that I am from engineering and not finance, so they respect my background. My manager even
asks me specifically to help her with certain tasks because she knows I am good with computers. They made me feel proud that I can contribute to them.

Honestly though, sometimes it can be depressing because I am not working what I want to do, in my own field. Initially when I was training there, my thought was, “I have to do this repetitively, everyday, with nothing new about it?” When I come home from the office, I was so tired, but it wasn’t from the work. It was because I didn’t do any work, that was why I was so tired! But it has been nearly a year now, so I am more used to this job. I am not complaining that this is not a nice job; I just feel that something is missing for me. Every day, I study my engineering books at breaks, and it makes me see what I could be doing instead. Engineering is my passion! I get excited when I hear people talk about engineering or BC Hydro. Engineering is a part of me; it is like when I introduce myself, I say, “Hi, my name is Ritika. I came from India, and I am an Electrical Engineer.” I wish, and I know, I could be doing much more and much better than what I am doing right now. I may be fast at my job, but I feel I don’t do complete justice to the position. My co-workers are much better because they have the experience and knowledge in this field. Sometimes, I do not feel productive – I do not feel like my mind is working.

It has taken me a while to get used to feeling this way, and to see the positives from my situation. I learned to be down-to-earth, and not to boast about my educational background. Every day there is something good about my job so when I come home I do not feel completely depressed… I always know I have something to do tomorrow. Although I am not doing what that I have been doing for the past 25 years, at least I know I am doing something new and exciting.
Future Chapter: “My Dream Come True”. Professionally, I want to go to my own field to do something I really like. When I get a job in my own engineering field, my dream has come true, because this is my dream from childhood.

Across-Participant Themes

It is important to note that each participant’s experiences are unique, and cannot be generalized to the Asian ITP population as a whole. However, reflecting on their narratives and the research question, certain themes have emerged across the eight participants.

Immigration to Improve Quality of Life and Future

For many of the participants, their decision to immigrate was not an easy one – there were sacrifices in aspects such as their relationships, lifestyle, support networks, and career. As this research focused on the experience of the transition from a professional to unemployment or underemployment, one thing was notably missing from the narratives. Only one out of eight of the narratives indicated that immigrating to Canada was a career move. James pointed out that, “I decided to move to Canada because I see other [colleagues] doing the same thing. After they finished doing research, they moved on to Canada, so I thought I should try it too”. Furthermore, in asserting the importance of career, James elaborated that career is “almost everything that I want to do in Canada. [Because] we spend most of our time at work… we have social contact at work. Like me, I don’t have work, I also don’t have social contact.” Thus, James saw work as paramount in establishing other aspects of his life in Canada, like social relationships and integration into the culture. To James, work came first.

Contrarily, five out of the eight participants indicated that their move to Canada was motivated by the hopes of creating a better future for themselves and/or their family, as well as
improving their quality of life. In addition, three participants said they were aware of the difficulties in finding work before immigrating to Canada. As Grace explained:

I wanted to slow down [in my career] because my kids are growing… when they’re teenagers already, you have to know their friends, you have to know where they are, all those, so I thought I just needed more time to be with my children. I wanted to slow down. So that is when I started working with local companies, and the idea of immigrating to Canada came… Coming to Canada, it is not really for me already, it is for the children. I have accepted the fact that, at a certain point of your life, you are here just to play a supporting role to your children. Because it is now their turn, it is their turn to build their future.

In supporting her family, Grace has chosen to sacrifice her professional career and success in the Philippines. Factors other participants mentioned contributing to their decision to immigrate included preferring the Canadian lifestyle and culture, political stability in comparison to their country of origin, a better quality of living, and the prospect of creating changes to propel themselves towards the next life stage.

**From Career Peak to Starting All Over Again**

Although many participants were prepared to sacrifice their professional success, feelings of frustration, disappointment, and sadness in the sense of decline in their career was present for all participants. One particular pattern that emerged from five participants’ narratives, all of whom had worked extensively in their profession post-graduation, is the sense of reaching their career peak in the chapter prior to immigration. The participants’ incorporated descriptions of their career peak within their story telling as well as in their chapter titles. For example, Frank described his professional career prior to immigration as his “ten-year golden period”, “the
maximum achievement” was Kamal’s portrayal his career peak in Iraq, and Grace described it as the “biggest phase of what [she] could do”. In contrast, a review of chapter titles reveals that the words “transition” and “new” was often used to represent the chapter of immigration, carrying a sense of rebuilding or returning to the beginning of one’s career. The “transition” and “new career” chapters encompassed the struggles each participant felt in their job search process, and in being underemployed. As Grace expressed, “I feel I am underutilized, it is a very simple job”. Linda depicted her feelings and the contrast in the two periods of her career life in the following excerpt:

I was at the level of my career peak… I just think that was the most difficult time to accept. [Moving] to Canada as a professional was not only [about finding a new] career, it’s a new identity, it’s your person as a whole because we talked about relationship, we talked about the career I had, there are so many things involved. [As] a person who is so career-driven, a huge part of my life, now there is no career. I felt I lost my identity. [And] with more time being unemployed, without a career, you feel more uncomfortable, more anxious, and emotionally stressed. It was hard, there were so many stressors, the stress and anxiety built up. [It] can destroy a professional. I wasn’t able to accept the fact that I couldn’t find a job. Me?

Linda’s genuine narration of the emotions and thought processes demonstrated the strong, internal struggle she experienced. As Linda continued describing her process towards acceptance and understanding, she explained:

Trust me; it took me a while to be able to say, I understand, everyone won’t feel great. They lost everything at the time when they were really great. They don’t have a relationship anymore. They don’t have the career title anymore. They cannot do the
things they have been doing. They felt so great about themselves, they enjoyed it, and now they don’t have that much anymore. They don’t have money coming in. They don’t have friends. Their personal life is struggling… It’s a huge transition!

Both excerpts combined give a glimpse of Linda’s experiences as she physically, mentally, and emotionally transitioned from the peak of her career to a place of uncertainty in her career, identity, and life.

**Agency and Hope**

The level of agency, the feeling of control in the decisions made and in their life was evident in every participant’s narratives. For some participants, the level of agency was consistent throughout their life while other participants felt it fluctuated or changed with their immigration. For example, Kamal expressed his frustration over the lack of control he felt in his life and career:

I have no option and choice. I have been forced all my life. I changed myself, I will take any kind of job, but even then, I cannot get [a job]... I was very happy to work [for an on-site interview], I just want to put my feet in the door as they say, but after 2 months of waiting, they apologized, they said, “We are unable to do the security background check because of where you were from. There is no way to investigate your background.” So it is my fault then? The interviewer can’t do this background check; why should I take the consequence? So you can see how frustrated and upset I am – even an Operator position, I still cannot get it… Nobody is giving [me] this first chance… I tried everything now. There is nothing I can do. I have many phone interviews, I have an excellent resume, I did my best to get a job [but] there are reasons [that is] out of my control.
Other participants also experienced barriers that were perceived to be systematic or structural and out of their control. As James explains about bad timing, “the ultimate goal is to find a job, which is in the hand of employers, right? ... If there’s no job because of the recession, [I] cannot work.” For these participants, there seems to be an overall, and at times, an overwhelming sense of helplessness, of being trapped in a situation where actions taken do not seem to lead to expected or desired results. They felt that power is not in their hands.

It was also apparent that when participants were determined to make changes or had a higher level of agency, they were also able to be optimistic, hopeful, or confident about their situation. As Linda explained, as a career counsellor, she observed that “people who are more active are more positive, they’ll say ‘okay, I’ll do whatever I need to do.’ Some people will say, ‘Oh, why should I?’”. Grace also exhibited her optimism and hope when she referred to the stories of other immigrants, that some “immigrants’ struggles were even more difficult than what I am going through… when people can do it, then we can do it. I’m inspired by their success stories.” Linda further revealed her thought processes that motivated her towards action:

If you cannot change your situation, you have to say, “How can I live with it?”… I learned from the transition [to] surrender myself … in terms of not fighting with the emotions… accepting where you are at. Then you’re not struggling so much, you’re more focused on what you need to do.

Linda’s narrative demonstrated how she was able to regain control over her career by taking a step back from fighting the barriers she experienced. It was only when she was mentally able to “surrender” and “accept” that she was better able to see and focus on what she could do, and where her power was.
Maintaining a Professional Identity

Occupational identity is one of the main constructs behind this research. The participants’ revealed that being a professional did not necessarily have to be contingent on a “professional” occupation. In discussing the meaning of being a professional, five out of the eight participants alluded to characteristics and behaviours independent of an occupational title. For example, when Linda explained her perspective of what constitutes and is a requirement of a professional, she asserted that “it is impossible if you don’t learn or a have strong awareness of developing learning, it’s a part of identity of professional… [Being a] professional is not a standpoint, for me, it is more of a process”. Although their current occupation may not be classified as “professional”, the participants were able to identify and associate other professional features of their work and daily life to affirm their professional identity.

Elements such as a person’s conduct, appearance, attitude and approach towards their job, and ethics and integrity were at times more important that an occupational title or even a professional association’s recognition and designation. James made the point that:

In my profession, [before] we are accepted to be a member [of the engineering association], we are not “professionals”; it is their definition here where you have an engineering degree and so on, [but] we are not entitled to be called Engineer. For me, we already professionals before that, it is just a formal acceptance by the society. But for me, [being a] “professional” is more of an attitude to get things done, [it] is also an attitude. So the way of doing [and] finishing our tasks… Despite restrictions, we do our best for certain situations… If [someone] can do a good job despite the restrictions that he has, even if the result he achieved is lower than people that have a better condition, probably, I would say is [he] more of a professional.
James’ assertion, as well as many other participants’ opinions on the meaning behind being a professional demonstrated that despite feeling “underutilized” or even just being unemployed, the identity of a professional continues for many of these Asian ITPs. Therefore, it is possible that regardless of ITPs’ employment status, ITPs can maintain their professional identity through the way they approach tasks and problems, and the manner of their conduct.

Stories and Themes

Each narrative provided an in-depth understanding of each Asian ITP’s career successes and barriers, emotions, thoughts, and realities. The across-participant themes provided a lens into the pattern in the Asian ITP participants’ experiences of themselves within their career journey. The contrast between the narratives and the themes demonstrated the juxtaposition of each participant’s unique upbringing and career paths, along with similarities across their experiences, pushing us to recognize their commonalities while seeing these experiences as embedded within each participant’s own distinctive lived experiences.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The stories and themes of the Asian ITPs represented in this study are reviewed here as it relates to the literature and practice. First is a discussion on how the findings of this study fit and build on past literature. Then, the limitations of the study is presented along with implications for future research. Last will be an exploration into the significance of the results as well as how the results inform counselling psychology and career counselling practices.

My Research’s Place in the Literature

The Experience of Unemployment and Underemployment

Various studies in the past have found that unemployed and underemployed immigrants – skilled and professional or not – experience a range of negative emotions (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Lev-Wiesel & Kaufman, 2004). The Asian ITPs in this research were no exception. Anger, frustration, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, depression, and confusion were some of the emotions that the participants experienced in their career transition. The array of emotions was consistent with Grant and Nadin’s (2007) findings on the psychological reactions of ITPs to underemployment and credentialing problems. In addition, the narrations of these feelings were mostly situated within the context of the confines of structural barriers that the participants perceived surrounded, trapped, or eluded them. The structural barriers included discrimination from employers, economic recession, and professional association requirements. Participants also identified individual barriers such as English proficiency, lack of a social and support network, family obligations, and age as contributors to their difficulty in obtaining relevant and/or professional work. The participants’ narratives of job search struggles supported the literature on ITPs and structural and individual barriers (Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Salaff et al., 2002).
Culture and Satisfaction in Post-Immigration Career and Life

The results in this study provided support as well as a slight divergence from Aycan and Berry’s (1996) finding that greater loss in immigrants’ socio-economic status results in less satisfaction of their lives in Canada. A comparison between the Asian ITP immigrant participants who lived in Canada for more than five years versus more recent Asian ITP immigrant participants who lived in Canada between one to five years demonstrated a difference in their establishment of their career and satisfaction of their life in Canada. Namely, the narratives of the participants who lived in Canada longer seemed to exhibit a greater sense of satisfaction in their new career and integration into life in Canada than the recent immigrant participants did. In addition, several recent ITP participants who are unemployed expressed feeling socially isolated from others, which relates to Aycan and Berry’s (1996) finding that the longer the duration of unemployment, the more the immigrants experienced alienation from society. In this respect, several aspects of the findings here seem to correspond with Aycan and Berry’s (1996). However, within the participants’ narratives, many expressed an appreciation and satisfaction of their life in Vancouver and Canada. The articulation of appreciation was present in both recent and established ITP participants. Examples of comments include appreciating the dignity of labour here, the sense of equality across people in different socio-economic classes and occupational statuses, the lifestyle, and the open and friendly culture. This seemed to demonstrate that regardless of whether the Asian ITP participants found a satisfying and congruent occupation or not, they were all able to experience positive aspects of their life in Canada, which posed as a slight departure from Aycan and Berry’s (1996) results. That is not to say, however, that if the recent immigrants continued to be unable to find meaningful employment, that the positive aspects of life in Canada would not be exhausted through time.
One possibility in the participants’ contentment with their life in Canada may be related to collectivistic cultural values. More specifically, as aforementioned in the across-participant themes, most of the participants immigrated to Canada for reasons related to improving the quality of their own and their family’s life. This may broaden their criteria in what makes life in Canada satisfying beyond employment success to include aspects such as benefits in quality of education and future opportunities for their children, and the culture and lifestyle – things that elevated their overall quality of living despite the sacrifices made in their professional career. This would be consistent with the general portrayal of individuals from collectivistic cultures being interdependent, where group goals outweigh individual goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Reviewing the participants’ narratives, especially narratives of those with children, seemed to indicate that their career took precedence insofar as it satisfied the goals of the family. The Asian ITPs worked hard in their career to bring in money, help the family improve their living circumstances, increase their social status, and ensure their children’s futures. However, once the family goals and the individual career goals became inconsistent, the individual’s career was sacrificed. Therefore, although sacrificing one’s own career success created negative psychological, emotional, and social impacts, it is possible that the goal of improving the family’s life in immigrating influenced the satisfaction that Asian ITPs experienced in their lives in Canada.

**Power, Agency, and Occupational Success**

Results from Tharmaseelan’s (2008) study on the adapted model of migrants’ adjustment to career suggested that given supportive external forces (e.g., labour market), personal responsibility for one’s career is crucial in determining career success in employment status and career satisfaction. As discussed in the across-participant themes, the narratives presented here
seemed to support Tharmaseelan’s (2008) assertion; when participants exhibited a higher level of agency and power, they were optimistic about their future and were able to take action that created progress in their career in Canada. It is important to note, however, that this only further supports the presence of a link between ITPs having a sense of power and agency and having career success and satisfaction and does not indicate a directional relationship.

Although several narratives in this study related to Tharmaseelan’s (2008) finding, to focus on personality responsibility being a prime factor in career success and satisfaction with the condition of favourable external forces seemed to ignore much of the structural barriers that many ITPs experience. Experiences of limitations from external forces such as discrimination, restrictions from professional designation associations, and labour market are prevalent, and was illustrated in the narratives and literature (Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Grant, 2008; Salaff et al., 2002). What the disparity shined light on is the advantages participants expressed they received when they have others who support their transition and help them establish a career here. These supports come in the form of friends and family, friends and acquaintances from the same cultural background, mentors and other professionals, role models, employment services, etc. As Frank explained of his career transition post-immigration, “I am particularly fortunate to have some people of my cultural background… helping me. Each kind of job [I had were] all introduced by people of my background.” This demonstrated that despite structural barriers, ITPs who have or were able to establish a supportive network around them were able to experience progress in the beginning of their careers in Canada, such as landing a transition job, meeting professionals within the industry, and integrating into the Canadian culture.
Moreover, the notion of taking personal responsibility seemed to hinge on one’s power or agency. The presence or lack of agency and similarly and the presence or lack of hope were often both present at different times in the participants’ narratives. Therefore, it seemed to indicate that factors such as timing (in the sense of the duration of the participant’s residence in Canada, as well as the state of the economy), support, and experiences seem to play a role in the participants’ level of agency and hope. For example, James exhibited moments of power and agency in his decisions and independence, yet currently, he feels a lack of control over his career and life due to the recession. However, as Linda pointed out, it took time for her to come to accept her situation and the barriers that surrounded her, and it was then that she was able to see what she could be doing. In addition, by doing informational interviews, she understood what her marketable and transferable skills were and where she could apply them. This process involved time, support from others, and experience, thus enabling Linda to reclaim her power and agency.

Negotiating the Professional Identity

When I began this study, the target participants were professionals who have trained and worked outside of Canada. Although the participants I obtained satisfy this criteria, it became apparent throughout their narratives that what was the consistent and enduring aspect of the self was not the “professional” title, but the characteristics within professionalism. Due to unemployment and underemployment, many of the participants had to disengage with their prior work role. Niessen et al. (2010) posited that disengaging one’s psychological attachment to a prior work role would moderate one’s ability to performance, fit, and attachment to a new work role. The career transition of the Asian ITPs in this study were slightly different from the self-employed participants in Niessen et al.’s (2010) study, therefore it would be difficult to clearly
support or dispute their findings. However, several participants mentioned the need to “give up” the hopes of working in a similar field, to “adjust myself” or “adjust my requirements” in order to move on to different career objectives. These sentiments seemed to emerge from the participants’ perception and experience that their professional occupation cannot be sustained post-immigration. However, what was sustainable was their identity as a professional.

As Ghidina (1992) found in the study on custodians, when one’s work status was incongruent with one’s self-concept, the positive aspects were embraced. In addition, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) predicted that narrative identity work is more prevalent when people go through drastic, socially undesirable work role transitions that evokes concern from others, and that the narratives are a way to explain to themselves and to others the reason for such a career transition. The Asian ITP participants’ narratives, where a stronger engagement with their professional identity rather than their current job title or employment status, could be evidence to support both Ghidina’s (1992) finding and Ibarra and Barbulescu’s (2010) propositions.

Learning continuously, using an educated and critical attitude and approach in problem solving, and behaving and communicating professionally were some aspects that the Asian ITPs used to affirm and express their professional identity. Although the elevated status of their professional occupation title may not be present, these professional qualities enabled the ITPs to perceive and experience themselves to be different from others. Thus, the professional identity developed through the years of education, training, and work experience was maintained in both the ITPs’ daily lives and career. The professional identity offers a congruent, continuous, and unified narrative of the self from the past to the present.
Delimitation and Limitations

A delimitation of my study was that I did not study the experience of occupational identity loss of ITPs with limited English ability. Due to the nature of data collection and my restriction on participants’ English level, I realize that it limited the representation of my sample. It was likely that Asian ITPs who have a good command in English would have different experiences, expectations, and feelings in their job search as compared to Asian ITPs whose English was not as fluent; therefore, participants in my research were not representative of Asian ITPs or ITPs as a whole. This restriction enabled stronger inferences to be made regarding the job search process for ITPs in Canada, since it was the ITPs’ professional, occupational identity that I was interested in exploring, rather than the barrier of language abilities.

A limitation of my study was within recruitment. It was possible that participating in the study were more attractive to Asian ITPs who have had negative experiences in their career transition immigrating to Canada, since the research allows them to voice their feelings and thoughts on this subject. On the other hand, Asian ITPs who have had positive experiences throughout their career transition may not have felt as motivated to participate.

In addition, because this study was based in Vancouver, the lifestyle and career opportunities present in Vancouver needs to be taken into account when understanding and interpreting the narratives and findings presented here. Considering the number of different cities and provinces in Canada, Vancouver offers less career opportunities compared to places like Toronto and Calgary. Therefore, the ITPs who choose Vancouver as their immigration destination may be qualitatively different from those who chose to immigrate elsewhere. Therefore, the experiences of the participants presented here were not meant to be representative of Asian ITPs in Canada as a whole.
Moreover, the goal of narrative research is not to generalize its results to a greater population. Each narrative was unique and true to the experiences of each Asian ITP transitioning in his/her career and immigration. Each narrative was also situated within the time and interaction of its creation. Its relevance and representation was of the identity of each individual Asian ITP, as he/she saw and constructed it in our dialogue (Arvay, 2002). Therefore, the Asian ITPs participating in this study were not meant to be a representative of all Asian ITPs in Canada, and the narratives and themes derived from this study were not meant to be generalized to the experiences of other Asian ITPs. Rather, I hoped that through the narratives, readers, professionals, and practitioners can come to make meaning from and form another level of understanding of the voices presented here. ITPs may be able to identify with the narratives of struggle and success, and practitioners may be able to apply to their practice the understanding the how this difficult transition may affect ITPs’ social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Counselling Implications

Although unemployment and underemployment may seem to be an issue directed specifically towards employment counsellors, it is important for all counsellors to be aware of the difficulties skilled and professional immigrants encounter in relation to their employment status. ITPs face challenges in adjusting and adapting their lives in a new environment, as well as challenges in securing employment that is congruent to their sense of identity, and reflective of their skills, experience, and education level. The inability to obtain employment that is comparable to the occupation that skilled immigrants left behind in their country of origin can have a negative impact on them financially, emotionally, and psychologically, and on their lives in Canada.
I hope that the eight narratives provide career practitioners and counsellors a lens into the lives of Asian ITPs. That perhaps reading the full career life story of an Asian ITP can deepen the understanding of and inform the work with past, current, and future clients. It is not that counsellors will encounter replicas of career narratives, but that perhaps the pieces that resonate with parts of clients’ stories can generate a curiosity to question, understand, and empathize. The depth and history of the narratives allow us to see that for some people, career is something that has been developing ever since they stepped into school. The investment into their career perhaps included a combination of hard work and determination from elementary school to university, parents’ organizational efforts, extracurricular activities, and encouragement from role models. All of this created professionals who may feel that they have done too much to give up and start all over again. This is where helping professionals may be able to help guide their clients from feeling overwhelmed and stuck.

The participants’ stories seemed to indicate that having a sense of empowerment and hope corresponded to times of progress in their career and life. Therefore, aside from identifying barriers to employment, helping ITPs recognize not only what their strengths are but also how and where they could apply it, might enable ITPs to advance and find their niche. As exemplified in the narratives presented here, many ITPs possess great strengths, confidence, and motivation to carve their careers up to this point. Being in a new environment poses new challenges for ITPs to overcome, this coupled with the harsh emotions associated with feeling as if they are starting all over again can lead to the deterioration of their confidence. It is evident from the narratives that the climb towards their professional status and career peak required hard work, intelligence, and capabilities, things that would not simply disappear through immigration. ITPs may come to seek guidance from career practitioners or counsellors in a vulnerable
position, and feeling vulnerable may not be a familiar experience for some ITPs. Therefore, it might be helpful for counsellors to learn about, and for the ITPs to rediscover, their accomplishments and capabilities. Counsellors can help ITPs identify and leverage their strengths – in learning, problem solving, critical thinking, research, etc. – to better understand where they stand in this new economic environment, and to strategize how and where to apply their strengths. Thus, rather than being perpetually underutilized, ITPs can find or carve out their way to contribute their experience and competencies to the society.

The experiences of those marginalized can often be relevant to the experiences of those in the mainstream, and at times, it can act as a magnified reflection onto the culture as a whole. As exemplified in the narratives, immigration can be an isolating experience, and unemployment and underemployment can make it even more so. Isolation can result from the lack of social contact with others for immigrants to a new culture, but it can also result from purposeful distancing by the immigrant due to shame. Living away from their culture does not mean that the cultural expectations do not follow them. This is an area worth exploring when working with clients, as such feelings and isolation may hinder job search success as well as other aspects of their lives. The Asian ITPs’ narratives demonstrate that counsellors need to attend to unemployed and underemployed job seekers’ feelings of shame and anger. In addition, these feelings may affect job seekers’ emotional well-being and their relationships with others.

**Future Research**

This exploratory research could be expanded to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Asian ITPs. For the purposes of this research, I kept the participant criteria relatively open, future research could consider focusing on one particular group within ITPs. For example, within the eight participants there seemed to be differences
between the ITPs who immigrated with family or not, and between ITPs who had acquired more or less than ten years of professional work experience outside of Canada. Another aspect that could be investigated into are gender differences. Gender differences were not something that I focused on in this study, therefore, the differences observed between the male and female Asian ITPs cannot be fully understood. Future research could examine how cultural values and norms shape male and female ITPs’ career transition decisions differently. In addition, participants of this research resided in the Vancouver and Lower Mainland region, future research could look at Asian ITPs in other parts of Canada or North America to discern if different economic markets and lifestyles attract different immigrants and produce different experiences.

Family seemed to be an important factor, both as a cultural value and as a motivation for many decisions made by the Asian ITPs presented here. Because this study focused more on the experience of the self and identity, I did not expand to explore the implications of the Asian ITPs’ experiences on their family. It is important for couples and family counsellors to be aware of the implications unemployment or underemployment has on relationships around the ITP. For example, it would be interesting for future research to investigate into areas such as how ITP’s immigration and career transition experiences influence their children’s career aspirations. In addition, Asian ITPs’ partners or children may have different narratives to share on the ITPs’ transitional experience of their occupational identity, and how that may affect their own sense of identity. It is obvious that this research has only examined one portion within the lives of ITPs and their experiences of their identities; further research would be necessary to continue to generate better understanding of Asian ITPs and ITPs in general.
References


Grant, P.R., & Nadin, S. (2006). The credentialing problems of foreign trained personnel from Asia and Africa intending to make their home in Canada: A social psychological perspective. *International Migration and Integration, 8*, 141-162.


Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Interview Letter

Dear (Participant’s Name):

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. This is a confirmation that we are scheduled to meet on (date) at (time), at (place). The interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours.

As I mentioned in our phone conversation, to make sure that we are making the best use of your valuable time, please consider the following questions before our meeting:

1. When was the beginning of your “career”?

2. What were some events that had an impact on your career path?

3. How do you see yourself as a worker throughout your career?

Thank you again for your time and contribution. If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at (phone number) or (e-mail address). I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Mandy Hung
Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

**Occupational Identity:**
Narratives of Asian Internationally Trained Professionals’ Experiences

**Principal Investigator**
Dr. Norman Amundson, PhD
Professor
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia

**Co-Investigator**
Mandy Hung, BA
Graduate Student, Masters of Arts in Counselling Psychology
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia

This research is a Master’s Thesis completed as a part of the fulfillment of the Masters of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. The principal investigator and co-investigator will have access to your information for educational purposes only. The completed thesis will be a public document.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Asian Internationally Trained Professionals experience and understand who they are in relation to their career with the transition of immigration and in work.

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you:

(1) held a technical and/or professional degree and profession in your home country,
(2) are currently unemployed, or underemployed (i.e., not working to the full capacity of your skills and knowledge),
(3) are living in the Lower Mainland,
(4) possess English skills at an intermediate or higher level, and
(5) identify as being Asian in ethnicity.

**Study Procedures:**

- You will participate in two separate interviews with the co-investigator, where each interview will last approximately one to two hours, over the period of six weeks
- In the first interview, you will be asked to provide stories around your career, and your experience of who you are.
The second interview is an opportunity for you and the co-investigator to review the stories and information gathered from the first interview in order for you to confirm that your experiences are being understood accurately. This is also an opportunity for you to correct, remove, or include any additional information you feel necessary to provide a more accurate description of your experiences.

The interviews will be recorded (audio-only). All recordings will be transferred and kept in a password-protected computer, where only the co-investigator, assistants, and principal investigator will have access.

**Potential Risks:**

There is minimal foreseeable risks to your participation in this study. It is possible that discussions about your career, self-perception, and past may bring about negative feelings such as discomfort, stress, sadness, anxiety, resentment, insecurity, and dissatisfaction. If at any point you feel uncomfortable and would prefer not to answer certain questions during the interview, please do not hesitate to inform the interviewer. A list of appropriate and affordable counselling and employment services will be provided to you at the beginning of the first interview as a resource should you feel any distress.

**Potential Benefits:**

There may or may not be direct benefits to you as a result of your participation. As a member of the minority, your participation will provide you with the opportunity for your unique experiences to be heard and understood by others. The opportunity to describe the experiences you have gone through or are experiencing currently may help you gain a different level of understanding of and insight into your experiences.

Furthermore, your participation will help researchers and counsellors develop a better understanding of Internationally Trained Professionals’ experiences and self-concept through immigration and cross-cultural work role transitions.

**Confidentiality:**

Your participation and identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number, and kept in a locked filing cabinet. All identifying information will also be removed from the data and from any reports of the completed study. Records that are kept digitally will be kept in a password-protected computer, and will be identified only by code number. All research data will only be accessible to the principal investigator and co-investigator.

The original data will be retained in its original form for at least five years after the study is published or otherwise presented, but may be retained for a longer period provided that they are stored securely.
Remuneration:

In order to defray the costs of inconvenience and transportation, you will be receive an honorarium in the amount of $20 for each interview completed. With the completion of two interviews, you will receive a total of $40 for your participation.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire any further information regarding the purpose or the procedures of this study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, Dr. Norman Amundson.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your refusal or withdrawal from the study will not be disclosed, and will not affect the quality of the employment services you receive if you are currently working with an employment service provider. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any point prior to publication, any information obtained will be destroyed, and will not be included in the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

______________________________________ _________________________
Participant Signature Date

____________________________________________________
Printed Name
## Appendix C: Stage Outline

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